



St Bene't's  
CAMBRIDGE

## Report on the parish 'Deepen' Survey The Reverend Ed Green

**Summary:** We received a lot of positive feedback across most areas. There were very few comments that were critical of what we already do (and those that were focused on relatively minor details). However, there do seem to be some gaps in our offer – recommendations are made below.

Unfortunately, the qualitative data has not shed any light on the reason for lack of engagement among people in the 40-49 age bracket. There are many (speculative) possible reasons for this, but it appears that targeted pastoral work is needed to understand this demographic better.

Below are summaries of different areas; some quotations are included but these are not exhaustive.

### Community

**I. Across the age range, the sense of community, in particular the connection with other Christians (as opposed to a solely private faith) was very important to people.**

Across all kinds of activities, people often emphasized that taking part together with others was helpful to them.

*'Being able to take it for granted  
that others share my faith  
allows me to relate at a deeper level.'*

*'Our safe, inclusive, warm  
and welcoming community  
makes all the difference.'*

One respondent reported that they value

*'being part of a Christian community  
and finding friendship  
with people of varying age and stage of life.'*

**Community-building activities, both liturgical and social, are a key strength and an area we should continue to build up.**

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## **2. The Young People particularly valued the sense of community:**

One member of Young People noted that they attend a church school which 'reinforces' their faith.

One Young Person said that they particularly value the social aspect of their group (including treats such as going out together, outside of the church building).

*'I value the community and people with different experiences in their faith.'*

Being part of 'a loving and believing community of all ages keeps one going.'

*'Connecting with others' is important because 'I get more opinions on God.'*

**A clear strength of our offering for Young People is that in addition to learning and praying, they are build up in bonds of fellowship. The Youth Leaders should be commended for this.**

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## **3. There are a couple of small gaps in our otherwise successful community offer.**

One respondent revealed that they were simply unaware of many of the activities and resources we asked them about.

One elderly respondent said that they valued 'social contact with Christians in an otherwise lonely existence.' It is heartening that we provide that contact, but equally perhaps there is more we can do to help lonely members of our congregation?

**We should look into whether there is any improvement to be made in our communications. I do not believe our communications are bad, and there will always be some people who miss even the best communication, but it may be worth reviewing.**

## **Personal Prayer**

## **4. Multiple respondents indicated that what we provide in church helps them to structure their personal prayer life.**

*'Trying to keep to a regular daily routine'  
is helped by  
'having a daily Eucharist  
and evening prayer always available.'*

*'The stability of routine makes it easier'  
to engage with God.*

**Since it appears that stability is highly valued, I recommend that we make effort to keep our public worship offer going as it is, while seeking to provide support for people who are working toward stability and structure in their prayer life.**

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## 5. The barriers to private prayer are difficult to overcome.

It can be difficult to ‘set aside time where God is the only thing on my mind,’ according to one respondent. The reality of 2023 is that some people are simply too busy to devote as much time to prayer as they would like. There may be some value in developing and providing prayer resources that are brief and memorable, or in a pocket-sized form. There may also be some value in asking whether there is a particular time of day that is more amenable to people who currently are unable to access things.

Several respondents reported that they did not really understand what ‘deepen your faith’ meant. There is a paragraph-long definition of it on the survey itself, which may suggest that this is not really our fault. On future surveys it may be worth using an even shorter definition.

A few respondents, particularly in the eldest age brackets, reported that they didn’t really feel their faith was ‘deepening’ but that a range of activities in church were essential to ‘maintain’ their faith. It might be worthwhile to ask the follow up question ‘do you want to deepen your faith’ or ‘do you feel that you need to deepen your faith.’

**It appears that the people who are able to access our events and resources which support personal prayer are well-served, but that there is a significant group among our congregation who are not able to access them in the way they are currently offered.**

## Liturgy

## 6. Our Liturgical offer is very positively regarded by the community.

The Eucharist is of high importance to many people. This will not come as a surprise to many, but it is worth stating since this was explicitly indicated by respondents.

Hymn singing is also very important. The vast majority of those who commented were positive about traditional hymns. A very small number suggested other types of music, however, since our liturgical pattern and consistency it valued highly by such a large majority, I strongly recommend against this, as it would alienate far more than it would please.

Our pattern of in-church worship provides ‘regular anchoring ... in an ever-changing world’ and ‘connects my daily life with God,’ and is ‘a dependable and nourishing practice.’

The fact that we have continued to livestream worship for those who cannot make it in person was praised by more than one respondent.

The quality of our sermons is generally highly praised, as is the fact that we have many different preachers.

**In general, our liturgy as it stands is well received, and I recommend that it is not changed in any significant way.**

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## 7. However, there were a couple of requests for additional provision.

There was a call from more than one member of the community to add to our programme a liturgy of Healing service (i.e. laying-on of hands and anointing). This could be done within the context of a Eucharist or as an extra service. I have a broader liturgical proposal which may encompass this, which I will pass on to James and the Churchwardens before I leave.

One piece of feedback I have received verbally is a perception that we ‘*always preach only on the Gospel reading.*’ In my time here that has never been a rule, and there has been some preaching on the other lectionary texts, but a few people feel they are missing out on some content. It could be worthwhile to reassure our preachers that they are allowed to preach on any of the texts; on the other hand this may mean a complaint in a few months’ time that we only preach on the Old Testament!

**Assuming it is felt that we have capacity, we could consider adding occasional services on top of what we already do (for example, returning to our Reflective services).**

## Teaching

### 8. The Young People’s group values the teaching they receive.

*‘We talked about deep theological questions...  
I find the youth leaders’ experiences  
and opinions really interesting.’*

*‘We talk about the Bible  
and discuss the lessons we can learn from it.’*

*‘Without [the Young People’s group]  
I don’t know if there would be anything else  
that encourages me to deepen my faith.’*

**This is a very positive reflection on our Youth Leaders. What can we do as a parish to enable children and young people to engage with their faith outside of our building? What can we do to enable parents to engage with their children on matters of faith?**

### 9. Our other teaching is well received, but there is an appetite for more.

The Study Mornings were mentioned as a specific example of something ‘reflective’ which happens on a regular basis. If it can be made to work, we should attempt to keep these going.

In addition to what we offer, one respondent asks for a regular Lectio Divina group; this may be a good idea for a not-too-academic way to increase engagement with Scripture, which is an area in which we are significantly lacking.

Some respondents say that they would like to engage more with, for example, Bible study, but they find it difficult to fit in.

One respondent wrote positively about the Credo Course (confirmation classes) as a ‘*space where questions about faith can be discussed.*’

**I recommend a return the Friday lunchtime reading group, with the possibility of starting a Lectio Divina group. This could be organized and led by a lay volunteer.**

## Mission

### 10. Very few people made any link between mission and deepening their faith. Theologically, this is unfortunate.

A couple responding together mentioned that their faith might be deepened though ‘*more opportunities to help volunteer in the community.*’

**I recommend that we continue to advertise our missional activities while also finding ways to emphasize to people the ways in which it might be spiritually beneficial to them.**