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## **Acknowledgments**

First of all, I would like to thank all the volunteers that responded this research without whom I would not have been able to complete this research.

Starting a bachelor's degree during the pandemic has been a daunting challenge. Choosing to dissert about this subject was also a challenge. However, I believe it is of fundamental relevance to understanding how the Catholic Church communicated with its faithful during the first decades of the 21 century, especially during the Global pandemic.

The Catholic church is one of the oldest and most fundamental religions globally, and observing how such an entity uses new technologies to interact with its faithful is key to predicting the future of this entity.

Further, I cannot forget to thank my supervisor, Mary Morgan, for the thoughtful comments, recommendations and guidance on this dissertation. And my biggest thanks to all my friends and family that supported me and without whom I would not have made it through my bachelor's degree.

Sidnei Vitor dos Santos, I love you! You have been my hero.

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## **Abstract**

Catholics in Dublin have had the opportunity to interact differently with their religious leaders during periods of lockdown imposed by the Irish government during critical moments of the Covid-19 pandemic. Starting from the opportunity to connect, communicate and interact virtually, this study investigates what Catholic churches in Dublin has used to communicate with believers in the digital world and what the believers think over it.

The research, conducted using a mixed-method approach, consisted of a two different online questionnaires. The first was composed of open and closed-ended questions focused on the point of view of Catholics and a second questionnaire was applied via email to 27 Catholic churches throughout Dublin. A total of 64 Catholic believers responded to the online questionnaire while 3 answered the questions aimed at internal church members who work directly with church communication. The sample was invited to participate via Facebook and WhatsApp Groups and e-mail.

The findings reveal that many Catholic churches in Dublin are losing opportunities to keep a two-way communication with its communities by promoting activities on socials media and website without thinking deeply in build interaction and engagement online.

The conclusion of this research is that the catholic leaders in Dublin are communicating with the community through the Internet in an engaging way; however, they must give more attention to a more deeply way to communicate online focusing on building a two-way online communication with the Dublin community because evidences show that it can promote better believers' attendance and participation in and out of the online world.

## **1. Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction – Research Background**

Global pandemic has put increased pressure on church communications. During lockdowns, parishes and churches were pressed to learn new skills for online ministry. After that, some religious leaders mention being more willing to communicate online, as they realized that believers still sought religious comfort online.

It is a significant change in behaviour and could be explored in developing more marketing skills to church's members attract and retain believers wishing for spiritual fulfilment. In this context, the social phenomena generate interest in investigating what believers living this new reality are responding to it. Thus, for this research it is important to investigate how is the believers' point of view to understand how catholic churches has been using its online presence and communication to attract and persuade believers to interact and engage with the Gospel also in the virtual world.

### **1.2. Rational Justification & Purpose of the study**

We live in an increasingly digitized world where technology influences the habits and behavior of individuals. Individuals share cultural and ethical values and thus religion plays an important role in the repertoire of people who want to guide their values and foster respect and love for each other for the benefit of a friendly coexistence linked to the teachings of the Holy Trinity.

In this context, this research seeks to understand whether Catholic churches in Dublin are developing their digital capacity and communicating with their communities through digital means widely available via the Internet. Keeping communication is important at all levels of society, so the church also needs to evolve and continue its mission to spread words of hope, love, respect and help to those in need as this fosters attitudes towards a better society.

During the period of lockdowns imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, people had to face their fears, anxieties and other real-life issues in the face of the unknown without the possibility of connecting with their religious institution through the traditional means (physical parish/church); thus, having online presence is seen as key to invite, persuade and motivate people to experience their religion virtually in addition to instigating/promoting participation in the Catholic Church activities and celebrations aiming to help local community and, consequently the Dublin society as a whole.

### **1.3. Statement of the research objectives**

#### **Research question**

*Are Catholic Churches in Dublin communicating with  
the community through the Internet in an engaging way?*

#### **Research Aims/ Objectives**

The major focus of this research is to investigate whether Catholic Churches in Dublin are communicating with their believers through digital platforms and if the believers feel impacted/engaged with it. The general objectives revolve around the following goals:

1. To investigate how important Catholic Church websites are for believers and institution
2. To assess if believers like the content their Catholic parish/church create to them on Social Media platforms
3. To understand if Catholic Church still important for Catholic people in Dublin

The following five research themes and sub-research questions were proposed to guide the narrative of this dissertation and keep a relative narrow domain.

#### **Theme 1 - The relevance of Catholic Church in Dublin**

1. Why is the catholic religion church important in Dublin Community?

2. What do believers like the most in its church? What do they like less?

### **Theme 2 - Internet tools used for Religious Marketing**

1. How has religious marketing been applied by Catholic Church in Dublin?
2. Could religious marketing be seen as bad among Catholic believers in Dublin?

### **Theme 3 - Catholic Church and Website**

1. How has church's webpage been used to communicate to believers?
2. Who is responsible for maintaining the website up to date?
3. Can the church measure how much access its webpage has per week/month?

### **Theme 4 - Catholic Church and Social Media**

1. What social media are used to engage with church community?
2. Who is responsible for creating the social media content in churches?
3. Does the community interact well with the content prepared for them? How is it evaluated?

### **Theme 5 - Branding as strategy to Catholic Churches**

1. How can believers help strengthen the church's name to bring people to celebrate faith in God?
2. Is communicating online something seen as positive or negative by internal e external catholic members?

#### **1.4. Information gathering & data collection technique**

Primary and secondary research were applied to investigate the research topic. A mix of quantitative and qualitative approach (mixed methods) were considered to understand the church online communication scenario in Dublin. The primary research focused on believers and an online surveys questionnaire was chosen for gathering data among them. Asynchronous email method was chosen for gathering data from churches members. The web platform JotForm was chosen as tool to gather data from Dublin believers through Survey and Word document used as the medium used to

gather data from internal members. Questionnaires containing either open or close-ended questions were developed up front being so more structured.

### **1.5. Expected Outcomes of the study.**

The main outcome is to know if the online communication of Catholic churches in Dublin motivates their faithful to engage with the church. Furthermore, this research can benefit Catholic Churches and self-taught people looking for understanding what Catholic believers want/whish from the church digital communication efforts; consequently, it will benefit all catholic believers trying to reach and share God's and Christ's knowledge by accessing the gospel from a digital environment as well.

Undoubtedly, the research is relevant because the pandemic has revealed the need to improve digital knowledge as a strategy for the development of content and digital skills for attract and persuade people to participate and unified to reach better outcome for society purposes. The church still part of society working in many points to improve people's life, thus interaction into the virtual world is essential for the Catholic church follows its mission to spread the gospel of love, respect, care, and forgiveness all important for people's ethical perception. Also, social isolation revealed how important religion is when people face fear and doubt over the unknown which had brought believer to gather in online religious practices to fulfil spiritual needs.



## **2. Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of the secondary research was gathered information of what had already been written about the online Catholic church communication in Ireland. The literature search revealed that studies on this topic are not common in Ireland, which culminates in the absence of any theoretical model on which to study.

Thus, scholarly texts by experts in religion were studied to gain insight into how to structure the questions to be answered by the participants. As there is not much literature on online communication in Irish Catholic churches, this study requires a ‘quali-quant’ investigation to understand the experience of the faithful and church members in order to understand what has been happening in this regard.

### **Theme 1 – The relevance of Catholic Church in Dublin**

According to Abraham Maslow 1987 (cited in McLeod, 2018), human beings seek to give meaning to their existence in life. Maslow graphically represented a set of being's needs that were divided into basic needs (physiological and safety), psychological needs (idea of belonging and love and need for esteem and fulfillment) and finally the need for personal fulfillment (full self-fulfillment).

At all times, man is seeking answers and desiring fullness and to balance all the factors that make up our existence on earth, human needs and desires wander between material and spiritual fields to try to reconcile our wills and priorities to reach the 'top of pyramid' which is to feel full in life.

For many reasons, the Roman Catholic Church has been losing faithful worldwide. According to 2016 Census data. Although predominantly a Catholic country, the numbers revealed that “the percentage of the population who identified as Catholics on the census has fallen sharply from 84.2 per cent in 2011 to 78.3 percent in 2016.” (CSO, 2016)

The Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI) group had campaigned for people who are not in any religion or non-practitioners to check the option 'no religion' on the census form as a way to have more accurate data about religion in the country in the Census 2022.

“The 2016 census revealed that those with no religion had almost doubled to 468,400, a massive 73.4% increase making “No religion” the second largest category behind Roman Catholics. One in ten Irish citizens now has “no religion” which is indeed reflective of how Ireland is becoming a more secular society.” (HAI, 2022)

Diarmuid Verrier in his review of Peter Mulholland’ book *Love’s betrayal: The Decline of Catholicism and Rise of New Religions in Ireland*, allows readers to understand a little of how the religious landscape in Ireland has changed over the years. Verrier (2020) mentions that Mulholland studies point out that the main factors that led Catholicism in Ireland to weaken are linked to the power that the Church exercised over political contexts and how this power extended over the basic elements of an individual's social formation such as which “the press, education, and healthcare”. This abusive power of the church and the idea of sin “led to a nation of repressed and insecurely attached individuals” and scandals involving child abuse.

As the population became more educated and the financial condition of the Irish people improved, people felt more confident to differ on the “pessimistic conservatism of the Church” and began to seek alternatives to fill their need for religiosity and spiritual healing.

Recently, Finola Kennedy (2022) wrote for *The Irish Times* about church closures in the country. The Dublin City Council and parish leaders have discussed these church closures to benefit Irish people in relation to issues such as social housing and other community facilities. Kennedy also reveals that people’s interest in following life as priests has dropped considerably as can be

seen in the following excerpt: “the number of active diocesan priests plummeted from 3,801 to 1,728, a decline of more than 50 percent.” (Kennedy, 2022)

All these economic and social transformations and new ways in which people can access their spirituality and religiosity have had an effect on the willingness of Catholics to continue as active participants in the activities proposed by their churches and to participate in Sunday Masses. Brian Bethune in 2012 already brought some data on how much church attendance and new priests’ formation had declined.

“...nationwide figure hovers at 35 per cent, while it's a miserable 14 per cent in Dublin. That's a situation the city's archbishop, Diarmuid Martin, calls the greatest issue his Church has faced since the struggle for Catholic emancipation in the early 19th century.” (Bethune, 2012)

## **Theme 2 - Internet tools used for Religious Marketing**

Although churches are considered non-profitable business, the continuity of their activities depends largely on the 'tithe' donations that the faithful disburse in exchange for keeping the word of God alive among the Christian community. In this context, there are people who believe that when the 'service provided' is linked to religion, it is frowned upon for a Church to focus on strategies that increase its revenue. McGraw, Schuartz and Tetlock speak extensively about this in an article published in 2012. “...consumers may find it morally distressing when communally focused organizations use overtly commercial marketing strategies like rebranding or value-based pricing.” (McGraw, Schuartz and Tetlock, 2012, p. 157) According to the authors, the commercial practice of marketing explicit in this type of organization can cause discontent among Christians and consequently “cause backlash against the organization”.

However, it is necessary for churches to engage in marketing activities to remain relevant in the face of the multitude of religions (new or more traditional) to ensure the survival of

evangelization from a Roman Catholic point of view. Cultural shifts that see changing how men see the world (e.g., female empowerment) put pressure on the Catholic Church where conservatism is perceived as high.

Churches prefer the flexibility of being able to run their churches in the way they see fit (Einstein, 2008), as they know that believers are moving away from certain religious precepts that no longer have value for them in times of globalization in contemporary society. Einstein, in his studies, demonstrates the importance of the media in the engagement of religious practice.

“Repackaging religion – updating music, creating teen-targeted bibles – is justifiable and necessary. However, when the content becomes obscured, religion may lose its unique selling proposition – the very ability to raise us above the market.” Furthermore, “Faith brands exist for three reasons: (1) religion must compete against other discretionary leisure activities; (2) religion must compete against the constant barrage of images and information in today’s culture; and (3) teens and 20- and 30-somethings are not as attracted to religion as their counterparts in previous generations.”

(Einstein, 2008, p.i and p.193)

Covid-19 helped the religious community in Ireland to understand how important the Internet and the possibility of using various applications can bring their community together in search of the divine Word in times of cause. However, since 1990, Pope John Paul II had already become aware of the importance of adhering to new forms of communication as a means of the Church “fulfilling her mission”. Paul II (1990) expresses in his speech that the Church's previous experiences show that God speaks to humanity regardless of cultural change and age and thus within what the Pope calls "computer culture" the Church will continue to rely on different

resources. communication for “preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ.” (Paul II, 1990)

### **Theme 3 - Catholic Church and Website**

With the closing of religious institutions in March 2020 here in Ireland, Catholic churches also had to quickly adapt to the new reality by proposing and using online tools that would allow the church to continue performing its role for the Irish community.

Gladys Ganiel (2021) conducted research during 2020 in collaboration between Queen's University and the Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting (ICC/IICM). Published in January 2021, Ganiel reveals how religious leaders across Ireland did not know what to do when the Covid-19 pandemic decreed the closure of non-essential establishments to prevent the spread of the virus in the country.

Reading the document, it is clear that many of the religious representatives did not have a presence and influence on social networks as a way of bringing more people to participate in the celebrations and rituals of the Catholic Church, but in order not to lose their faithful during the lockdown period, they adapted from the possible way to communicate with your audience adapting rituals that were broadcast through streaming platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, Facebook and Instagram Live.

The lack of experience of these leaders in dealing with the online environment raised levels of pressure and stress on them due to the need to learn new skills for online ministry. Now, with the experience gained during the pandemic, some religious leaders are more willing to change this scenario, as they realized that the faithful sought religious comfort even online and engaged in the proposed activities with some ease. Now clergy “may consider a different approach to church in the future with eventual blends of online and in-person ministries to maintain connections made”.

(Ross, 2020, p.2)

It seems that, some faith leaders in Ireland have decided to stay away from these technological and social media tools up until that point, but that out of sheer necessity in uncertain times they find themselves pressured to have to step out of their comfort zone and so use the Internet as a primary means to remain relevant in the social, spiritual and, therefore, in the lives of its faithful.

According to Central Statistics Office (CSO), 92% of household in Ireland had access to internet in 2020. Moreover, 86% of people were using the Internet to send e-mail, 79% to find information of products and services, 73% were using it to make calls and video calls, etc. (CSO, 2021).

It demonstrates how important being connected through Internet is for the Irish population. Technology has change people's behaviour and so even more of us seeks interaction online. Mara Einstein expresses how the possibility to transmit a video makes religious videos more appealing to watch wherever one wants.

“Broadband allows for the transmission of video, which is widely in evidence on religious sites and makes them more appealing than the static sites of old. Sites associated with popular televangelists have streaming video available for viewing, for example... you can view the full service online any time of the day, any day of the week... Many churches have an online presence, which allows parishioners (and non-members as well) to view information about their organizations.” (Einstein, 2008, p. 33)

#### **Theme 4 – Catholic Church and Social Media**

With the development of the Internet and the possibility of greater interaction and democratization of this technology (the so-called Internet 2.0), the introduction of smartphones and

the development of applications for use in this type of mobile device were essential innovation factors that transformed the way in which people communicate nowadays.

The emergence of social networks enables real-time interactions and allows people to find friends, people they identify with and join groups to share some kind of idea, experience and keep in touch. Corey Slumkoski states that “the speed at which social media allows us to connect and collaborate, combined with the potential of history apps and portable computing, suggests that the transformative potential of the digital world may be realized in the coming years.” (Slumkoski, 2012 p.162)

A 2012 study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) in the US found that Catholic social media users were over 80% at the time. The surveyed showed interest in seeing their religious representatives blogging, but at the same time they were unaware if their churches were present online. (PR Newswire, 2012)

The potential to evangelize, to remain active and alive in the minds of the faithful through interactions on social networks is enormous, surpassing the limits imposed by the physical barrier of a church. Ganiel (2021) points out that religious leaders in Ireland began to question what it meant to ‘be a church’ during lockdowns and that “church is something other than a building”. Other leaders confessed that imagining that services provided online by other churches could be better than theirs put pressure on members of that church.

In this way, it can be said that the clergy starts to see more value in the use of digital tools in the day to day of religious activities, trying to improve the quality of the services offered to meet the needs and wants of its faithful. In this context, it is clearly seen that traditional marketing strategies used by churches (e.g., leaflet printing to attract believers to in-site events) lose value

compared to the reach of social networks and other live-stream tools. As a result, 70% of churches surveyed by Ganiel intended to continue ministering online even after Covid-19 restrictions ended.

At this point, some churches are concerned about offering better quality online services in order to reduce the threat of losing worshipers to competition, which, in turn, may be using digital marketing strategies more effectively. This concern is real, and Alexander Hvass (2011) states the following:

“What we identify from this is a major shift in the religious sphere and particular aspect of human life, not from theism to atheism, but from traditional denominational worship to more modern expressions of the Christian faith. The internet and social media is growing an audience faster than anything in previous history, bringing many aspects of our human existence through these gates, enabling basically everybody to find a match of interest, regardless of what that might be.” (Hvass, 2011, p.9, and p.13)

As a way of mitigating threats, the Foundation for Evangelization through the Media (FEM) in Rome has invested since 2012 in its own 'interactive social community', called Aleteia.org, as a way of trying to maintain one-on-one connection with its faithful and other potential stakeholders with the purpose of promoting engagement among the “seekers of the truth” through content that conveys messages of “Faith, Life, and Society.” (OPUSfidelis, 2012)

## **Theme 5 – Branding as strategy to Catholic Churches**

Marty Neumeier (2005) defines brand in his book *The Brand Gap* as “a person’s gut feeling about a product, service, or company. It’s a gut feeling because we’re all emotional, intuitive being, despite our best efforts to be rational. It’s a person’s gut feeling, because in the end the brand is defined by individuals, not by companies, markets, or the so-called general public.” (p.2) Phillip Kotler (2021), by his turn, has been writing about the major differences that marketing has shifted



in concept from “product-driven marketing (1.0), to customer-oriented marketing (2.0) to human-centric marketing (3.0).” (p. 3)

The two authors agree that society has passed its mass consummation phase and now, surrounded by information, uses its power of choice looking for “symbolic attributes” (Neumeier, 2005) and/or “spiritual fulfilment” (Kotler, 2021).

In recent years humanity is undergoing several transformations. Some of them are rapid transformations in technological development, which has accelerated even further with the occasion of Covid-19, five generations living in the same period of time (from Baby Boomers to Alpha), an increasingly prominent gap between privileged people in the economic classes. against people seeking to climb the social ladder, but it is increasingly close to joining the lower economic classes and joined to all this the spectre that the development of intelligent machines will culminate in unemployment, thus amplifying an imbalance of humanity.

In this context of uncertainty, religion plays an important role in people's lives as a way of meeting intangible human needs. Jesus Christ is the most prominent symbol of the Catholic Church; he was the one who sacrificed his life in flesh and blood to save men from sins. Hans Küng (2001) describes Jesus as “a powerful preacher of the Word and at the same time a charismatic healer of the body and soul.” (p.n.i) Thus, people are constantly looking for something meaningful to regulate body and soul; therefore, the Catholic church can provide moments of healing by spreading the gospel, the love and God’s salvation mission to Irish people who need spiritual fulfilment.

However, Catholic Church has suffered consequences of its conservative approach and scandals involving its clergy and to help in this point a rebranding of its message could collaborate in the rescue of its faithful and believers that are choosing other religions brands to fulfil their souls. By definition, brand loyalty is extremally important to a business survive because this keeps customers coming back to. Mellens, Dekimpe, and Steenkamp (1996) quotes (Jacoby and Chestnut

(1978, p.80)) to explain brand loyalty: "The (a) biased, (b) behavioural response, (c) expressed over time, (d) by some decision- making unit, (e) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (f) is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) process."

(Mellens, Dekimpe, and Steenkamp, 1996, p.509)

### **3. Chapter 3 - Methodology**

To approach the research's question the methodology applied was mixed methods. For field research, two samples were investigated; the first group of participants were Catholic believers, and the second group were church members who deal with the communication of their parishes/churches.

#### **3.1. Theoretical Paradigm - Philosophy employed**

Habits and customs are factors that influence our way of seeing the world. Since we were little, we are exposed to what our family and surrounding community teaches us. For this study, there is a mix between constructionism and post-positivism in the ontological approach as well as a mix of inductive and deductive on the epistemological perspective. It all due to the difference in approach when investigating believers and church's members.

However, in the general context of the research, the researcher's tendency towards a paradigm involving social constructivism and postmodernism is noted, which assumes that reality and truth are linked in the social, historical and cultural context and, consequently, we are in constant transformation in the face of our life experiences.

#### **3.2. Justification for the adoption of method, sampling technique and sample size**

The mixed methods designs were chosen for a more pragmatic overview in the situation raised. The researcher saw necessity to approach quantitative and qualitative data set in order to investigate a higher number of believers and a few members responsible for the church online

communication. Thus, mixed method was used convergently at the same time being less time consuming. It all would help to address the research question.

For the first sample (believers) , a semi-structured questionnaire of 17 questions was prepared. This questionnaire had fifteen (15) structured closed-ended questions where participants could choose which options (multiple choice) best matched their experience with online Catholic communication and the importance of the church in their perspective, here the aim was identifying patterns. The nature of the questions varied between investigating the age group, schooling and region where the participants usually go to church. Also questions to investigate which communication channels the faithful usually access content made by the parish/church they usually attend and frequency that are impacted by these types of content.

The faithful could choose option about their view over content posted on social media that engaged them, and they were asked to rank how useful pages and groups on social media would be for them to get in touch with their religiosity. The questionnaire ends with questions that investigate whether this faithful considers himself a regular visitor to his parish or if he/she has been away from it, and finally uses the last two (2) questions in an open-ended format to understand what makes this faithful participate in religious activities and their opinion about the Catholic church importance for Dublin community.

The questionnaire was made available electronically to the faithful. The researcher volunteered to participate in private and opened groups related to Dublin neighborhoods on Facebook, as this would help capture participation from these communities throughout the city. Posts were made calling attention to research with the access link to the electronic questionnaire. WhatsApp also served as a channel for disseminating the survey focusing on Catholic groups. The JotForm platform was chosen as instrument for capturing responses and, consequently, as a database. 64 was the total sample of believers who collaborated with this part of the study.

The second sample of participants included only internal church members. Participants should have experience/knowledge about the institution's online communication, mainly about the website and social media. To access this sample, the researcher sent emails to a list of twenty-seven (27) parishes/churches located in different neighborhoods of Dublin. Among them, three (3) members volunteered to answer the questionnaire.

This questionnaire was composed of fourteen (14) questions decided upon in an open-ended semi-structured basis where participants could answer tell them in their own words the types of contact channels used to communicate with the faithful, their difficulties in maintaining this communication online, their vision about this type of communication and the importance that parishes/churches have for the Dublin community in their point of view. The aim was to provide a general overview of the issues.

The answers were sent back both in the body of the email and within the Word document that contained the Informed Consent Form / Plain Language Statement where the questions had been attached just below the consent form.

This e-mail questionnaire instrument model was chosen, as Schmidt 1997 suggests (cited in Miller and Brewer, 2003, p. 89) that this methodology may be considered valid over traditional techniques when the audience participating in the survey is narrowly defined, and has easy access to an email account and to the Internet, the clear case of the Catholic internal members for this research sample. The advantage was that the volunteers communicated their experiences by typing, thus transcription error was settled.

### **3.3 Ethical Section**

“The ethics of social research is about creating a mutually respectful, win-win relationship in which participants are pleased to respond candidly, valid results are obtained, and the community considers the conclusions constructive.” (Miller and Brewer, 2003 p.95)

The research method applied with the faithful does not open the door to any ethical issue since the research was entirely online and did not require any type of identification from the participating volunteer. Before proceeding with the answers, each participant can read about the researcher's interest in carrying out the research and information regarding the institution that the researcher studies, full name, and e-mail if there were any doubts on the part of the participant, which could be contacted. The consent text made clear the option to withdraw from collaborating at any time during the journey, in addition to demonstrating agreement with the General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR. No question was sensitive and plain language was applied throughout the research instrument to avoid any type of harm.

To evaluate the questionnaire before its application, the researcher had the support of three (3) volunteers to criticize and give tips that served to improve the pilot project. All critics were taken into consideration and only after adjustments did the survey begin to be carried out.

Regarding the research carried out with church members, the only issue that could arise was related to the anonymity of the participants, since the instrument for capturing data was made possible by e-mail and, therefore, the researcher would have access to data that identifies the name participant and their workplace. To avoid any ethical issue Consent forms such as Informed Consent have been added to the e-mails explaining considerations such as withdraw any information given at any stage in the research. No data relating to names and email will be disclosed in the results of this study to ensure the volunteer's integrity. Therefore, only church members determined to collaborate in the study went through the process of responding, signing the Informed Consent or confirming validation of their participation in the body of the e-mail sent to the researcher.

#### 4. Chapter 4 - Findings

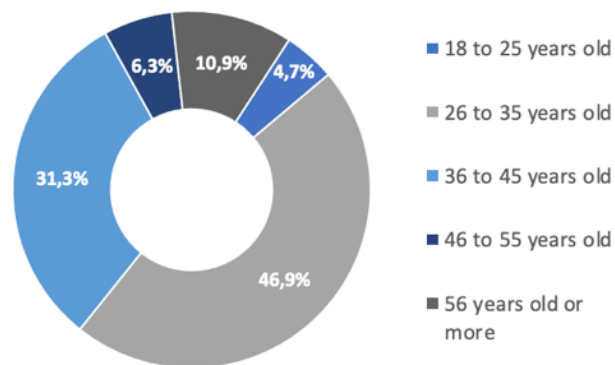
For a better understanding of the discoveries acquired on the research, firstly, the results related to the investigation carried out with the believers will be displayed below for examination. In sequence, the results collected with the participation of the church's members will be disclosed.

##### Results of the research – Believers Sample

The following results relate to the electronic questionnaire applied to the believers.

##### Image 1 Believers' age group [sample = 64]

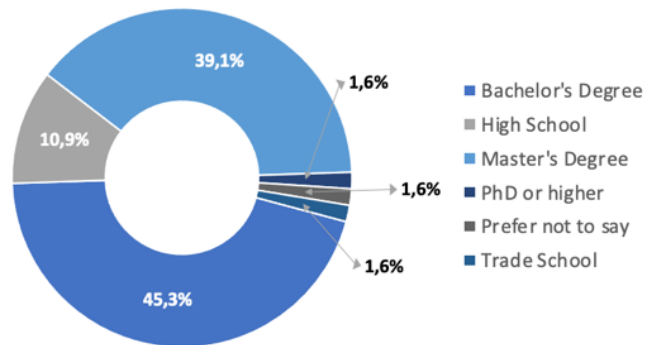
01. What is your age group?



It is noted that a significant part of the participants reveal to be between 26 and 45 years old, totaling 78.2% of the total sample.

##### Image 2 Believers' Education Level [sample = 64]

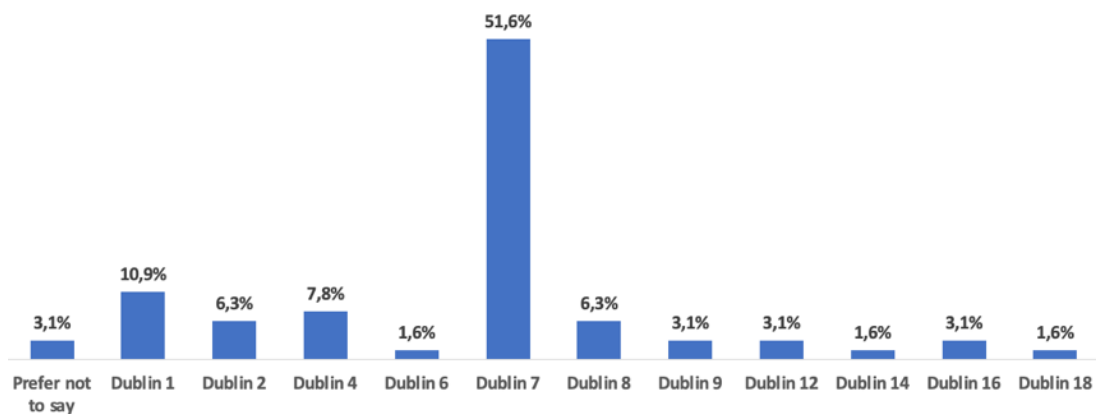
## 02. What is your highest current education level/degree?



Almost 85% of them experience a higher educational level (Bachelor's and Master's Degree).

### Image 3 Believers' common parish/church location [sample = 64]

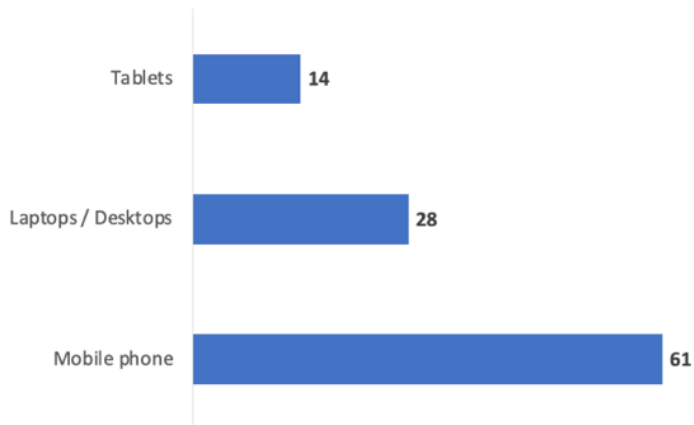
## 03. The Parish/Church you participate the most is in Dublin...:



More than 50% of the participants reported visiting parishes/churches located in the D07 region.

### Image 4 Believers' device preference [sample = 64]

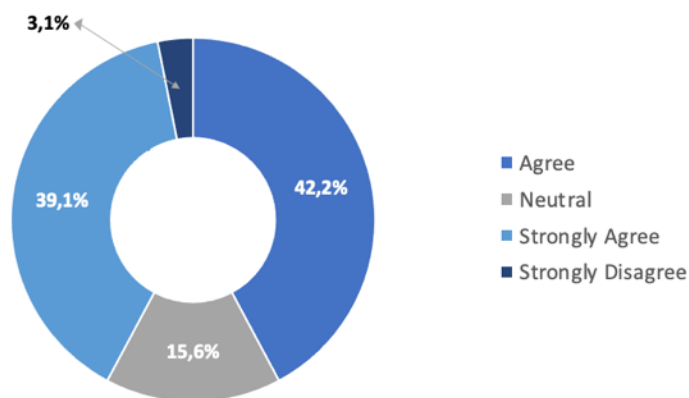
T2.0 On which devices do you use your favourite websites and social networks



61 out of 64 volunteers use mobile phones to connect with their favorite websites and social networks.

**Image 5 Believers' view about Church digital communication strategy [sample = 64]**

T2.1 How do you feel about this statement:  
*The Parish/Church should use digital communication strategies & tools to spread the gospel in Dublin.*

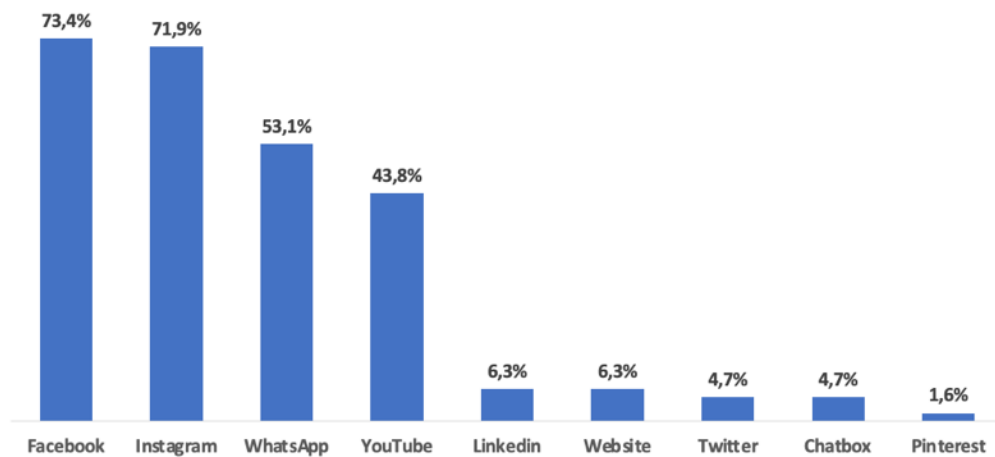


Believers demonstrate agreement with the use of digital strategies by their church representatives to spread the Gospel among Dubliners.

**Image 6 Believers' communication channel with churches [sample = 64]**



## T2.2 What online media have you used or will you use to engage with your Parish/Church?

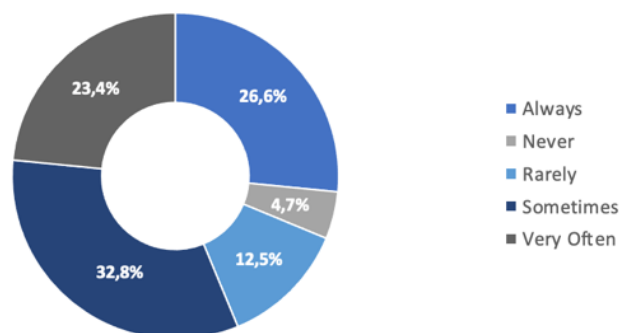


Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are identified as the strongest communication platforms when it comes to the interest of the faithful in engaging with the content produced by their churches. YouTube comes fourth.

## Image 7 Believers' search frequency about Catholic religion on the Internet

[sample = 64]

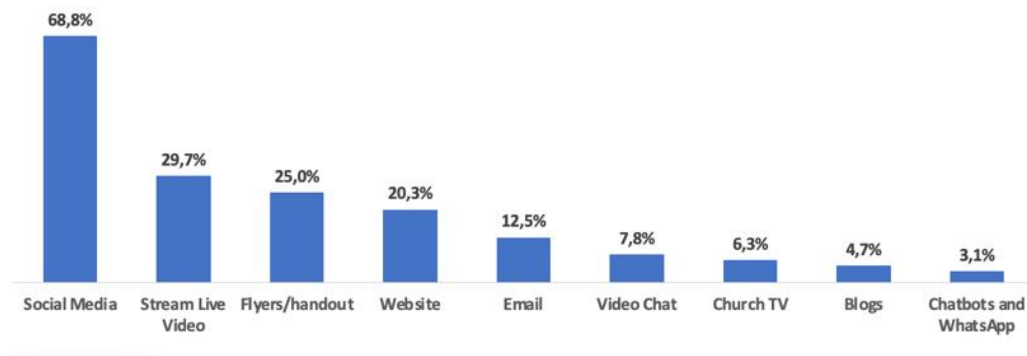
T3.1 How often do you search for topics related to the Catholic religion on the Internet?



This adds up to 50% of the total number of participants who say they look for religious content on the internet 'Always and Very Often'. Nearly a third of contributors said they search for it 'sometimes', and less than 20% reveal little or no research when it comes to religion.

### Image 8 Types of channels Churches use the most according to believers [sample = 64]

T3.2 Select bellow the type(s) of channels your Parish/Church uses the most to communicate with you?



Nearly 70% of respondents indicate that their church communicates with them primarily through social media. Live stream videos, flyers/handouts and website are mentioned by more than 20% of respondents.

### Image 9 Church posting content frequency observed by believers by platform

[sample = 64]

T3.3 How often do you see your local Parish/Church posting religious content and its activities on...

|                   | Facebook | Twitter | Instagram | Linkedin | Pinterest | TikTok | YouTube | WhatsApp | Website |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|---------|
| <b>Always</b>     | 34,4%    | 1,6%    | 35,9%     | 4,7%     | 3,1%      | 3,1%   | 21,9%   | 42,2%    | 21,9%   |
| <b>Very Often</b> | 23,4%    | 3,1%    | 23,4%     | 3,1%     | 4,7%      | 1,6%   | 21,9%   | 21,9%    | 12,5%   |
| <b>Sometimes</b>  | 20,3%    | 14,1%   | 17,2%     | 7,8%     | 7,8%      | 7,8%   | 26,6%   | 10,9%    | 32,8%   |
| <b>Rarely</b>     | 9,4%     | 25,0%   | 4,7%      | 25,0%    | 23,4%     | 26,6%  | 10,9%   | 4,7%     | 18,8%   |
| <b>Never</b>      | 12,5%    | 56,3%   | 18,8%     | 59,4%    | 60,9%     | 60,9%  | 18,8%   | 20,3%    | 14,1%   |
| <b>Total</b>      | 100,0%   | 100,0%  | 100,0%    | 100,0%   | 100,0%    | 100,0% | 100,0%  | 100,0%   | 100,0%  |

### Image 10 Believers' affirmation about engagement related to Church content

[sample = 64]

T4.1 Does the content that parishes/churches post and share engage you on social networks?

|                        | Facebook | Twitter | Instagram | Linkedin | Pinterest | TikTok | YouTube | WhatsApp |
|------------------------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|
| Agree 100%             | 37,5%    | 7,8%    | 43,8%     | 6,3%     | 1,6%      | 3,1%   | 31,3%   | 50,0%    |
| Agree 75%              | 18,8%    | 4,7%    | 10,9%     | 7,8%     | 7,8%      | 10,9%  | 20,3%   | 10,9%    |
| Agree 50%              | 10,9%    | 7,8%    | 12,5%     | 6,3%     | 7,8%      | 3,1%   | 9,4%    | 7,8%     |
| Agree 25%              | 18,8%    | 18,8%   | 14,1%     | 14,1%    | 10,9%     | 15,6%  | 10,9%   | 7,8%     |
| Agree 0%               | 1,6%     | 18,8%   | 1,6%      | 21,9%    | 23,4%     | 18,8%  | 6,3%    | 3,1%     |
| Parish doesn't have it | 12,5%    | 42,2%   | 17,2%     | 43,8%    | 48,4%     | 48,4%  | 21,9%   | 20,3%    |
| Total                  | 100,0%   | 100,0%  | 100,0%    | 100,0%   | 100,0%    | 100,0% | 100,0%  | 100,0%   |

Images 9 and 10 complement each other. In image 9, 42.2% of those surveyed revealed seeing their church posting on the WhatsApp platform 'Always'. In image 10, 50% of the participants "Agree 100%" that these posted contents engage them more than those posted on Instagram (43,8%) and Facebook (37,5%). It demonstrates that WhatsApp is the most potent vehicle for attracting Catholics seeking a deep connection in groups created by their churches.

#### Image 11 Usefulness of Parishes' pages and groups on social media for believer

[sample = 64]

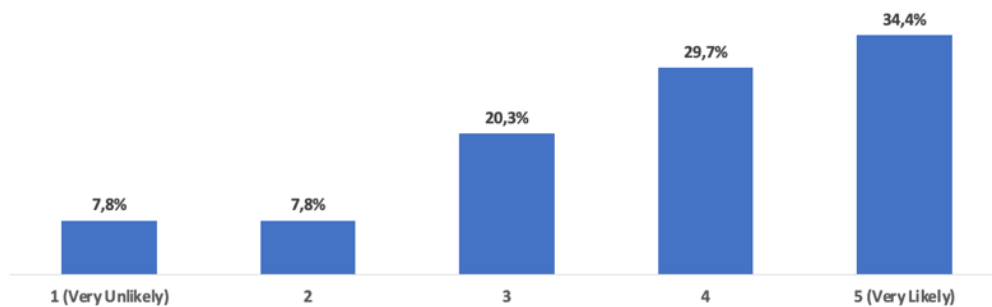
T4.2 Grade from 1 to 5 the usefulness of the Parishes' pages and groups on social media considering...

|   | T4.2e ...to Connect with Catholic community | T4.2f ...Cristian and Parish news activities | T4.2c ...to Spread/share the gospel | T4.2a ...to Listen the gospel | T4.2b ...to Learn the gospel | T4.2d ...to Worship | T4.2g ...Online giving, Tithing and Offerings |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| 1 | 10  | 13   | 7                                   | 4                             | 4                            | 8                   | 7   |
| 2 | 4   | 4  | 4                                   | 4                             | 4                            | 4                   | 4   |
| 3 | 46  | 43   | 40                                  | 39                            | 39                           | 40                  | 41  |
| 4 | 66  | 59   | 62                                  | 60                            | 63                           | 54                  | 54  |
| 5 | 143   | 146  | 145                                 | 150                           | 144                          | 133                 | 133   |

The faithful graded from 1 to 5 (1 for 'Not Useful' to 5 for 'Extremely Useful') how useful online church's pages and groups are for them considered pre-established variables. As can be seen in Image 11, 'to listen to the gospel' is the most useful factor that these pages and online groups can provide in the opinion of the Catholics surveyed totaling 150 points in extreme useful.

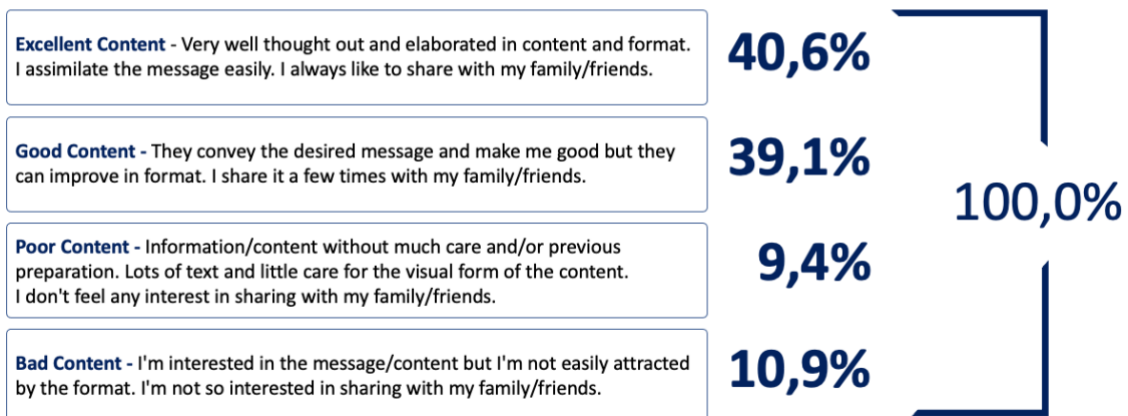
**Image 12 Faithful' likelihood to recommend Church's websites and social networks to family/friends [sample = 64]**

T5.1 Considering your experience, how likely would you recommend a Parish/Church's websites and social networks to your family/friends to engage online?



**Image 13 Faithful' view over Church's content on Internet [sample = 64]**

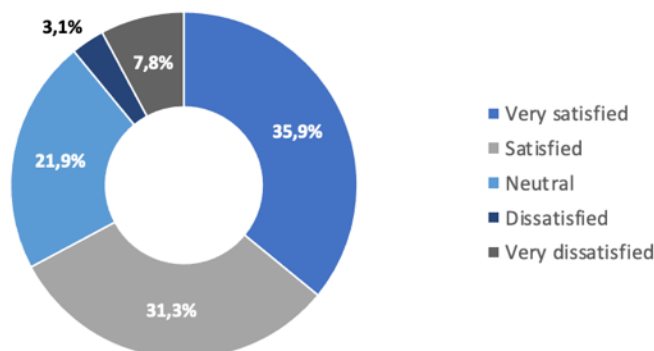
T5.2 Choose bellow a statement that better represent you in relation to messages/videos/contents made available by your Parish for you through the Internet:



Based on the information given in Images 12 and 13, it is inferred that most part of the faithful like the religious content produced by their churches and, they show propensity in recommend it for family and friends. This indicates that some devotees have appreciated the efforts that the members responsible for church communication have applied in communicating with them.

**Image 14 Believers' feeling about seeing local Church gaining prominence on online social networks [sample = 64]**

T5.3 How would you feel seeing your local Parish/Church gaining more room and prominence on online social networks?

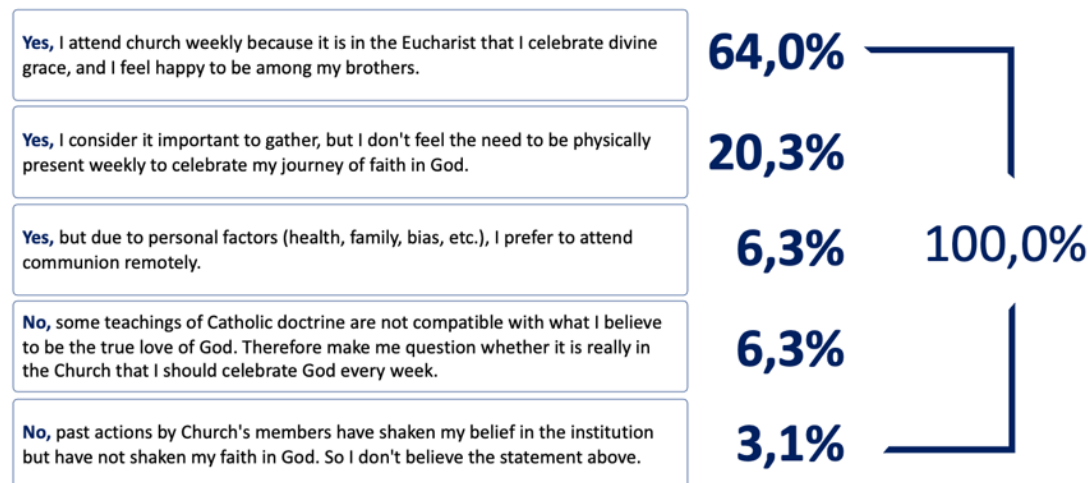


Believers would be pleased to see their church gaining more room and prominence on social media networks.

**Image 15 Believers' statements about attending or not the Church [sample = 64]**

T1.1 Do you believe that attending your church brings you closer to God and makes your faith in him more meaningful and deeper?

Obs: Choose the alternative that makes the most sense to you.



Most of the faithful reveal that being present weekly brings them closer to God and they feel happy to receive the Eucharist and be among the brothers.

### Image 16 Believers' motivations for participating in church activities [sample = 62]

T1.2 What makes you participate in the activities proposed by your local Parish/Church?



The question T1.2, shown in Image 16 above, was open-ended so that the respondents had more freedom to share their vision about participating in the activities proposed by their church. The words that appeared the most in the responses were '*Community, Faith, and God and Jesus connection*' showing how important it is for these believers to participate in a community that share the value of being closer to the divine spirit. One participant reveals participation due to "*External pressure (parents)*", another states that he participates due to "*Personal interest*" and a few others reveal that they have not participated in the activities.

### T1.3 From your view Catholic Churches continue to contribute positively to the transformation of the Dublin community.

Major part of people responded that the Catholic Church continues to contribute to the community. Some of them placed some considerations and there are some that do not agree with it. Few say they don't know how to answer the question or didn't answer. Below the researcher presents some of the responses received from the 64 participants.

| Catholic Church contribute to the community | Participants answers  |
|---|---|
| Yes   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Definitely specially during COVID time with social media, that helped for everything we went through."</li> <li>2. "It is through faith, fraternal coexistence and the union of all around the Eucharistic table that encourages us to be better and consecutively provide a better environment for coexistence, wherever we are: church, work, schools, circles of friends. The experience of living around a Catholic community is transformative!"</li> <li>3. "We need our churches...we need God... some people do not realise this! No online, social media could ever replace a church building... we need our live mass with people in the church...nothing can replace this!"</li> <li>4. "Yep. I've seen so many people being helped by them, also the community engage with people in many different need."</li> <li>5. "Yes, and always will do. Mostly because the gospel itself its a good influence towards the human behaviour."</li> <li>6. "Yes, Parishes help us and others in a way no one will do"</li> </ol>   |
| Yes, with considerations                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Yes but poorly. I believe they are afraid of losing more faithful people."</li> <li>2. "Yes, but just a specific part of the community, you ger generations doesn't feel that way."</li> <li>3. "Yes, they do. In my point of view faithful is the most important thing to have. Priests still having a lot work to do in order to bring Irish people back to the Catholic Church."</li> <li>4. "I guess the Catholic Church in Ireland needs to think in a young way."</li> <li>5. "It depends. I'm part of the Brazilian Catholic Community, I truly believe they are doing a very good job and engaging young people to follow the path of God and the Church, and helping out the community as always doing some social action to help the homeless, poor people etc. But I can't see the same welcoming environment in the local Irish communities. I think those churches are becoming older with their population and doing nothing to attract and engage young people, they need to change a lot or unfortunately I think the Catholic community in Ireland will have an end in a short few years."</li> </ol> |
| No  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "I don't think that they do, well not our parish priest anyway. He is more involved in parish politics and the good of the community he is in."</li> <li>2. "They don't do enough"</li> </ol>   |

## Results of the research – Church Members Sample

Three were members of the Catholic Church who participated in the survey. Below are the answers collected separated by research themes and where each participant received a code (P1, P2 and P3) to guarantee their anonymity.

### Theme 1 - The relevance of Catholic Church in Dublin

| Participant Code | T1.1 Why is your catholic parishes/church important for the Dublin community?   |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "For many the <b>Church building is a sign of comfort and assurance</b> . For the <b>elderly</b> it's a <b>place of quiet reflection and prayer</b> . For the <b>younger</b> crowds, it's a <b>"last resort" place to go light a candle for someone or a particular intention</b> . Many young <b>mothers</b> come by in the <b>mornings to light candles for their kids</b> and <b>all</b> the other intentions they carry. Lighting a candle is there way of remembering and <b>praying for someone</b> . Churches are also <b>places of quiet prayer and spending some time with God...</b> it's a "me time" for people, but with God in mind. <b>Churches have been a sanctuary for many of our parishioners during Covid</b> . When they were locked <b>at the start of Covid, many missed it and mourned that they could not get in</b> . In Inchicore – the ... Church...has a wonderful Lourdes Grotto outside and this was not locked and so many frequented the grotto lighting candles and praying earnestly to an end to the awful and destructive disease and the impact it was having on peoples mental health and relationships. The Church also <b>offers a sign of hope – and promise of things will change</b> . It's a <b>visible sign that God has not abandoned his people</b> . God dwells in the midst of his people. IN our hearts, in our town, in our area. <b>Churches hold memories... of births where babies were baptised, sacraments celebrated, vows made and loved ones mourned</b> . A return to one's church of Baptism can be a moment of reawakening of that relationship forged in the waters of Baptism uniting us to Christ." |
| P2               | "... Church was opened in 1836 and there has been a Church on site since at least 1790. It is a <b>long standing faith community for many centuries</b> and at one stage was the only Church serving South Dublin ...."   |



|    |   |
|----|---|
| P3 | " The catholic church in Ireland doesn't have too many faithful. <b>The Irish people do not believe in the catholic church any more.</b> I am part of the <b>Brazilian Community in Dublin</b> where we are trying to recover the faithful of the Irish people. They can see how we are helping people, taking care of each other, and mainly, believing and loving God. So, our church is important because of that, we are trying to help the Irish People to not lose their faith. " |
|----|---|

| Participant Code | T1.2. What do believers like the most in your parishes/churches?<br>What do they like less, in your opinion?   |
|------------------|--|
| P1               | "People love the quiet atmosphere and gentle music conducive to pray and reflect...they love the stain glass windows ... The three churches in the Inchicore Bluebell Pastoral Area are all different. Mary Immaculate is more traditional in style and still draws many people and especially couples who want to marry in the beautiful setting of the church. St Michaels and Our Lady of the Wayside churches are more modern in character and style and <b>people love the "open plan" and welcoming sense of being close to the action of the Sacraments being celebrated.</b> " |
| P2               | "Small Church and closely knit community."   |
| P3               | " I like <b>most the community, how the people helps each other.</b> "   |

## Theme 2 - Internet tools used for Religious Marketing

| Participant Code | T2.1. Do you believe communicating through digital tools can bring believers and community to your parish/church?   |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "Digital tools connects people and provides a convenient way for people to engage at a time and in a way that suits them. They can watch livestreamed events that have been recorded. IF they are housebound or immobile then the link of the webcam or TV on Mass helps people to feel they are participating. Many comments have been fed back thanking us for the service of the webcam as it permitted them to participate in a family funeral or to engage in an event they wanted to see but did not have the time to attend. As a conversion tool, I am not sure... its may give thought for reflection, but <b>the tool of conversion is the Holy Spirit.</b> " |
| P2               | "Yes"   |

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <b>P3</b> | "I think so. <b>Lots of people are impacted because of the social media.</b> We are in <b>lots of groups on facebook</b> where when somebody ask for <b>orientation, we can bring them to our church.</b> Social midea is a good way to be connect with people." |
|-----------|--|

| <b>Participant Code</b> | <b>T2.2. In your view, what are the main difficulties in developing content online for your community?</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>P1</b>               | "Trying to <b>keep update is difficult.</b> Trying to <b>be interactive and personal on line is challenging</b> as you are <b>writing for a vast array of people</b> – old and young and local and distant. <b>You want to be brief and give food for thought.</b> " |
| <b>P2</b>               | " <b>Keeping it up to date is always a challenge</b> and <b>more volunteers are needed.</b> "  |
| <b>P3</b>               | " <b>To get people involved.</b> As a volunteer work, <b>time consuming is too high.</b> "   |

| <b>Participant Code</b> | <b>T2.3. In your experience the community see your communication online from a good or bad point of view?</b> |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>P1</b>               | "Communication on line is <b>appreciated.</b> Its seen as a <b>positive step.</b> "                           |
| <b>P2</b>               | "Probably seen as a <b>positive thing.</b> "  |
| <b>P3</b>               | "I think <b>they see it in a good way.</b> "  |

### Theme 3 - Catholic Church and Website

| Participant Code | T3.1. How has your parish/church's webpage been used to communicate to believers? What are the main ways to reach believers to participate in your religious celebrations/activities? |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "We are very slow to keep the webpage updated regularly – but it provides for all the information necessary and people use it to get an update."                                      |
| P2               | "Social media, website, newsletter and live Web camera."  |
| P3               | "Our webpage is more to upload photos and keep the general information for the church. The social media is the way we use to communicate with the believers."                         |

| Participant Code | T3.2. Who is responsible for maintaining the website up to date?                    |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "Usually the priest of the Parish Administrator. In some cases we have volunteers." |
| P2               | "The Parish Priest and Parish Secretary."   |
| P3               | "We have a PASCOM, a committee responsible to maintain the website. "               |

| Participant Code | T3.3. Can your parish/church measure how much access the webpage has per week/month? If yes, what is the average number of accesses?  |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "Es we have a counter as to how many visitors. Because we have a webcam attached to the sight in all three churches, we average around 100 to 300 a week, and it can be more when we have funerals or special occasions." |
| P2               | "The web camera is accessed by 60 people daily and about a few hundred at the weekends."  |
| P3               | "Yes, we can. But I don't have this numbers, sorry."  |

#### Theme 4 - Catholic church and Social Media

| Participant Code | T4.1. What social media do you work to engage with your community? (E.g. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and other tools)   |
|------------------|--|
| P1               | "Facebook"..."We also had a social media sight setup up...where we got people around the UK and Ireland to do a <b>five to 10 minute morning prayer</b> – sharing their journey with God through scripture and reflection and highlighting a particular prayer. <b>It started during Covid lockdown and folks wanted it to continue even after emerging from lockdown.</b> " |
| P2               | "Facebook and Twitter"   |
| P3               | " Facebook, Instagram and whatsapp."   |

| Participant Code | T4.2. Who is responsible for creating the social media content in your parish/church?       |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | " <b>Priests/Designated parishioners</b> "  |
| P2               | "Mainly the Parish <b>Priest</b> "  |
| P3               | "The <b>PASCOM</b> , a <b>group of people responsible for all parich's communication.</b> " |

| Participant Code | T4.3. Does your community interact well with the content you prepare for them online? How do you know if they like or dislike it?   |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "Priest/ Parishioners check in regularly"   |
| P2               | "We know from the <b>likes and also messenger messages and emails</b> that come."   |
| P3               | "We read all the comments, so usually <b>we know who like or not</b> . But our <b>focus is more to understand their feedback</b> and, if it is something we can improve as <b>community, we'll try to do.</b> " |

#### Theme 5 – Branding as strategy to Catholic Churches

| Participant Code | T5.1. In this journey, how can believers help you strengthen the parish/church's name to bring people to celebrate faith in God?  |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "Don't know. IF a homily is online and they are talking of it with someone, and that person is interested, they can invite them to go online and see the recording of the Mass to hear directly what was said." |
| P2               | "By being more involved as volunteers they can help to share the Christian message."  |
| P3               | "Sharing their faith, the love of God and sharing good examples online. Most of the people now are connected. SO, we have a good way to share the words of God."  |

| Participant Code | T5.2. Is communicating online something you see as positive or negative to raise awareness of your parish/church name in the community and beyond? Why? |
|------------------|---|
| P1               | "Positive. Just another way for people to connect and communicate."   |
| P2               | "Positive."   |
| P3               | "Yes, we have lots of Brazilians living in Ireland. Our community is an important way to them feel like the church is their home here."                 |

## 5. Chapter 5 - Discussion of findings

### Theme 1 - The relevance of Catholic Church in Dublin

1. Why is the catholic religion church important in Dublin Community?
2. What do believers like the most in its church? What do they like less?

Survey respondents indicate that the Catholic Church in Dublin remains relevant to survey respondents. Believers see the Church as a place of transformation where it connects with the sacred spirit *"The experience of living around a Catholic community is transformative"*, where people help

others or rely on this help “*Parishes help us and others in a way no one will do*”. Church members mention that the church is important because “*Church building is a sign of comfort and assurance*”.

*'Community, Faith, God and Jesus connection, feel happy/good'* are the most cited words in the responses of the faithful when asked about what leads them to participate in the church, which corresponds to what Abraham Maslow (1987) states about human beings seeking meaning to their human needs and desires wander between material and spiritual fields. It can be said that the Catholic church in Dublin fulfil believers' psychological needs (belonging, love and need for esteem and fulfillment inside the catholic community).

Verrier (2020) mentions Catholicism in Ireland weakness are linked to power over political contexts and scandals involving child abuse. A believer had mentioned about it about the priest in the church “*our parish priest ... He is more involved in parish politics and the good of the community he is in*”, another had mentioned not see a welcoming environment in Irish church communities and mention that “*...they need to change a lot or unfortunately I think the Catholic community in Ireland will have an end in a short few years.*” A church member (participant P3) supports this point of view by stating “*The catholic church in Ireland doesn't have too many faithful. The Irish people do not believe in the catholic church anymore*”.

Despite different opinions, we can see that 64% of the participants continue to attend the activities of their churches on a weekly basis, as presented in the **Image 15 Believers' statements about attending or not the Church.**

## **Theme 2 - Internet tools used for Religious Marketing**

1. How has religious marketing been applied by Catholic Church in Dublin?
2. Could religious marketing be seen as bad among Catholic believers in Dublin?

Facebook and Instagram are the most significant means of communication between churches and believers with more than 70% of respondents stating that these social networks are or will be the platforms most used to engage with their churches (**Image 6 Believers' communication channel with churches**) . 61 believers responded that they access websites and social media through their mobile phone device (**Image 4 Believers' device preference**) demonstrating that the sample is well used to the online world. Pope John Paul II had already speech that God speaks to humanity regardless of cultural change and age. Thus the "computer culture" should be embraced for “preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ” and so new forms of communication are welcomed to the Church “fulfilling her mission” (Paul II, 1990)

More than 80% agree that digital strategies should be used by churches to spread the catholic gospel in Dublin (**Image 5 Believers' view about Church digital communication strategy**). It responds that religious marketing is not perceived as bad by major of the believer surveyed.

Einstein (2008) in her studies implies that churches members prefer flexibility to run their churches in the way they see fit as they know that believers are moving away. Church members agree that communicating online through digital channels is convenient “*for people to engage at a time and in a way that suits them*”, that impact many people and that social networks are important “*to be connect with people.*” However, they reveal that keeping the content updated is a difficulty because it demands people and time, it is also challenging “to be interactive and personal” which ends up delimiting the deepening of the communicated message. Overall, all members agree that their faithful reacts well to their online communication efforts.

### **Theme 3 - Catholic Church and Website**

1. How has church's webpage been used to communicate to believers?
2. Who is responsible for maintaining the website up to date?

3. Can the church measure how much access its webpage has per week/month?

&

#### **Theme 4 - Catholic Church and Social Media**

1. What social media are used to engage with church community?

2. Who is responsible for creating the social media content in churches?

3. Does the community interact well with the content prepared for them? How is it evaluated?

Themes 3 and 4 were joined in this discussion because they had similar data about responsibilities for creating content both on the website and on social networks.

Church members report that priests, parishioners, and members and volunteers in pastorals are the ones who take care of their church's website. They mention that the webcam, that allows livestreams, is what attracts the most followers to the website.

Mara Einstein (2008) talks about the importance of streaming videos to make religious videos more appealing to watch wherever one wants. "Sites associated with popular televangelists have streaming video available for viewing, for example... you can view the full service online any time of the day, any day of the week..."(Einstein, 2008, p. 33)

Participant P1 reveals hits "*around 100 to 300 a week, and it can be more when we have funerals or special occasions*" and Participant P2 "*60 people daily and about a few hundred at the weekends.*"

Gladys Ganiel (2021) conducted research in 2020 and revealed that church members were adapting rituals to be broadcasted through streaming platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, Facebook and Instagram Live. Participant P1 corroborates this information by mentioning that "*We also had a social media sight setup up...where we got people around the UK and Ireland to do a five to 10 minute morning prayer ... It started during Covid lockdown and folks wanted it to continue even*



*after emerging from lockdown.”. Also, collaborates with what Ross (2020) assumes as the best approach for churches a blending “of online and in-person ministries to maintain connections made”.*

From the believers’ point of view 70% point out that their churches communicate with them more through social networks. It is noted that Live stream videos, flyers/handouts and website are mentioned by between 20% to 30% of respondents. (see **Image 8 Types of channels Churches use the most according to believers**). Another curious result is that only the participant P3 (church member) said he used WhatsApp to communicate with his followers, but when we analyzed the data from - **Image 9 Church posting content frequency observed by believers by platform & Image 10 Believers' affirmation about engagement related to Church content** – it is seen that the faithful impacted by this communication vehicle are much more engaged with the content made available.

Finally, this research confirms as Alexander Hvass (2011) had said about the Internet and social media growing faster “enabling basically everybody to find a match of interest, regardless of what that might be.”

## **6. Chapter 6 – Conclusions**

The pandemic summoned many sectors of society dedicate time to create content to online communication in order to keep in touch with their audience at a distance. Catholic churches also recognized this value and tried to use creativity to bring its community together during tough times. Nonetheless, this research has revealed that online mediums remain in the background when priests and other church officers in Dublin do not get volunteers to take care of this activity.

Church members have been trying to post content mainly on their websites, Facebook and Instagram, but there is a difficult to control the data that these posts specifically generate. Thus, the engagement with the content published by churches was measured by the faithful’s view because

the church members say more about offering webcam livestreams of masses and livestreams for funerals for example for those who cannot be present in such a situation.

In the other hand, people have shown that exist churches which better take advantage of the online opportunity to communicate and interact with their faithful in a more emphatic and closer way have managed to make their faithful feel more committed to attending church and living their faith among other practitioners, revealing that maintaining communication and online engagement mainly on social media and WhatsApp can help in the commitment to the faith; a favourable scenario where this relationship between churches and believers is strengthened bringing more people to live the activities proposed by the Catholic Church.

An active participation of the catholic church in social media is desirable by the believers. It indicates that people in Dublin are acostumated to the usage of social network thus the church needs to be present and active on theses platforms to present itself to the public and possibly bring them to the church.

Parishioners are willing to use online communication tools to feed the need of their faithful but lack of time and people with more in-depth knowledge about tools and strategies to reach the target of Catholics looking for religious content on the Internet make this task something secondary in the administrative day-to-day of the church and proposed activities.

An interesting area of research could be the investigating further churches in Dublin 07 region where there were large numbers of participants collaborating with this research. From the researcher's point of view, this weakens the strength of the other regions, because if collaborations had come in a similar number of responses in other neighborhoods of Dublin, the results of this research could show other results.

Another gap to be investigated is understanding the view of young people between 18 and 25 years old. Even though Einstein (2008) states that “Teens - 20 and 30 - somethings are not as attracted to religion as their counterparts in previous generations.” - it is important the real aspects

influencing this behavior since this survey was published on Facebook and WhatsApp groups, platforms where young people engage frequently.

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