

St Laurence's Roman Catholic Parish - Self-Assessment (October 2024 - Version 1)

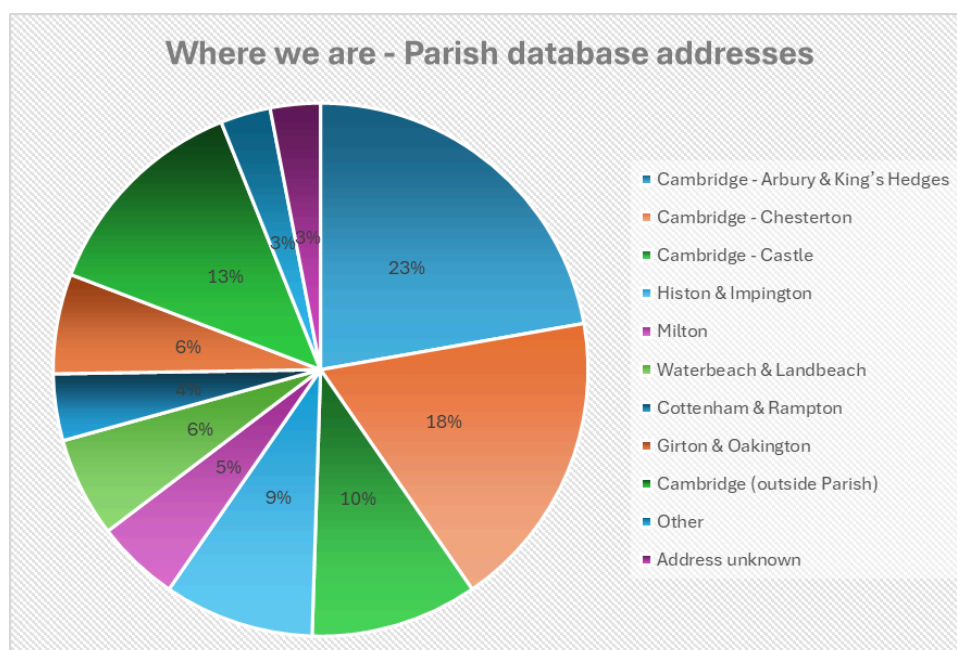
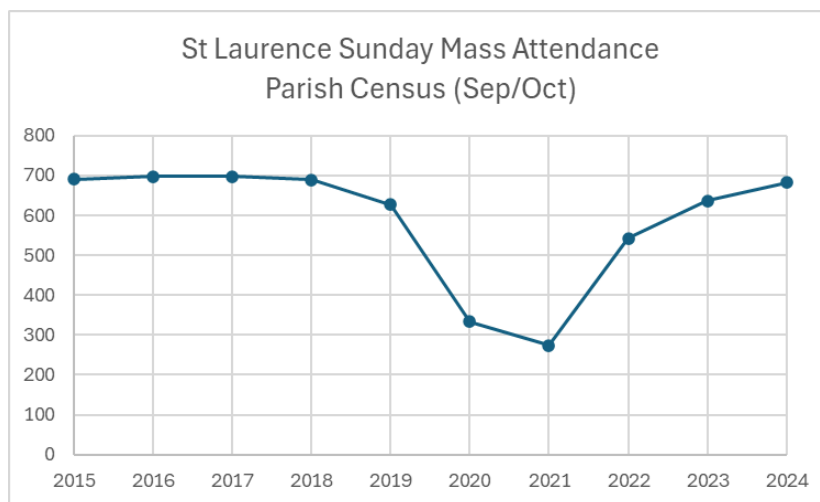
"As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organised if it is to be an ordered service of the community." [Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 20]

St Laurence's Parish strives to be a community of love and service, a welcoming place – both in person and through our online ministry – for all who are new, or visiting, or long-term parishioners. We aim for people to feel at home in our worship and ministries and all our activities, and together to grow spiritually, to share practically, and be engaged socially.

St Laurence's is one of three Catholic parishes in Cambridge, in the Diocese of East Anglia. It is a diverse community, spanning all ages, global ethnicities and languages, and many backgrounds and experiences – a wonderful mix of humanity, bound by our shared faith and fellowship and friendships. Wherever we live, or from wherever we connect, what we have in common is the Parish as our spiritual home.

Parish demographics

St Laurence's Parish covers the north of the city of Cambridge and the villages of Histon, Impington, Girton, Oakington, Cottenham, Northstowe, Milton, Landbeach, Waterbeach, and Horningsea. This includes large areas of new housing, either recently added or planned. The most prominent of these new communities are on the northern boundaries of the city at Darwin Green, at Waterbeach, and in the new town at Northstowe. At time of writing, our 2024 Parish census is underway - the first three weeks record an average of 683 Sunday Mass goers. This represents a recovery to pre-Covid levels of attendance (see chart below). Our Parish database currently has 516 individuals registered at around 400 different addresses.



Cambridge's universities and high tech industries contribute to the international nature of the population, as well as the extensive cultural mixture, and to a relatively high degree of transience. Many people also come from overseas to work in our health service and care sectors. The nature of the city is reflected in the diverse community at St Laurence's. At a Parish celebration in 2013, we identified 37 different nationalities in the Parish and this number is unlikely to have declined.

The age profile of our congregation is varied - typical attendances of 60 at our two children's liturgies and a similar number in our First Holy Communion class in 2024 reflect relatively strong engagement with young families. We have an active Confirmation group and youth involvement in the monthly Ablaze Mass, but the drop-off between First Holy Communion and Confirmation group numbers is striking and, in general, the relatively low attendance among teenagers and young adults evident in many places is also seen at St Laurence's. Sunday Mass attendance shows a good spread across the age ranges, although there is a bias, particularly among those involved in organising and discussing Parish life, towards the older (often retired) members of our community. We are always glad to welcome students into our community, but it is worth noting the student community in Cambridge is focused more on other parts of the city and the student community is mostly served by the university chaplaincies and OLEM Parish.

The northern edges of Cambridge and its villages are home to relatively large Traveller communities, and this is reflected in our church, both in attendance at Mass and in the wider community of Travellers seeking assistance from the Parish Priest and access to Baptism, First Holy Communion, Marriage, and Funerals.

Cambridge is a relatively prosperous city, but the economic conditions and increasing inequalities of recent years mean that there is real need in our city reflected, for example, in increased use of foodbanks. Cambridge also draws significant numbers of homeless people and the urban location of the Parish has meant that we often face the challenges of how best to welcome those in this particular form of need when homeless people come to our doors looking for support.

Our Parish school, St Laurence's, is located around a mile from the church, offering Catholic primary level education to around 300 pupils.

We also have a 'virtual' Parish community. Our streaming presence, established before the pandemic, was invaluable during this time and has led to continued interest in streamed Masses at St Laurence's. We regularly get around 25-30 Mass online viewers at the 11am Mass, for example. We believe this consists of parishioners unable to get to Mass (including residents of at least one local care home) plus some people from outside the Parish (and even the UK) who have found St Laurence's online.

Strengths

Our well-established community and church buildings.

Revived strong Mass attendance and an active Parish life.

The diversity of our congregation and an intent to welcome all to our Parish, including those joining online.

Our location in a relatively prosperous university city – we have resources and skills to draw upon.

Parish school.

Challenges

How to be present in new and growing communities and across a large parish, particularly outside the city.

Involving and welcoming all. Making sure those involved in and organising Parish life are reflective of our community (in age, ethnicity, gender...).

Ministering effectively to the Traveller community.

Engaging more effectively with teenagers and young people.

Enhancing ministry and outreach to those online.

Managing frequent demand for assistance from the homeless at the presbytery door in a way that reduces the stresses placed on our priest while fulfilling our charitable mission and helping those in need towards the best long-term support.

Our Masses and Mass communities

There are currently four regular Sunday Masses at St Laurence's:

6pm Saturday (vigil) - said Mass in English with hymns from the hymnal supported by recorded music.

8am Sunday - said Mass in English.

9.30am Sunday - said Mass in English with music group. Prayers of the Mass are sung and the hymnal is used for hymns. There is a Children's Liturgy group in term-time.

11am Sunday - said Mass in English with music group. Prayers of the Mass are sung and a music sheet is printed for hymns and responses. There is a Children's Liturgy group in term-time. Coffee and refreshments are offered after Mass each week.

Once per month there is an additional '**Ablaze**' Mass at 5pm, with a youth orientation and a charismatic approach to its prayer and music. This has proved successful - but we note that we are less successful in involving young people in, and engaging them with, the liturgies at our regular Sunday Masses. This should be understood as part of their formation and remains a challenge for us.

A **Polish Mass** is said every Saturday at St Laurence's at 7.30pm (attendees are included in our Parish census figure) and we also host occasional Masses for the **Filipino** and **East Timorese** communities.

There are **daily said Masses** currently at: 9.30am Mon, Thurs, Sat; 12:30pm Tues, Fri; 6pm Weds. The variation in time reflects a desire to allow for attendance of people with different work patterns. Funeral Masses are typically at 11am during the week.

Communion is given in both kinds at all Masses, with the assistance of Eucharistic ministers. Communion is predominantly received by hand. Non-Catholics in the congregation and younger children are encouraged to come forward for a blessing.

Our **musicians** have been able to provide a continuing and much appreciated live music offering, including instrumentalists and a cantor, at two regular Sunday Masses. For feast days and festivals of the church, the 9.30am and 11am music groups combine to support the liturgy. But there is a continual need to enrich and develop our use of music in the liturgy and draw more people into this ministry.

We have around 50 people involved in the **ministries** of the Eucharist, reading, and welcoming at our Masses. Rotas are produced by volunteers for each of these ministries, approximately quarterly. A small group of flower arrangers enhances the presentation of the church each week. A volunteer team writes the bidding prayers for use in Mass each weekend.

Vital work to enable our liturgies is undertaken by our **Sacristans** - Setsuko Willin and Margaret Martin - who, among other things, prepare and tidy the altar for all of our Masses, lock and unlock the sacristy and church, wash the altar linen, and ensure resupply of candles, votive lights, altar breads/wines, etc. This work is vital 'glue' that holds many of our sacramental activities together. We are very dependent on this support, and need to share the load more effectively with others, possibly integrating in some way with the work of our Eucharistic Ministers (see net section).

Altar servers assist with the 9.30am and 11am Sunday Masses and sometimes at 6pm. We have begun building up this team again after Covid disruption, but have a gap to fill between a couple of university-age servers, who we rely on for training and support when available, and the cohort of younger servers.

The programme of 4 (or 5 once a month) Sunday Masses is **difficult for one priest to maintain**. This is not an issue when we have another priest serving the Parish (as has sometimes been the case, for example, when trainee priests spend time with us). Otherwise, we are reliant on help from Blackfriars priory

to support Sunday Masses (and to provide cover when our priest is away). We have discussed alternatives in Parish Open Meetings, such as merging the 8am and 9.30am Masses, and plan to review this in a future Parish meeting. As a Parish, we aim to be open to change and development, always ensuring that such changes are fully discussed within our community, for example, via Open Meetings.

Strengths

Well-established Mass communities, in-person and somewhat online.

Quality and well-established music groups.

Offering children's liturgy at 2 Masses.

50+ people involved in the ministries of the Mass.

Challenges

Mass communities can operate in 'silos', with relatively little connection between them.

Limited scope for post-Mass activities for 9.30am Mass, owing to turnaround time before 11am.

Drawing young people into active involvement in the liturgy.

Continuing to enrich our use of music in the liturgy and draw more people into this ministry

Maintaining / recruiting ministers and other volunteers - especially readers and Eucharistic ministers for the 6pm and 8am Masses, and for some groups such as flower arrangers.

Improved support for the ministry of the Sacristy and integration with Eucharistic Ministry.

Recruiting sufficient volunteers to maintain our children's liturgy offering - the current group is stretched.

For many parishioners English is not the first language. Do we do enough to recognise this - e.g., could readings be delivered sometimes/regularly in one of the relevant languages?

Further building up the altar serving team post-Covid.

Other aspects of sacramental life

We have active Catechesis programmes for **First Holy Communicants** (around 60 in 2024) and **Confirmation** candidates (16 in 2024), both running from September to June each year. Children at St Laurence's school used to be prepared by the school and represented about half of the first communicants in any given year. However, the Parish now prepares all of the children from the Parish (following Diocesan policy). This includes both families who are regular worshippers at St Laurence's and those where this is not the case. In 2024, we were not able to accommodate all of the children who wanted to come for First Holy Communion - this is a challenge for us. Our plans for the next round of First Communion programme included the Parish Priest paying a visit to the children's families to increase the strength of connection with all families. The young people of the Parish are usually confirmed during the school year in which they reach the age of 13 (school year 9). Included in the programme are Friday evening sessions for the full family to attend and socialise. One point to note is that it can be hard to advertise and run these catechesis programmes in a way that effectively includes young people from the **Traveller community**.

We have a number of **Special Ministers of the Eucharist** to bring Holy Communion to the sick and housebound. It has been noted that coordinating this activity is an area where more support from a volunteer or pastoral assistant would be useful.

Confession is on Saturday morning and afternoon, and on request.

Baptism, Weddings and Funerals are arranged individually with the Parish Priest, via the Office. We have in the past had baptism programmes run by catechists for families, but preparation is currently handled through individual meetings with the Priest. We have had comparatively few weddings at St Laurence's in

recent years. Couples are referred to the Diocesan Marriage Preparation course and also meet individually with the Priest as part of their preparation.

Strengths

Existing volunteers and programmes for First Holy Communion, Confirmation.

Eucharistic ministers who can take Communion to the sick.

Challenges

Ensuring we can accommodate all who want First Holy Communion.

Retaining/creating connection with first communicant families.

Involvement of the Traveller community in catechesis programmes.

Coordination of pastoral activities - e.g., visiting the sick.

Seeking future Diocesan support to hire a Pastoral Assistant.

Managing Parish life - overview

Until recently, the only formal mechanism for lay involvement in managing Parish life was our **Parish Open Meetings**. While these provided a forum for opinion and discussion, they were often ineffective in organising action and left responsibility for many activities unclear or resting with the Parish Priest or office. The Synodal process launched by Pope Francis has been a major stimulus to reviewing how we work as a parish and has led us to set up a new **Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)** which pulls together the work of five more informal **Core Teams**. These are:

- Liturgy, education, and faith sharing
- Social activities
- Buildings and grounds
- Communication and outreach
- Parish office and staff support

We also have, as required by canon law, an active **Finance Committee** and other existing groups (SVP, Tech Group, CAFOD, etc.) that help to drive aspects of Parish life.

In creating the new teams, we are actively seeking to increase lay responsibility for the culture, vitality and spiritual health of our Parish. We hope to expand and share the pastoral co-responsibility with the clergy in the Parish.

Though not chairing the PPC, the Parish Priest is held to have ultimate responsibility for ensuring the pastoral focus of the PPC's agenda, and he, the Deacon and any other clergy in the Parish are members. We are seeking to make discussion in both the PPC and its teams amenable to different Catholic viewpoints and open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To ensure our ethos is encouraging to hesitant voices and reassuring to parishioners anxious to raise specific concerns, we aim to embed 'conversations in the Spirit' and the Synodal approach to listening and reflecting whenever appropriate.

PPC meetings are open to all parishioners to attend, and we are retaining our tradition of Open Meetings for the whole Parish whenever useful, and at least annually. To encourage a growing number of parishioners to become involved in the PPC and its Teams, we have adopted regular turnover of membership and leadership roles.

Strengths

Momentum behind growing lay involvement in Parish organisation, gained from Synodal process.

Parish commitment to Synodality.

Active volunteers working in many areas of Parish life.

Challenges

New teams are still forming and bedding-in. Some have yet to expand and establish clear membership/coordination and too many people are on multiple teams.

PPC could still be more representative of the Parish as a whole.

Liturgy, Education and Faith-sharing

Having discussed Masses and the sacraments above, this section reviews remaining areas of activity relating to the practice and development of our faith within the Parish.

We are well-served in this area by the work of groups and individuals already mentioned: our catechists, music group, sacristans, Eucharistic ministers, readers, bidding prayer team, and altar servers. We also have some established prayer groups in the Parish, such as Soul Food, which meets on a Tuesday evening. Our Social Action groups are also relevant here, but are covered in a separate section below.

Our new Liturgy, Education, and Faith-Sharing Core Team aims to take an overview in this area, coordinating the work of existing groups and seeking to fill gaps and encourage development.

One initiative began in June 2024, when the Team **brought together over 50 lay ministers** for an afternoon opportunity to meet other ministers, pray, discuss and socialise together. The meeting was welcomed and we hope to build on it with future sessions.

Supporting families in bringing children up in the faith has been another area of focus, including a plan to start a monthly group for children between First Communion and Confirmation.

The Team has also driven a programme of **lay-led discussions** in recent years, much of which has been the fruits of our Synodal process. These include both in-person and 'Zoom' sessions. Recent discussions organised have included series on the Synodal process, St Matthew's Gospel and the Sycamore Course. Forthcoming sessions will reflect on *The Cross of the Moment* report, and on how parents and grandparents deal with difficult issues, especially gender.

The team takes the lead in accompanying and instructing parishioners wishing to be **received into the Church**.

There is much more that we could be doing, particularly in the context of a growing Parish. One example was identified earlier, in the need to more effectively coordinate outreach to the sick and vulnerable, particularly with the blessed sacrament. Others include supporting and developing (and when necessary replacing) our catechesis volunteers. In the past, we have also had more active parents/carers-and-toddlers groups.

Identifying and serving such needs requires time and the right skills and pastoral insight, especially for a diverse and growing Parish. To this end, and in the spirit of reducing reliance on overstretched clergy, we had developed a proposal to employ a **Pastoral Assistant** (see [job description](#)). Our initial proposal was rejected by the Diocese - partly for financial reasons (Covid disruption means we do not have a clear history of financial returns showing that we can afford this) and partly due to questions about why the work could not be done by volunteers (we did not manage to organise an effective dialogue with the Diocese so that we could explain our ideas, particularly that the intent of the role was to develop and support such volunteer work). This is an idea to which we hope to return, possibly looking for a part-time position.

Strengths

Liturgy, Education, Faith Sharing team coordinating new activities and ministers' meetings, etc.

Many volunteers involved in these activities.

Challenges

Activities to support more groups in the Parish - e.g., families with toddlers, parents, younger adults.

Involving young adults after Confirmation.

Many activities still rely on volunteers who already have multiple other commitments within the Parish - placing stresses on volunteers and meaning activities can lack resilience.

Pressing the case for the appointment of a Pastoral Assistant to bring dedicated time to the range of challenges and opportunities

Parish Finances

Our finances are healthy, particularly in the light of the recent Covid disruption. We had assets of around £250,000 at the end of 2023. We expect these to be extended with an upcoming legacy. Rather than resting in the bank, some of these should be invested in the infrastructure of the Parish - indeed, we have invested in re-roofing and a much needed new heating system recently. However, scope in this area is also constrained by our human resources to manage such projects.

Our Mass attendance last year was over 600 and we ran a comfortable surplus based on our income versus regular outgoings.

We have a well-established Finance Committee and processes, including auditing. A team of 10 counters ensures that our cash is counted and banked bi-weekly.

Due to Covid restrictions we encouraged more bank transfers and gift aiding, adding bank card readers, initially for special collections (CAFOD, SVP, J&P, etc.). Following their popularity and general success we have added two Dona systems by both main entrances, which has helped increase giving for primary, second and special collections, as well as ad hoc giving.

Strengths

Financial assets and surplus position.

Financial management.

Challenges

People with time/willingness to manage big projects and put our assets to best use.

Keeping more parishioners updated and engaged in discussions about finance matters.

Social Action

The Parish has a strong engagement in providing practical and emotional support to our local community - Catholics and others - principally through the work of our local group of the **St Vincent DePaul society**. The SVP is integrated into Parish life - for example, organising Eucharistic Ministers to visit the sick, social events and trips for the elderly, supporting vulnerable families and access to health care services, providing lifts to Mass and supporting members of the Traveller community.

Historically, the Parish has had a strong **CAFOD** group, organising fundraising, awareness activities, connections to overseas parishes, and events. This presence has declined in recent years and many of the remaining CAFOD volunteers are very active in maintaining other aspects of Parish life. We have kept up key activities such as family fast day collections.

The Parish was awarded status as a **Live Simply** community some years ago for our action on sustainability around the Parish - for example, early installation of solar panels, use of Fair Trade goods, and our campaigning action. However, we have not recently revisited this commitment or reviewed it to ensure continued compliance - this is something we should consider.

Other social action programmes in the past have included collecting for local **foodbanks** but, although we are aware of sustained need in this area, this activity ceased during the pandemic and has not restarted.

There is also a **Justice and Peace** group active in the Parish, working together with members from OLEM and St. Philip Howard and other local churches. The group meets monthly.

Strengths

Active SVP group, integrated into the life of the Parish.

Challenges

CAFOD group needs reinvigorating.

Need to review commitment to Live Simply and other social action, such as foodbanks.

Social Activities

Social activities are at the heart of building any community. At St Laurence's, our **Saturday morning coffee hub** provides a venue for parishioners and others to meet up and spend time together. It takes place after Saturday morning Mass each week. An SVP member attends each week to offer support to anyone who may need it.

We also have **coffee and tea after 11am Mass** every Sunday, organised by a rota of volunteers.

Other social events for older members of the Parish are organised by the **SVP** and **CWL lunches** are organised monthly.

And we aim to organise social events throughout the year - especially a **St Laurence's Day** (10 Aug) party.

However, this is an area where a consistent team and coordination has yet to come together effectively and we are currently organising each event on an ad hoc basis.

Strengths

Regular Saturday and Sunday activities

Facilities and usually volunteers willing to help

Challenge

A team/coordinator to take this on as a regular responsibility.

Encouraging more engagement from all Mass communities, including those nearby and often online, to help break down separate Mass/silo barriers and build up a more interconnected community..

Communications and Outreach beyond the Parish

Our main communication tools within the Parish are the weekly Newsletter and emailing, the Parish magazine, *The Pilgrim* (published 3 times per year), and our website.

The **website** includes a continuously running livestream which shows all Masses, other services and an invitation to join in silent prayer before the cross. This not only supports parishioners unable to get to Mass, but is part of our outreach beyond the Parish - we know of regular online attendees from other parts of the world. Other useful features of the website, in addition to information and news about the parish, are the ability for people to register in our Parish database and to donate to the Parish online. A key current focus for our Communications and Outreach Team is to redevelop and enliven the site, giving it a more contemporary feel, to put it on a platform that enables more people to participate in updating and maintaining content, and to add features like a Parish diary.

Our **database**, as noted above, has been built up over the last 4 years to now include over 500 people, with information on their interests in church activities as well as contact information. This resource is beginning to be useful in contacting parishioners, for example, to request volunteer help from people who have

expressed interest in the activity being promoted in the past. But we could do much more to enrich and use this data.

Other communication mechanisms include a **Facebook** page and a 'Keep in touch' email list, which can be used to quickly get messages out the Parish - although with ~150 members, this only reaches a subset of the Parish.

We are aware that we have done comparatively little work in recent years on **outreach** beyond our Parish - both evangelisation and promoting our presence in the many communities that our Parish covers, and in making connections with other Christian denominations. We have an open project to prepare an audit of ways in which we might do this - this is another area of work where time dedicated by a Pastoral Assistant could be of use.

Strengths

Established communications tools - newsletter, website, continuous live-streaming, Parish magazine.

Database of parishioners in relatively good shape, updated in past 3-4 years.

Challenges

Taking our online presence to the next level.

Making more effective use of social media and email/messaging, as well as live-streaming.

Promoting the work of St Laurence's across the many communities and villages that we cover.

Reversing what we sense has been a long-term decline in ecumenical activity.

Office and Staff Support / Parish Office

The Parish employs one member of staff - our part-time **Parish Administrator** works 18 hours per week. The job description can be found [here](#).

The Administrator (previously called the Parish Secretary) is vital to keeping the Parish ticking, with key responsibilities including:

- Administrative and reception tasks
- Support for liturgical and other Parish events
- Assistance with Parish communications
- Support for maintenance of the buildings, grounds, and facilities.

We have just appointed a new Administrator (Emanuela DiPietro), the previous post-holder having left in June 2024 after four years. Our Parish Secretaries have served us well, but we are aware of a few potential areas for improvement, identified under challenges below.

The new **Office and Staff Support team** aims to involve lay parishioners with management experience in supporting our Parish Priest to address these challenges. For example, with Fr Simon Blakesley, the team had agreed to help with recruitment, objective-setting, monitoring progress, and regular appraisal. What support and help the new Parish Priest requires in line management of staff and the office should be discussed and agreed.

We plan to increase the role of parishioner volunteers undertaking specific administrative tasks, to limit the load on our part-time Parish Administrator and provide necessary cover when he or she is away. This should also extend to ensuring good processes for managing day-to-day activities in the Parish in the absence of the Parish Priest, ensuring that our priests are able to take appropriate breaks and holidays.

Strengths

A paid member of staff ensures that key tasks and activities are covered in administering the Parish.

We have many volunteers, and parishioners willing to volunteer (e.g. if they are asked).

Challenges

Ensuring high quality line-management and support for Parish staff.

Putting in place the right, clearly documented systems and processes in and around the office - this is currently a gap in our practice. We are too reliant on 'institutional memory' - i.e., people knowing / remembering what needs to be done, and how - and in many places this memory is now missing.

Ensuring resilience in the office and administration of the Parish, enabling paid staff and the Parish Priest to take appropriate breaks and holidays.

Buildings, Grounds and Facilities

For many years at St Laurence's, maintenance of the buildings and grounds was supported and managed by members of the Parish with appropriate skills. This **skill base has been lost to us in recent years**, and not yet replaced. Maintenance and the management of larger projects around the Parish has proceeded on a fairly ad hoc basis, with individual projects being picked up by different volunteers and day-to-day management relying on the Parish Secretary and the occasional and variable support of volunteers. We have created a new **Buildings, Grounds, and Facilities Core Team** to try to address this situation. This has identified a new group of volunteers willing to provide support, but we still need more people prepared to coordinate the group and to provide relevant skills. We have made some progress - a project to tidy up the grounds and gardens over the summer, delivering the new heating system, and getting in place the project to re-roof the Parish rooms, as well as smaller-scale repairs such as oiling the benches in church. We need to build on this and also to document properly what needs to be done to maintain our facilities in a buildings and grounds handbook. This will reduce the chances of vital work being missed.

We have a **backlog of potential projects**, identified through the five-yearly diocesan survey of the Parish and approved in principle by our Finance Committee. After reroofing, these include redecoration of the presbytery, church and sacristy and replacing the remaining old windows in the church. In general, our Parish rooms are a little tired and untidy and much could be done to improve them - for example, redecoration and new flooring in the main parish hall could be considered.

Our buildings and garden are an **asset** for our community, enabling us to hold meetings, events, and celebrations. We are also open to renting them out for use by other community groups which can be both a financial asset to the Parish and part of our outreach.

Our use of technology is supported by a very strong **Tech Group** within the Parish, which supports our use of IT for Parish activities and administration, including installing and maintaining our livestream presence.

Security is an issue, given our urban location and desire to keep the church open for prayer during the day. We have had some recent thefts and minor damage around the church. Balancing access to the church with keeping internal doors locked and managing who has key-code access is difficult.

Managing parking at the site has been an issue in the past, with unauthorised use creating problems. This has been addressed by introducing a camera-based 'ANPR' system to identify unauthorised use, with fines then being imposed by an outsourced company. Visitors to church must either have their cars registered with us, or input the registration on a console in the church when they visit. While being effective in ridding us of previous parking problems, this has caused problems due to legitimate church users being fined, and does require us to continually communicate the need for people to register when they visit.

Bicycle parking is popular and has remained sufficient for even the larger Masses.

Strengths

A prime site near central Cambridge with buildings and facilities in an adequate state of repair.

Financial assets to support work.

Volunteer support to help with practical tasks.

Strong Tech Group.

Challenges

Expertise and leadership in buildings and facilities management is lacking. Limited human resource to manage big projects.

Refreshing and maintaining our Parish rooms.

Parking system - minimising problems due to legitimate users being fined; this also soaks up a large amount of admin time that could be better spent.

Lack of good process and documentation - need to create a handbook for the Parish so we know the history and future requirements in maintaining our facilities.

The renting-out of Parish rooms (and maintaining facilities at a quality to enable this) and management of parking are both things where we may want to review current practice.

Keeping the buildings secure while enabling access to our Parish community (e.g., managing key/code holders).

Safeguarding

We have parish Safeguarding representatives who are trained, involved in the DBS checking of relevant volunteers, and represented on the PPC where safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda. The Parish is up to date with all its DBS checks. We can also draw on diocesan advice for support, and this has been prompt when requested.

Strengths

Safeguarding representation in place and checks for volunteers up-to-date.

Challenges

The team is currently advising on updating our record-keeping for children's activities to bring it in line with Diocesan requirements. A system is in place for keeping a register of all children and adults attending the First Holy Communion group. It is hoped a system covering events such as Children's Liturgy, Confirmation and Youth groups will be in place for the start of the Autumn term.

Schooling

St Laurence Primary School

St Laurence is situated on Arbury Road, serving north Cambridge (and other areas) and lies within the parish boundary. Many of our Parish children attend the school. The school has just reduced its Pupil Admission Number from 45 to 30, due to a national drop in the birth rate. The cohort of children is diverse in ethnicity as well as economically.

At a recent Ofsted inspection (May 2024), inspectors noted that:

Pupils thrive in the richly diverse community at St Laurence Catholic Primary School. It is an inclusive and friendly school where everyone is welcome. Pupils learn from the many different cultures and languages represented in the school. As a result, they have a strong appreciation of diversity. (Ofsted 2024)

The Parish and Parish Priest are strongly supportive of the school. We used to celebrate our 9.30 Mass at the school, although we have not returned to this arrangement post-Covid, and the Mass is now quite well-established at the church.

St. Laurence has an established and thriving 'Mini Vinnies' group which works alongside the parish St. Vincent de Paul group, on some of their campaigns as well as running campaigns of their own. The school has many liturgical events, throughout the school year, which have benefitted from the involvement of the Parish Priest.

The Assistant Headteacher, Mrs. Rachel Chalklin, is a parishioner and a regular reader at Sunday Mass. The Headteacher is Mrs. Jenny McGhee Wallace and this is her third year in post.

Other Schools

Our Deacon, Dr Geoff Cook, is a Director of St Bede's Interchurch school, the only Christian state secondary school in Cambridge. St Mary's School offers Catholic education privately. Both schools lie outside the Parish boundaries but are attended by children from the Parish. It should be noted, however, that the majority of Parish children attend their local non-Catholic schools at both primary and secondary level.

Strengths

Parish primary school.

Challenges

Limited/no connection/outreach to other (non-Catholic) schools in the Parish.

Conclusion

In drawing up this self-appraisal, we have been mindful of the Pope's and Bishop Peter's call for the laity to take responsibility for more and more areas of Parish life. The urgency is underlined by the declining number and rising age profile of priests in the Diocese. We have been struck by the way this direction of travel dovetails with the insights of *The Cross of the Moment*, its analysis of the Church's flaws, and its plea that we overcome the notion 'that the Parish belongs to the priest, that he is in charge and must decide everything.' That notion, it goes on, 'is fertile ground for attitudes which diminish the Baptismal responsibility of laypeople and limit the sense that the whole community is responsible for its own life and mission.'

We hope this summary of where we are on our journey will be helpful in inducting, integrating, and supporting the next Parish Priest at St Laurence's.

Beyond that, we hope that this can become a 'living document' that we review and update regularly (at least on an annual basis), reminding us of priorities, helping us to identify new ones, and tracking our progress. We also hope that this process might be something we can share with other Parishes to help their development, and that we can likewise learn from ideas and best practice elsewhere.