



Summer 2022 Parish Survey

The qualitative responses from SHJ's Summer 2022 Parish Survey are found below. Overall, key themes include:

- Parishioners appreciate the sense of community and inclusivity of the Parish; at the same time, this is an area that can continually be improved
- Ensure that Masses and programming are suitable for young families and children
- Some concerns extend beyond our Parish, specifically, mass attendance and negative views of the Catholic Church
- Ensure ongoing communication and input from parishioners, especially regarding Parish life and the new church
- Several ideas were put forward on how to reach out to new Catholics and former parishioners
- There are mixed feelings toward the building of the new church

1) In your experience, what is unique about our Parish?

Most parishioners felt that Parish was unique because of its small and intimate community. Parishioners noted that the small size of the Parish fostered a sense of “togetherness,” that they felt people cared for each other, were extremely friendly to each other and overall, felt like a “family.” However, there were a couple of parishioners who felt that the sense of community was more prevalent and unique prior to the pandemic and has unfortunately dwindled as the pandemic progressed. Several parishioners also appreciated that the Parish offers Perpetual Adoration for several days during the week. A number of parishioners liked the music at Mass, specifically noting its modern and contemporary feel. Others appreciated that the Parish offers hospitality, has dedicated volunteers, that Mass was livestreamed during the pandemic, that the church building itself is small and historic, and that there is opportunity for the Church to grow as Rockwood grows.

2) What do you like about our Parish?

Similar to the responses above, most parishioners liked that the Parish was small, friendly and welcoming. A few of the parishioners captured this by saying the church is “Small, but mighty,” echoing Bishop Bergie’s words toward the Parish. This sense of community further creates an inclusive environment, offers many opportunities to become involved in the Parish, and provides the chance to get to know each other and recognize each other when around town. There were a few parishioners who liked that there was good communication, a willingness to gather feedback from parishioners (e.g., this survey, use of social media) and accessibility of Mass (i.e., times, location). Several responses also shared appreciation for the hard work and dedication of Parish staff and liked Father Mark’s leadership and homilies. Other elements of the Parish that parishioners liked were:

- Perpetual Adoration
- Music at Mass
- Hospitality after Mass

- Opportunities for Faith Formation and prayer (i.e., Processions, Devotions, Litanies)
- The small size and historicity of the church building itself
- The building of the new church

3) What don't you like about our Parish?

Most commonly, parishioners felt that they are lacking connection to the Parish, Pastor and/or broader community, specifically noting the lack of programs/supports for children and young families. They also had difficulty resonating with the homily and felt that children had a hard time understanding or connecting to the message. Overall, there was a sense of disengagement from activities and other families within the Parish (especially amongst the younger generation), however there were a couple of comments noting that they recognize that that this concern may be part of the Church at large, and not necessarily specific to our Rockwood Parish. Along similar lines, people did not always feel like there is a welcoming or friendly environment at the Parish. Another comment was that it was difficult to get volunteers to help around the Parish, and it is usually the same group of people who are always helping. Other parishioners felt that there needs to be more transparent and ongoing discussions within the Parish and pointed to requiring an "authentic" Parish/Pastoral Council where people can ask questions and engage in conversations. For some, discussions within the Parish felt exclusionary to those who did not feel called to talk about evangelization or whose voices were different than the dominant conservative viewpoints. Other elements of the Parish that parishioners did not like, or where they suggested areas for improvement, included:

- Volume is too loud at Mass
- Washroom location
- The sense of togetherness has declined since the pandemic
- Mass times (too early for Daily Mass; could use another Mass on Sunday)
- Building of the new church
- The church is too small
- Expand events to the broader community, not just to Catholics

4) Why do you think some parishioners are no longer attending Mass in Rockwood regularly or at all?

Parishioners' thoughts as to why some are no longer attending Mass in Rockwood regularly, if at all, can be grouped into three categories: 1) Perceptions of the Catholic Church based on recent scandal and wrongdoing; 2) Homilies at the Parish; and, 3) Impacts of COVID.

First, there was a general consensus that the recent issues of the Catholic Church, such as the involvement in the Residential Schools and sexual abuse scandals, has negatively affected people's views of the Church and undermined the credibility of the Church (i.e., the leadership). Though in some cases this has not affected people's personal faith lives, it has resulted in people pausing to think about what the Church means to them and represents as an institution. It has also affected their willingness to attend Mass and seek guidance from Church leaders. People would like to see the Church take greater accountability for their involvement in these harms.

Second, several parishioners said that they were not attending the Parish because of the length and nature of the homilies. They felt that homilies were more focussed on the mechanics of the Catholic faith rather than on topics that they felt connected to and that could help them in their own spiritual growth and day-to-day decision-making. The over-attention of Church rules in homilies made some parishioners feel that the priority is on the doctrine of the Church as opposed to the people; sometimes also focussing on the rules makes people feel bad about themselves and does not provide a welcoming environment. Parishioners voiced that they want to be acknowledged in their imperfections and humanness, with the awareness that all need healing. Some parishioners noted that they now attend Mass at a different Parish where the homily offers them the spiritual reflection that they are looking for and where their whole family can connect to the message. One suggestion to improve upon this was to pay attention to attendance levels and when more people are gathered at Mass (e.g., Christmas, Easter, First Communion, Confirmation, etc.) and understand that people are looking for community; therefore, people would appreciate homilies that focus on community and the everyday ways that we can become better people to each other.

Third, several parishioners believed that many people are not coming back to Mass because they became too comfortable with viewing Mass on Zoom during the pandemic and are now used to its convenience. There was some speculation that some parishioners may have not been attending Mass regularly or been heavily involved in the Parish previously, however the pandemic certainly exacerbated the sense that attending Mass in-person was not a necessity. People also felt a lack of community during the pandemic which prevented them from getting back to the Parish post-COVID. There was also a hypothesis that after COVID, people may have attended alternate, perhaps larger parishes, and have since stayed. Further, COVID also interrupted the usual routine of day-to-day life, including Parish life, and people may have difficulty reintroducing this in their lives. It is also understandable that for various reasons, some people may not be ready to get back to social gatherings since the pandemic and as restrictions are being lifted.

Other thoughts about why some people may no longer be attending Mass in Rockwood included:

- Torn between wanting a more contemporary Mass and sticking to traditions of the Catholic Church
- Requiring a more interactive and applicable way of understanding Scripture; don't just want it read to them
- People may not know there is Mass in the gym, and if they do, it may not give them the feeling of a Church or welcoming environment
- Overall loss of faith in the community
- Lack of community connection
- No programming for youth (e.g., Sunday school)
- More outreach to parishioners was needed during the pandemic
- Financial implications: Instability makes it hard to donate; tired of being asked to donate, especially for the new Church; increase in gas prices and unemployment (people are not able to venture out to Rockwood)
- Attending larger Parishes around the Rockwood area

5) How should we reach out to parishioners who have left SHC and invite them to return?

Some suggestions of how to reach out to parishioners who have left SHJ Rockwood included:

- Develop an outreach team to phone people
 - o Consider doing this via a phone tree; involve people from outside of the parish for anonymity purposes
 - o Ask about why they left or what they were missing
 - o Tell them they are an important part of the community
 - o Thank them (via a card) for their time
 - o Invite people to come back for Mass
 - o Have a “Welcome Back” Mass
- Post upcoming events/Masses publicly
 - o On social media platforms
 - o In the newspaper
 - o Put a sign outside of the SH School in Rockwood (or other schools)
 - o Post in libraries
- Invite those that you know face-to-face
- Talk to other parishes/priests to see how they are inviting parishioners back to Mass
- Send out an anonymous survey to see why they may have left
- Foster intentional accompaniment
- Have the Sacraments (First Communion and Confirmation) more regularly on Sundays to increase attendance
- “Get to know the Saints” Event
- Reassure people of COVID precautions at the Church when inviting them
- Send out personal letters/cards/baskets to invite people back
- Incorporate various ethnic culture into some events
- Provide food at events

Parishioners also suggest that it is important to not overwhelm others when inviting them or talking about the faith, and also have an understanding that people’s perceptions about the Church (re: harms, scandals and abuses) extend beyond the Parish and may not be something we can address with a simple invite.

6) Why don’t we see more families from Sacred Heart Catholic School attending Sunday Mass?

There seemed to be a general sense that many times, families from Sacred Heart Catholic School are not attending Mass because they believed that the school preparation for Sacraments and teaching of the faith was a substitute for attending Mass as a family. It is also possible that parents are not practicing the faith and therefore do not always attend Mass on Sunday. Some parishioners expressed that the School could be more active in encouraging families to attend Mass or have more staff practice the faith themselves. A few suggestions to improve the Parish presence in the School included:

- Parish updates in the school newsletter
- Have Parish catechists teach Sacramental prep

- More of a presence of Fr. Mark in the school
- Special activities (e.g., crafts, music) for the students during Advent and Lent

Families may also be drawn to larger churches where they feel the atmosphere is more suitable for their children. A Children's Liturgy program would likely help draw families from the School to Mass.

7) How can we reach out to new Catholics in Rockwood?

Some suggestions of how to reach out to parishioners who have left SHJ Rockwood included:

- Ask what other parishes do
- Distribute letters/pamphlets or make phone calls and tell them about SHJ
- Hold a "New to Rockwood" event
- Host an Open House for new Catholics in Rockwood
- Better signage to Mass
- Establish a 'Welcoming Committee' to bring food and invite people to come to Mass
- Hold events outside so that people are curious to know what is going on
- Advertise through various means
 - o Use SH School communications
 - o Newspaper
 - o Local ads/boards outside establishments
 - o Social media (Rockwood-specific Facebook & Instagram pages)
- Offer Bible Studies
- Offer someone to accompany those who wish to come to Mass for the first time

There were a couple of comments suggesting that some of these events or suggestions should wait until the new church is built, but in the meantime, it may be a good idea to advertise to new Catholics that this new church is upcoming. Some responses also shared the need to include Priests and Bishops in the outreach to newcomers in the city (i.e., offer to meet with them, schedule visits if desired).

8) How can we reach out to people who live in Rockwood but are attending Mass in Guelph, Brampton, Milton, etc.?

Many people shared the same ideas here as those shared with how we can reach out to new Catholics in Rockwood and parishioners of SHJ who no longer attend Mass. Some new suggestions included:

- Involve the youth in distributing flyers/pamphlets
- A 'Reunion' Party: all ministries and parish activities can be on display
- Regular emails/updates about Parish life
- Organize lecture nights
- Sunday Evening Mass

The main takeaway in these responses was that there needs to be a way to ask why people are going to other Parishes. This may include asking where they live, what they are missing from the Parish, what they would like to see from Parish leadership and asking what programs they'd like to see for their

youth. It would then be important to ensure new programming is introduced before inviting people back to the Parish. Parishioners believe that the new Church will naturally help attract people to the Parish. There was also a call to ensure that the Parish be welcoming and provide programming appropriate for all ages so that parishioners feel connected to fellow parishioners and remain at the Parish here in Rockwood.

9) If you have a young family and are NOT attending Sunday Mass regularly in Rockwood, why are you going somewhere else or not attending at all?

Several parishioners commented that there needs to be more programming/events available for young children at the Parish, specifically expressing interest in a Children's Liturgy program. Along similar lines, young families had difficulty experiencing homilies as relatable, engaging and reflective and attended other Parishes where homilies were more applicable for their young family and children. Often times, young families are attending Sunday Mass in other cities/towns because that is where they live or have an already-established routine to visit parishes in these cities. A couple of parishioners also shared that the pandemic affected them attending the Rockwood Sunday Mass, but did not elaborate on further reasons. Beyond the Parish level, and echoing responses from previous questions, people may not be attending Mass due to their negative view of the Catholic Church at the current time.

10) Are you looking forward to building our new church on the hill at Camp Brebeuf? Why or why not?

There were slightly more parishioners shared that they were looking forward to building the new church on the hill at Camp Brebeuf (58%) than those who were not in support or unsure of the new build (42%). Those who were looking forward to the new church said that they were happy that there would be more meeting space, a quieter atmosphere for Adoration and Mass, and were hopeful that it would attract more people to the Parish and opportunity to strengthen the community. At the same time, there were some who were concerned that the new church may not be sustainable unless church attendance (overall, not just at the Parish) increases. There was also a reservation that the build may not be viable without the partnership from Camp Brebeuf. Further, parishioners felt that the building process has been dragged out and although there is a Building Committee, there is a sense that the Diocese and leadership voices still take precedence without frequent consult from the Parish. Some will also miss the historicity of the current church and it will be quite a change for them if they've been attending the Parish for many years.

11) Anything else you would like us to know?

Many parishioners shared their gratitude for having a tight-knit Parish community and for Father Mark's leadership. They expressed how they appreciated the ongoing prayers and guidance from Father Mark and opportunities to provide feedback and feel listened to (such as surveys like this). Several parishioners also acknowledged that some of their comments and concerns are not able to be simply and immediately addressed by the Parish, as they are issues that are complex and exist within the

Church at large (e.g., Mass attendance, changing views of the Catholic Church). Parishioners continued to emphasize the need for youth programming, a diversity of opportunities to grow in faith (e.g., speaker series, retreats), and mindfulness of the variety of people that the Parish is serving (i.e., age, accessibility) while balancing tradition with evolving cultural demands. Parishioners look forward to moving ahead together as a Parish family and find solace in knowing that they are praying for one another and are being guided together.

For those interested, please find the graphs below with the full data of the Parish survey questions asking about volunteering and interest in Parish events:

Figure 1. Would you attend these Parish events?

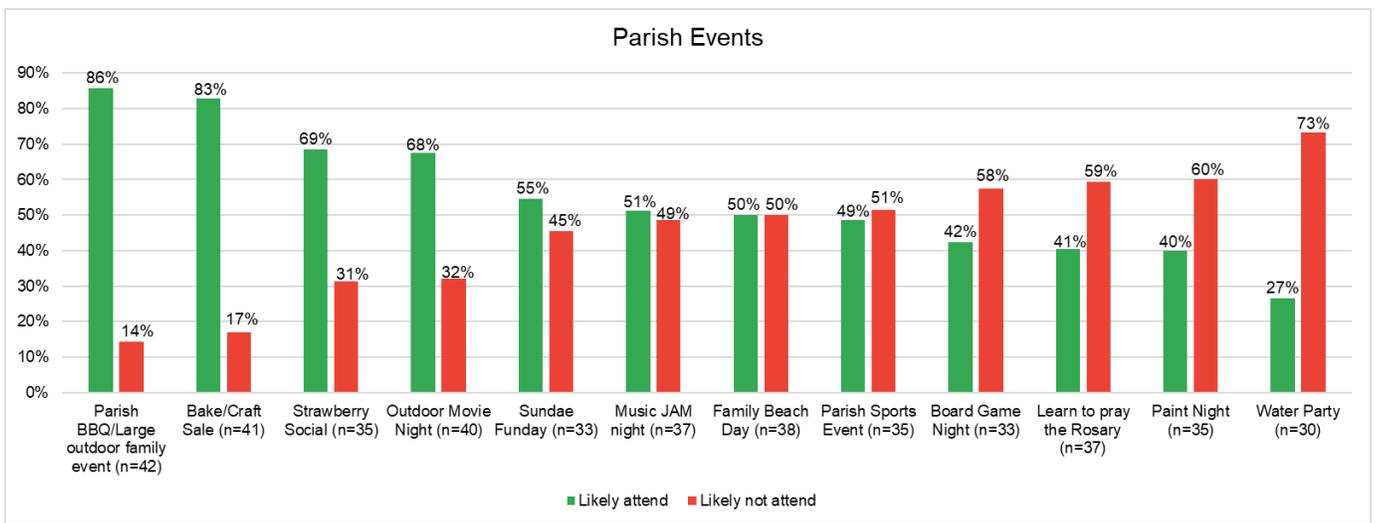


Figure 2. Would you be interested in volunteering at these Parish events?

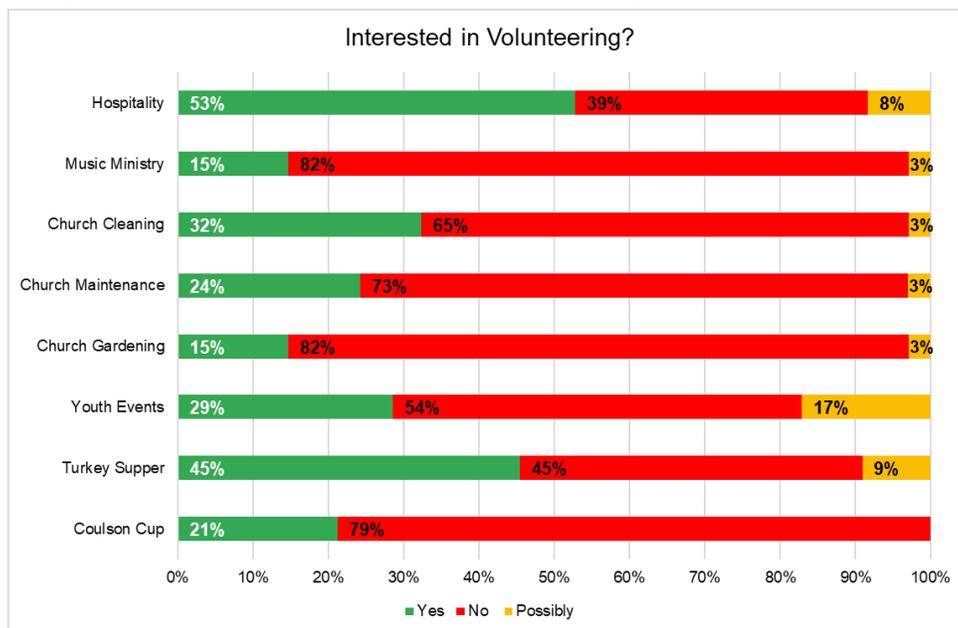


Figure 3. Would you like to see the Coulson Cup return?

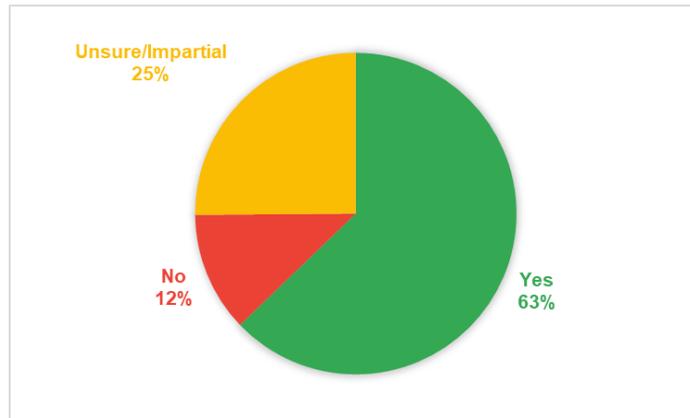
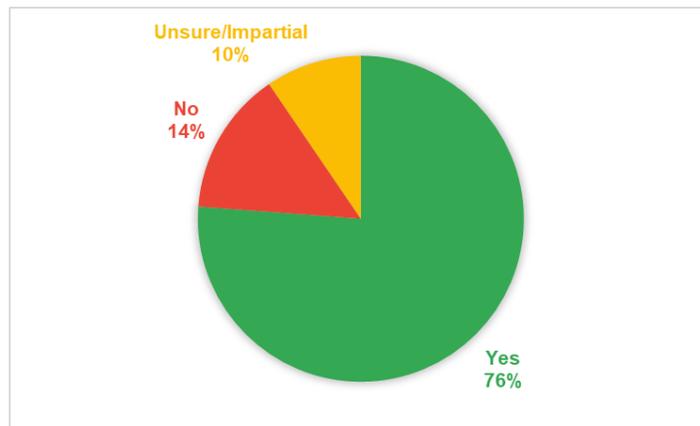


Figure 4. Would you like to see the Turkey Dinner return?



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