

# EVALUATION OF SWINDON NEW TOWN INNOVATION FUNDING PROJECT

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# 1 Executive summary

## *Background*

The Swindon New Town Innovation Funding project was established to secure sustainable growth and renewed confidence in the parish of Swindon New Town. Serving a dense urban population of over 23,000 people within a town of around 200,000, the parish includes three churches – St Mark’s, St Luke’s and St Saviour’s – and ministers within a context of socio-economic deprivation, cultural diversity and significant demographic change. A substantial Goan community, many of Roman Catholic heritage, forms an important part of the local population. By 2019 the parish had experienced long-term decline and uncertainty. Under new leadership from 2020 onwards, attendance began to recover. Innovation Funding (2023–2025) sought to build on that momentum by adopting proven mission methodologies from an evangelical context within an Anglo-Catholic theological framework, investing in additional clergy and lay capacity to focus particularly on children and families, young adults and the Goan community.

## *Impact and Outcomes*

The project delivered measurable growth and qualitative renewal. Adult Sunday Mass attendance rose significantly in the early years of the project and, although plateauing later, remained well above pre-project levels. Under-16 attendance trebled from its 2022 baseline. Thirty-five people were prepared for confirmation during the period, including a notable proportion of new disciples. Social action engagement reached over 100 individuals, from which twelve became part of the worshipping community. Lay leadership diversity increased substantially, with minority ethnic leaders and those under 40 exceeding original targets. Growth has been most evident where new or renewed worshipping communities have been developed, notably the revitalised Sunday congregation at St Mark’s and the weekly Konkani language Mass at St Luke’s.

## *Implementation and Mission design*

The project hypothesis — that evangelical mission practices can be faithfully translated into a Catholic ecclesial context — has been broadly validated. Expanded Mass provision, Alpha courses, community cafés, children’s groups, pilgrimages and targeted evangelisation have borne fruit in attendance and deepening discipleship. Implementation was ambitious and largely achieved, despite staffing transitions and some unrealised plans (notably schools engagement and the full development of St Aldhelm’s as a community hub). The most significant constraint has been sustainability: much of the new activity remains dependent upon paid clergy and staff rather than embedded unpaid lay leadership and giving has not grown significantly during the project, giving a budget shortfall when external funding ends.

## *Learning and recommendations*

**Leadership matters profoundly.** Confident, spiritually alive priestly leadership has been catalytic in shaping culture and growth.

**New worshipping communities drive growth.** Intentional re-launches or clearly differentiated congregations have yielded the strongest results.

**Lay leadership development takes time and requires structured pathways.** Sustainable growth will depend upon clearer development routes for unpaid lay leaders.

**Community engagement translates to discipleship when invitation is explicit.** The social action-to-worship pipeline has proven effective but requires scale and coordination.

**Cultural integration takes time.** Engagement with the Goan community demonstrates that belonging and ownership cannot be short-cut.

The project demonstrates that sustained, intentional Catholic mission in an urban context can generate real growth. The parish should now focus on financial resilience and leadership multiplication to secure long-term sustainability.

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## 2 Background

### 2.1 Parish context

Swindon New Town parish serves central Swindon. It is an urban parish with a growing population of more than 23,000 residents, within the town that has around 200,000 total population. The parish includes Swindon's commercial town centre and dense, mostly terraced, residential housing. The parish is listed at 29% most deprived (nationally), with the area around St Marks the most deprived part of the parish at 14%. The parish includes two large primary schools, as well as the University Technical College; the North Star campus of New College Swindon; and the new Cultural Heritage Institute of the Royal Agricultural University.

The parish has three churches, St Marks, St Lukes and St Saviours, and a town centre chapel (used as the parish office and the town's food bank), each with a hall. It has a long-established Catholic identity and is within the Oswestry jurisdiction, with a commitment to engaging as fully as possible in the life of Swindon Deanery and Bristol Diocese.

Swindon has a large Goan community (unofficial online estimates suggest 25,000), many of whom live in the area of Broadgreen where St Lukes is situated. Goa is distinct as a region of India that was a former Portuguese colony with a very high proportion of ethnic Goans (online sources suggest 80%) professing as Roman Catholic.

St Marks is the largest building and most centrally located church in the parish, in a relatively prominent position adjacent to a park. St Saviours is a much smaller and more modest building, slightly tucked away on a side road up a hill from the centre in a slightly more affluent/less deprived area of the parish.

A new Church of England church was launched by the diocese and the HTB network in 2019/20, Pattern Church, which is in walking distance of St Marks.

### 2.2 Parish mission before the project

Similar to many other town centre parishes in England, Swindon New Town had faced significant decline over several decades to the point when in vacancy in 2019, the churches of the parish were facing an uncertain future, with small congregations and the risk of closure of one or more of the churches. The appointment of Fr Toby Boutle to the parish in 2020 brought new hope and as the churches emerged from the covid pandemic, they began to refocus and see growth in attendance. This was most prominently at St Marks, the most central and largest building, where a reinvigorated Sunday Mass began to see a growing Sunday congregation. By late 2022 (before the start of the funding in early 2023), average weekly attendance across the parish had grown to over 160.

## 3 Effectiveness and Missional design

### 3.1 Planned Mission Theory & Design

The project mission theory was to adopt the approaches more commonly seen in the evangelical tradition (and specifically in the parish of St Andrew's Avonmouth within the diocese) and apply them in a Catholic context, focused around the Mass and priestly ministry. This included a focus on establishing community service activity, inspiring worship, intentional

evangelism (or evangelisation in Catholic terminology/theology), discipleship opportunities and developing lay leaders (A full Theory of Change diagram is provided in Appendix 1). There was to be a specific targeting of three demographic groups; Children and families, young adults and the Goan community. This it was hoped would deliver sustained 'good growth', of new disciples, depth of discipleship, community impact, and new and more diverse leaders.

This approach was to be delivered through additional resources of a second full-time and mission focussed Priest and three part-time lay workers (0.8FTE total) to work with the three target groups. These additional roles would be funded for three years, costing a total of just under £250,000, provided by Innovation Funding. In addition, the PCC committed to renovation of the hall at St. Mark's, with new lavatories and a new kitchen, estimated at £100,000, to make it more suitable to host community events.

## 3.2 Mission activity undertaken and learning

To a significant extent the missional design was implemented broadly as planned across all areas of the theory of change and to all target groups. The project had an extensive and relatively detailed plan of activity for the three years, that proved somewhat ambitious and would probably have required everything to go swimmingly for it to have all been achieved. Given some of the staffing challenges and issues faced, the scale of activity completed showed significant effort and effectiveness on the part of the team. Although not all activity had the anticipated impact (not at all surprising in a project of this nature), where it did not, the leaders continued to learn and adapt, trying new things whilst keeping true to the intentions and aims of the project. Some areas took longer to implement or did not transpire (notably planned work in schools and colleges, some of the young adults focused activity and the scale of social action) but no focus area of the mission design plan was missed completely or failed through poor implementation.

### 3.2.1 Resourcing

The first staff recruited to the project began in post in late spring 2023 (rather than January as had been planned). This included the full time Mission Priest, a lay Goan community worker (0.1FTE) and a full-time lay mission worker focused on children, families and young adults. This latter role was originally planned to be two posts at ~0.3FTE each, however additional grant funding was secured to top this up and it was found that wider pool of experienced candidates could be found for a single, full time role.

In addition to these project funded roles, the parish also received a full-time curate in early summer 2023 (as a 3 to 4 year post), meaning there were three full time priests for the duration of the project. The parish also already had two part time roles before the project began of Music director (~0.2FTE) and an administrator (~0.3 FTE) who have also continued throughout. Additional grant funding was secured to create a role of Pastoral Assistant from September 2024, as a full-time one year post as ministry experience training, particularly for those exploring a call to ordination (with housing and a living allowance rather than employed salary), which was repeated in 2025.

Therefore during the project period the parish has had three full-time ordained priests, and lay roles amounting to ~ 2.5FTE.

There were a number of personnel changes during the project, with the first Goan community worker leaving the role after around 6 months and the second appointee after around one year,

however both remained members of the church and heavily involved in Goan community activity and services. The mission priest was also replaced, the first leaving the role in early 2025 for personal reasons and with a new mission priest starting in May 2025. Inevitably this had some impact on the capacity in the project during this period.

### 3.2.2 Children & families

Plans for reaching children and families in the parish focused around; building relationships and activity with nurseries, schools and colleges (including messy church and youth alpha in school/college); providing children's holiday clubs, Sunday schools during Sunday Mass, a youth group, building on links with scouts & guides and pilgrimage to Walsingham.

Much of this was carried out in some way, although notably developing relationships with nurseries, schools and colleges proved very difficult and there was little receptiveness from those approached, so minimal church involvement has occurred.

New work with children and families carried out included

- Weekly Sunday school at St Marks during Sunday Mass, which has grown over time to around 15 (sometimes as many as 20) under 18s, mostly pre-school and primary age but with some older (who meet altogether in single group). Sunday school at St Lukes started in September 2023 and continues to be offered but typically is not taken up, with many children remaining with their parents throughout the service.
- Weekly mid-week after school singing club at St Saviours (since summer 2023), singing various music including learning songs for use in messy church (held in same time slot as monthly messy church). Attracts around 6 children and led by lay mission worker.
- Weekly youth group (since early 2025) at St Saviours, around 10 or more youth each week aged 11 to 16. Games and activities, no Christian content. Several non-church attending.
- Weekly toddler group at St Marks (since early 2025), with free play and singing attracting between 5 and 10 parents/carers and their children each week.
- Monthly messy church, initially at St Lukes (from summer 2023), but was mostly existing church families so moved to St Saviours (summer 2024). Attracts older children (age 8 to 15), includes child focused sung eucharist and finishes with meal. Typically around 15 children and 20 adults attend (sometimes as many as 25 children), with several not previously attending Sunday mass. Led by lay mission worker.
- Children's confirmation preparation using catechesis, around 10 to 12 weekly sessions in lead up to confirmation. Led by lay mission worker.
- Inviting under 18s to serve in eucharist after confirmation, and leading Sunday mass service once a month in St Saviours (which occurred before the mission project began).
- Week-long holiday clubs (summer 2024 & 2025, half term Oct 2024) based from St Marks and an adjacent park, with activities and games, saw around 15 children attending. No Christian content but has seen some attendees coming to Sunday mass thereafter.
- Residential pilgrimage to Walsingham (2024 & 2025) and Lourdes (2025), with several youth from parish attending and expressing spiritual impact/growth
- Hosting cadets Christmas service and occasional school assemblies

Of the areas of work anticipated, only the youth Alpha and activity in schools & colleges has not transpired to any degree, and these seemingly not for a lack of effort. Without a church school

or existing relationship, it has proved difficult to engage with schools to any significant degree, which is not uncommon with unattached churches finding (particularly secondary and FE) it takes considerable time of building trust to find opportunities.

The significant increase in provision for children and young people has seen a positive impact with growth in attendance (from around 10 to 30 Sunday attendance) and deepening of discipleship, with 17 under 18s confirmed. The activities are to significant degree very similar to those that would be found in evangelical contexts, albeit with an authentically catholic theology and practice. Different activity was tried and adapted with learning and there has clearly been an intentionality on seeing children and youth becoming a full part of the worshipping community and growing in their depth of discipleship. The intentionality of discipleship for children and youth is impressive, as demonstrated with comprehensive confirmation preparation and summer pilgrimage, eucharistic messy church and Sunday school focus on teaching.

Having a single group at each church Sunday Mass for a wide range of ages of children (pre-school to teenagers), makes delivering an age appropriate session very challenging (although individuals involved seem to do a good job) and inevitably will reduce the appeal to those outside of the majority age, which will tend to receive the focus. With the exception of the Sunday school at St Marks and St Saviours, both of which are led every week by the same hugely committed volunteer lay leader, other activities are heavily reliant on the paid staff. This is a limit to the growth that can occur and poses sustainability challenges, as mentioned elsewhere in this report. Without more comprehensive research, it is difficult to say to what extent a flow from community activity to church attendance has occurred for children and families, and although anecdotally it has occurred in some cases, it may not have been the case for a significant proportion.

As with other demographic groups, the growth of children and families at Sunday mass in the parish has been significantly focused to St Marks and to a lesser extent at St Lukes, with the success of the monthly messy church at St Saviours not translating into Sunday (or other mass) attendance. Attendance of children and youth at St Saviours Sunday mass has not grown and in fact decreased in 2025. Although uniformed groups have a strong link with the church and attend for parade services each term (to which 20 or 30 children attend), there is no cross over to attending usual Sunday Mass. Engagement with children from the Goan community at St Lukes has also proved particularly tricky, as it would appear that culturally the expectation is that children remain with families through the Mass rather than going to a Sunday school group during the service. This is not necessarily a problem but it is less apparent how the church can support discipleship of children from Goan community.

### 3.2.3 Young single adults and couples

Plans for reaching young adults in the parish included Alpha courses, opportunities for social action, mid-week evening worship and prayer events, Walsingham Adoremus programme and other young adults specific discipleship programmes.

Activities with specific young adult focus included

- Young adult fellowship started in 2023 and initially had good numbers but struggled thereafter and was stopped to concentrate on other activities due to concerns too many initiatives were being started at once. Was restarted with different format in December 2025, with 14 young adults attending first event.

- Adoremus (young adult) pilgrimage to Walsingham (November 2023 and 2025 – around five people)
- Pastoral assistant programme started in 2024 for one person a year exploring call to ordination (particularly young adults)
- Several other activities although not exclusively focused for young adults, have been established to some degree with them in mind, such as mid-week evening mass, Theology in the pub (monthly theology discussion in pub), Grace at the ground level (4 lectures by church members of what difference their faith made in their work), Faith & Film events.

As mentioned elsewhere, social action did not transpire as expected and most activities are weekday day-times which work less well for working adults to volunteer so that has not been a particular area of engagement. A specific young adult focused Alpha hasn't transpired and likewise there hasn't been a young adult specific discipleship programme or mid-week Mass. Although a young adults fellowship was started in 2023, it was more a result of being part of the plan rather than a felt need of the congregation (given relatively low numbers of young adults at that point) and added with inexperience of what might work, it perhaps didn't quite have the right emphasis and didn't gain traction, so folded when the lay volunteer organising it decided to convert to Roman Catholicism. It was also thought that the monthly contemplative service that started in autumn 2023, as more informal structure might attract more young adults (although it wasn't entirely aimed at them) however that has not particularly been the case. Nonetheless, the number of young adults regularly attending the parish has grown gradually over the three years, particularly at St Marks where (anecdotally) up to ten young adults now attend Sunday Mass most weeks, with smaller numbers at St Lukes (and one or two at St Saviours). Several of the young adults have got well involved, with one newcomer already joining the PCC and several others as Eucharistic ministers. A specific monthly group for young adults (Guild of St Therese) was launched in December 2025 and has started well (around 14 in attendance).

Although there have been perhaps fewer young adults attending regularly than hoped (albeit there was no specific figure given for young adult attendance in project outcomes), there has nonetheless been (anecdotally) growth in this age group by proportion. Given the specific activity aimed at this group was rather less than that for children and families for example, and it being the smallest age group in churches more generally across the Church of England, it is perhaps not a surprise that growth has likewise been lower. In fact, it could be considered surprising that the growth in young adult attendance at St Marks has been as much as it has. It is also interesting to note, the young adults at St Marks rather than wanting more informal and easier access services or events, seem to be looking for the more formal and spiritually significant. The parish continues to make efforts to develop this further to find a format that works for this age group in building community and growing faith.

### 3.2.4 Goan community

Swindon has a large Goan community (unofficial online estimates suggest 25,000), many of whom live in the Broadgreen area of Swindon, where St Lukes is situated. With Goa having a large Roman Catholic population, many in Swindon from the Goan community are seeking a Catholic Mass, resulting in a significant and growing proportion of the St Lukes congregation being from the Goan community over the last decade. Increasing further attendance from this demographic was a focus in the mission project, specifically through providing a weekly Mass in

Konkani (the language of Goa), establishing a lay group to co-ordinate worship, social events, bilingual catechetical resources and developing lay leaders from the Goan community.

Activities carried out were

- The previously monthly Saturday evening Mass in Konkani became weekly in September 2023, growing over the period to a regular (but significantly fluctuating) attendance averaging perhaps at around 40 or 50.
- Several (around 6) annual Saints days celebration Masses, often with attendance well over 100 and each time with lay-led and organised Novena (9 days of prayer leading up to the celebration).
- Social events after Konkani Mass were attempted but have not become a monthly event as planned, as they did not see the regular participation hoped.
- Friday evening mass since summer 2023 on request from Goan members of St Lukes working shifts.
- Bilingual (English and Konkani) prayers such as stations of the cross in Lent,
- Bilingual resources for children, such as illustrated Mass guide and occasional resources for prayers at home.
- Goan lay worker role (0.1FTE) was twice attempted but ultimately both times lasted only 6 to 12 months and was not continued after second unsuccessful attempt.
- Hosted blood pressure clinics by south Asian community support charity

These efforts have been successful in seeing a growing congregation at St Lukes, both on a Sunday and significantly at the Saturday evening Mass in Konkani as well as increased lay involvement in organising worship specifically for the Goan community. The attendance at the Konkani mass fluctuates significantly, such that regular Mass attendance can approach 100 or be less than 20 and is effected by seasonal variation, being particularly lower in winter months when many families take extended trips to Goa, which makes building momentum challenging. Holding Novena and saints' day celebrations was an initiative of a group of informal lay leaders from the congregation and has proved successful, with the daily prayers (Novena) held in the church building being entirely lay-led and organised. Efforts to provide discipleship groups at St Lukes didn't see any take up from the Goan community, however lent stations of the cross in Konkani organised by the first Goan lay worker worked better. Participation in pilgrimage to Walsingham by the Goan community was also seen for the first time through the work of the Goan lay worker and other signs of wider engagement in parish life outside of weekly Mass (such as participation in church cleaning day and one-off social events) are slowly growing.

The cultural dynamics of the Goan community worshipping at St Lukes has been found to operate somewhat differently from that of a more typical English Church of England congregation, such that it has proved difficult for the priests and PCC to know how best to draw members of the Goan community more fully into the life of St Lukes community. For example, children's groups during the service at St Lukes although regularly offered, tend not to have any take-up from Goan families as they prefer to have children remain with them throughout the Mass. Activity initiated by members of the Goan community have typically proved much more effective than those established by staff, but developing this into members of the Goan community being appointed to formal roles in the Church has been limited (one Goan has joined the PCC in the last year, having been an attender of St Lukes for over 20 years) and prompting Goan members to take on organising more activity in the way of discipleship or social events has on the whole not proved successful. More often members of the Goan community are informally involved in

arranging worship and activities including the initial suggestion of the Konkani mass and arranging readings and Konkani hymns etc. for it each week, as well as the Novena, Saints day and occasional social events linked to them.

It was hoped that having the paid (albeit only half a day a week) Goan lay worker role therefore would prove a short-cut to engaging more effectively however that did not in general prove the case. The first person appointed found it difficult to get community engagement for their ideas, and due to their studies and changing family commitment struggled with capacity so left the role after only around 6 months. The second appointment was quite young (17 years old) and although enthusiastic, was perhaps insufficiently experienced to undertake the responsibility successfully. It is possible that both role holder's youth proved a challenge to gain influence in the community or perhaps their inexperience in organising was a factor but ultimately it was felt by Father Toby and the PCC that the role didn't work and the longer term work of growing relationship and belonging of the Goan community couldn't be short-cut. The net result is that the Goan community activity feels somewhat separate to the rest of the parish and given the informal nature of arrangements, it gives the impression that there is limited cross-over between the English and Goan communities, despite the efforts of the team. There are signs however that this is perhaps beginning to change and Fr Toby and PCC continue to seek ways to better serve and integrate the Goan community as a whole.

There is a particular challenge also in growing participation and belonging, by the fact that the Goan community are typically Roman Catholic background rather than Anglo Catholic. Fr Toby is very upfront to point out to new attenders that St Lukes is not a Roman Catholic church and to explain the differences. This leads to an understandable sense of nervousness on the part of Fr Toby and others to be very overt in publicly promoting the church to the Goan community, for fear of being seen to be 'poaching' a congregation. (Indeed one longstanding member of the Goan community at St Lukes said they were advised not to go to St Lukes by the Roman Catholic Church). As such it would appear the sort of social media and other local means of advertising the Konkani mass (there is no prominent advertising on the building of St Lukes for the Konkani Mass for example) have not happened as much as they may have were this not a fear. Although anecdotally it has been suggested many of the congregation were not very regularly attending the Roman Catholic church in Swindon before attending St Lukes, many of those spoken to nonetheless identify themselves as Roman Catholic. This appears to have impact in some of the practice, for example families often preferring to have their older children confirmed into the Roman Catholic church on trips to Goa, despite being regular attenders of St Lukes. Altogether, this has perhaps served to undermine to some extent the confidence in overtly engaging this community, in a way that may not be the case with other target groups.

Nonetheless the efforts to grow participation of the Goan community is seeing fruit and attenders of St Lukes from the Goan community spoken to, expressed sincere fondness and appreciation towards Fr Toby and St Lukes for holding the Mass in Konkani and the wider efforts and ministry for them. It is likely that growing a sense of belonging and ownership from the congregation will continue to grow over time with concerted effort, especially as this may well not be what members of the Goan community are used to from their experience of Church, particularly in the UK.

### 3.2.5 Church led social action and community support

New community social action activity was expected to be a major thrust of the project and the main way of building relationships with those outside the church and building awareness of the

church's presence. Several regular weekly activities and other occasional events have been established, although overall less social action was carried out than expected. New social action work includes:

- Two weekly afternoon café style drop-ins were established, initially at St Marks (immediately after a 12.30pm Mass) and later a second at St Lukes (called 'Welcome space') which have attracted new people from the community, several of whom have become part of the worshipping communities. Typically, around 10 to 20 people attend each week for relaxed conversation and building friendships, simple free lunch and activities such as bingo or quiz. The Welcome Space at St Lukes also hosts a Free Shop, providing free donated clothing.
- Weekly toddler group at St Marks (since early 2025), with free play and singing attracting between 5 and 10 parents/carers and their children each week.
- Child focused groups such as week long summer holiday club and weekly singing club.
- A beer festival in summer of 2025 was in part a community activity, although was more undertaken as a fundraiser for the church.

These activities do not have any overtly Christian content, rather the aim is to build relationships and invite people along to Mass and other church activities, which has been successful in several cases.

St Aldhelms, which already hosted the town's food bank distribution centre (although not operated by the church) was expected to be a centre for community provision, however this has not happened with no additional regular activity taking place there. This is because work to refurbish the space to make it suitable for community activities have proved slow to develop, with expectation of it being managed by the mission priest not proving possible. As such without someone coordinating design development with all parties (food bank tenants, PCC, diocese, architects) progress stalled and although faculty has now been granted for the work, fundraising is still required to carry it out. Therefore initial ideas for supporting refugees, veterans and support for food bank users did not transpire.

Approximately 100 people have been regularly or occasionally participating in the activities put on, although this is significantly less than the 500 people per year originally hoped, unsurprising given the lower activity than planned. Nonetheless, this engagement has led to 12 people becoming part of the worshipping community, which as a proportion is significant. If a full 500 people had been engaged and the churches had been just as effective in engaging these into the worshipping community, an additional 50 people would have been potentially added to church attendance, meaning many more of the project targets would likely to have been hit. Although it is impossible to say what would have been the impact of different additional social action and community activity, this evidence does seem to suggest that the mission design has been successful in translating into participating in the worshipping community.

### 3.2.6 Evangelisation

Evangelisation was planned to be centred around providing opportunities to participate in Mass, Alpha courses, publicising Christmas and Easter services, prayer focus on invitation and evangelism training (including 40 hours devotions as focus for invitation), in addition to specific activity to target demographic groups mentioned elsewhere.

The evangelisation activity not focused on one specific demographic included

- More opportunities to celebrate Mass, with five additional weekly Mass services, in addition to monthly Messy Church Mass, contemplative service and care home Mass.
- Three alpha courses, first on mid-week afternoons in 2024 (around 12 attending), Saturday mornings in early 2025 (as a pre-confirmation course for four people) and later 2025 for Farsi speakers.
- Publicity for Christmas and Easter services, including social media and fliers to all homes in the parish on several occasions,
- Teaching into culture of invitation and expectation to share faith to the congregations, for example in homilies, 'welcome' course in 2023, as elements of lent course in 2025 and 'How to share faith' session during PCC away day.
- Eucharistic procession through town centre in 2024 which significant number of congregation took part.
- Series of four talks 'Grace at the Ground level' in 2025, where lay people spoke about impact of their faith in daily life (both as evangelistic and discipleship)
- Faith and film monthly events for around a year, with up to 20 people at peak but tailed off, one person started attending through it.
- A 34 hours devotions event for prayer (linked to Thy Kingdom come) with focus on invitations

As an area that is sometimes less often developed in Anglo-Catholic churches outside of Mass, focused evangelistic activity has seen significant growth during the mission project. Opportunities for people to participate in Mass as a means of experiencing God for those new to faith is an important core tenet in catholic theology and the expanded number of regular weekly Mass has allowed this to take place. These additional Masses (with the exception of Saturday vigil Mass in Konkani at St Lukes) have not seen a significant number of new people who wouldn't otherwise have attended Sunday Mass, although that may have happened in some cases and particularly when aligned to community events, such as immediately before the St Marks Welcome Space. There has been a focused effort on teaching into sharing faith as a part of a normal Christian life, and several congregation members spoken to talked of having enjoyed the 'Grace at the ground level' events connecting faith with everyday life. A willingness to invite was particularly apparent in more recent younger converts, with one teenager having visited St Marks after seeing a video on TikTok posted by a teenager from the congregation who had himself not long been coming. It would appear that the majority of effort into and fruit in evangelisation has been concentrated at St Marks, with the three Alpha courses and significant majority of new converts coming through it. Alpha has not been held as regularly or in each church as was planned, and without any specific youth or young adult groups. Although the first Alpha was publicised and saw some attending it from through the alpha website (rather than personal invitation), the subsequent two courses were more focused on a small number of specific people already in the congregation. Each time several people attending the Alpha course have gone on to be confirmed in the church, including some who were not already considering it. It would appear therefore that although it has proved fruitful, the confidence in putting on Alpha in each church and members of the congregation inviting friends and family to it has not taken hold, which is how it is typically used in evangelical settings. Of those spoken to through the evaluation who have joined the church having not been attending any church in recent past, they have done so either through the community activities or having tried out a Sunday morning (or Saturday evening) Mass directly, often by personal invitation or having searched online.

### 3.2.7 Discipleship

Deepening discipleship was a key part of the missional design and included launching discipleship programmes, teaching days, pilgrimage, lent study groups, evensong with teaching, lay-led devotions and courses as well as other specifically for target demographics mentioned in those sections of this report.

New activity started during the project includes

- Fortnightly rosary group, focused on prayer and hymns (5 to 10 typically attending of older members of St Marks and St Saviours, led by lay mission worker) and
- Weekly day-time Lectio Divina study group at St Saviours led by priests
- Bible reading group was tried both in person and online, looking at a book of bible in turn initially weekly but took break over summer and has not continued.
- Lent and advent courses in 2024 and 2025, with weekly meeting and around 5 people or more typically attending
- Residential pilgrimage to Walsingham (2024 and 2025 week long) of around 20 parishioners and 3 day retreat to Douai Abbey (10 attending).
- Several one-offs teaching days, trips to Oxford & Walsingham (15 to 20 attending) and a local session on discerning spiritual gifts.
- Year of the Eucharist in 2024 with visiting speakers and lectures (around 5 in total), very well attending often around 70 people and perhaps covering 150 individuals
- Monthly 'Theology in the pub' group led by lay mission worker, often 5 to 10 attending with several new to faith or enquiring.
- Series of four talks 'Grace at the Ground level' in 2025, where lay people spoke about impact of their faith in daily life (both as evangelistic and discipleship), with around 40 or more attending most talks.
- One to one meetings between priests and congregants on request
- Confirmation preparation courses, going through theology and practice of Christians faith.

A wide variety of different discipleship groups and events have been tried, generally with the one-off events seeing more take-up than the regular groups. Although this doesn't amount to as clear of a 'discipleship programme' as such as may have been envisaged, nonetheless there has regularly been opportunities for the congregation to deepen as disciples that many have taken up. Several of those interviewed highlighted the 'Grace at the Ground Level' talks and year of Eucharist lectures as being a highlight, and those who had attended pilgrimage (both adults and children) remarked on it having significant spiritual impact for them. Many too spoke of attending Mass as significant part of their spiritual growth, particularly those newer to church and having spoken to the priests with their questions, either informally or having met up specifically to do so.

Although lay volunteers have been involved in speaking at or leading one-off events, the significant majority of discipleship activity, including all regular groups, are led by the priests or lay staff. This limits the capacity for groups to start and has meant that some have stopped due to capacity constraints.

NCD Healthy churches data (as explained in section 3.3.1 ) for the qualities most applicable to discipleship (passionate spirituality, holistic small groups, gift-based ministry) have all seen substantial improvement at St Marks between 2021 and 2024 and although 'holistic small

groups' remained the lowest score of the 8 qualities, it was above what was considered a high score in NCD process. St Saviours has seen much more modest improvement over that period, with scores remaining moderate or low. St Lukes had only one assessment in 2024, which had two a little below average and one high score across the three areas (holistic small groups being the lowest).

Without dedicated programmes of discipleship, it can be less obvious to what extent individuals within the church community are continuing to deepen in discipleship. That isn't to say that less structured approach is not effective, in fact in many circumstances it can be, however particularly as the numbers in the worshipping community grows over time, it can be less clear who within the worshipping community are continuing to deepen their discipleship and whether effective and accessible routes that engage well with all demographics really do exist.

### 3.2.8 Lay leadership

Developing lay leaders was a key part of the mission design to release more mission and ministry from within the congregation. Plans included to train lay leaders for work with children and youth, pastoral teams, worship, lent groups, and encourage target groups to join PCC, however lacked details of how this would be done.

Specific activity to develop lay leaders included

- Day training on discerning spiritual gifts for any interested congregants
- Re-licensed (and some refreshed training) of a Licensed Lay Minister in 2023 who had joined parish having previously been trained and licensed elsewhere. She leads prayers and occasionally preaches in midweek masses as capacity allows, as well as work on community (beer festival) and pastoral (planning a bereavement group) support.
- Some external courses, through Walsingham and existing children's work leader training through Youthscape
- Courses on leading intercessions and ministry of welcome
- Four people on one year diocesan urban mission leadership course (delivered in daytime weekdays so limited access for some)
- Opportunities for Lay preaching and talks (Wednesday evening mass – mostly staff, LLM, or ordination track – and Grace at the Ground level talks)
- Governance and admin in strengthening PCC and committees

There has clearly been effort made into developing lay people to be more involved in the life and leadership of the parish and Fr Toby has responded positively to the opportunities that presented themselves as well as approaching and encouraging individuals to serve. This has resulted in having more people taking on lay serving roles, and several have joined the PCC or been involved in leading occasional or one-off events and worship. This has been seen specifically from target groups of under 40s and ethnic minorities, such that the targets in those areas have been met.

Within the Goan community at St Lukes, despite not many taking on formal roles within the parish, nonetheless on a weekly basis an informal team take responsibility for organising and leading worship (sung worship and prayers and reading in Konkani), as well as Novena (nine days of prayer leading up to Saints Day) on a regular basis. This however developed somewhat organically, with the support of but not instigated by the priests or PCC. Elsewhere, there has not been such obvious increasing numbers taking on ongoing and regular leadership responsibilities for areas of mission and ministry within the parish unpaid. The significant

majority of lay leadership that takes on areas of responsibility (other than the more practical) is carried out by the paid lay mission worker, pastoral assistants, ordinand, director of music and to some extent the LLM, with just a very few other unpaid long term committed individuals. The only obvious regular ongoing activity within the mission & ministry of the churches led with significant responsibility by an unpaid lay person, is the children's Sunday school groups at St Marks and St Saviours. Both are organised and led on a weekly basis by the same one person, who has been doing so at St Saviours for many years (and started leading the St Marks group in addition in 2023). Although efforts have been made to encourage members of the congregation to take on more lay leadership roles, there has been some reluctance and nervousness to do so, although four people are now taking part in a diocesan urban leadership course, which is a significant step.

Although there has been training put on or provided through external parties, this has been somewhat ad hoc and perhaps without as intentional a pathway or plan for developing individuals to take on unpaid lay leadership responsibilities with the sort of intentionality shown in other areas. The Licensed Lay Minister has been encouraged by Fr Toby to seek out other potential lay leaders to develop although this has proved challenging so far. What it means to be a female lay minister in a Society parish has taken some navigating for her and although Fr Toby has always been very supportive, this has not always been the case with some congregation members.

Lay leadership development is one area where the missional design adopted from evangelical contexts has been less clearly enacted thus far therefore, where it would be typical to have unpaid lay leaders of various ministry areas (welcome/hospitality, children & youth, social action, discipleship groups etc.) taking on rather more responsibility than has been seen in Swindon New Town. However given the starting point in the parish in terms of lack of lay leadership in worship and teaching, it takes time and concerted effort to grow skills and confidence, particularly within the culture of Anglo-Catholic tradition, where this may not have been previous expectation. Added to this the three years timeline of the project is not particularly long in that regard. It was probably also a weaker area of the plan for the project overall, seemingly without a clear sense of how this would be delivered before the project started. Nonetheless, particularly given it is a key part of a longer-term sustainable growth model, it could have received greater focus and attention in the project than it did.

### 3.2.9 Other (Pastoral, community/welcome, worship, social media)

Developing pastoral support was part of the plan, with intentions for formal lay teams being setup to enable and facilitate pastoral support wider than the priests. Although clearly some informal peer support is ongoing (as in all churches) and the additional staff (lay worker, mission priest and curate) have expanded the pastoral care, this has not been developed into formal teams or structure involving more unpaid lay people in congregations. The LLM has been tasked with working on this so it may be forthcoming in future.

Having a warm welcome and enabling the building of church relationships was also part of the theory of change. The Welcome Course carried out in each church helped PCC members to think through and take steps in this regard and people are welcomed into Sunday mass services by volunteers on the door. Refreshments after Sunday mass, occasional social events and Welcome Space drop-ins have also helped build relationships, as have weekly and monthly groups that run. The priests are also good at speaking to newcomers, connecting people together and creating a warm and welcoming environment. Developing relationships in the

Goan congregation has been less obviously successful, with people often leaving immediately after Mass and social events not always successful in take-up.

Having compelling worship that provided a joyful experience of the transcendent, was one of the foundations of the project. Although there was not plans for significant change in the churches in this regard (as changes had already been made on the whole) it was expected to be an ongoing consideration. Congregants spoken to at St Marks in particular often talked of finding the Mass inspiring and spiritually uplifting. The NCD healthy churches survey data corroborates this, with the 'Inspiring worship service' score at St Marks being astonishingly high, at 99 (out of 100). In contrast St Lukes and St Saviours received much more modest scores, both around 50, with very little improvement between the 2021 and 2024 surveys for St Saviours. The St Marks (and to a lesser extent St Lukes) building enhances very well a traditional catholic style of worship, being a large and relatively grander traditional stone building adding to the sense of awe. St Saviours building, being much more modest size and basic construction, whilst feeling perhaps friendlier and easier to operate, does not perhaps for some lend itself as well to the sense of transcendence.

Building more of an online presence to publicise and grow awareness of the churches was also a part of the work. The parish in 2022, developed a new website and visual identity which is updated regularly with events and information about the services and activity of the churches. They have also used social media (specifically Facebook and Instagram) frequently to publicise events and services, which has been particularly effective for younger generations.

### 3.3 Summary of Outcomes

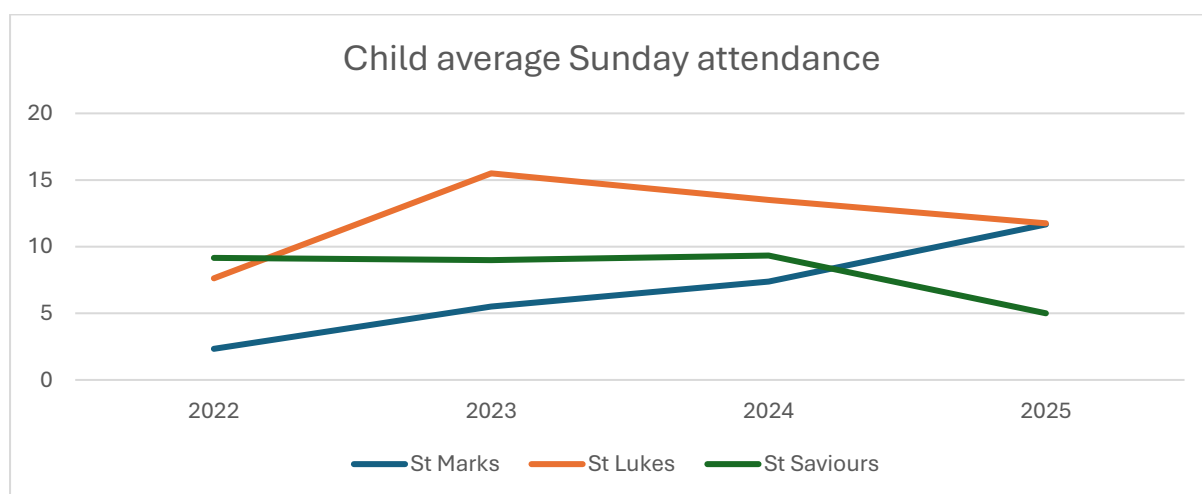
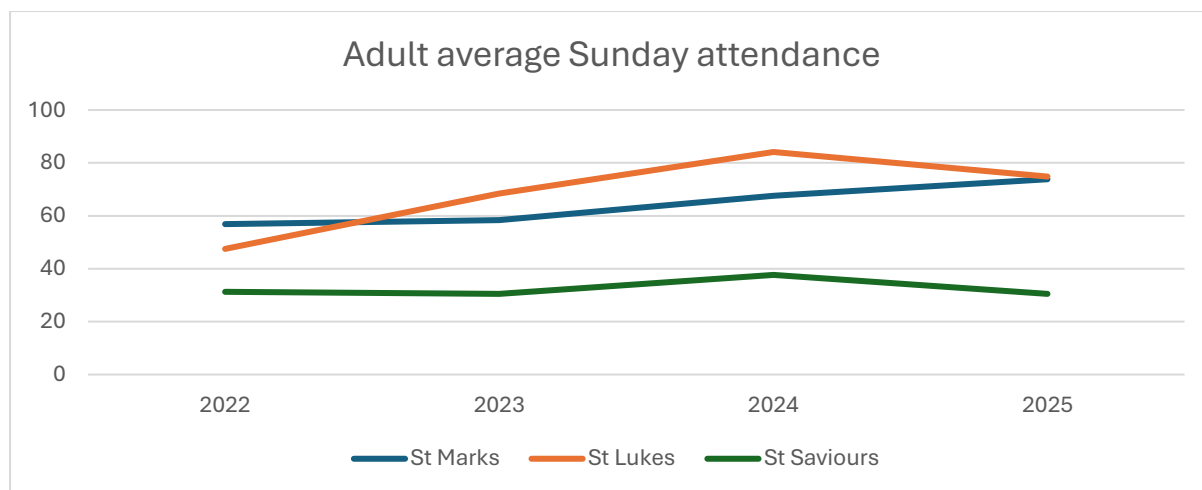
A set of measurable outcomes and associated yearly targets were established before the beginning of the project. During the project, these measurables were simplified down on the advice of the NCI's funder team. Outcomes that were removed and therefore not measured were, weekday worship attendance, Bilingual Konkani/English worship attendance, Sunday school/youth discipleship, lay leaders in teaching/discipleship programmes, Lay volunteers in church-led social action, weekly volunteer hours in social action and people signed up to stewardship scheme.

The outcomes measured during, and at the end of the project are shown in the table below, with targets shown in brackets. The colour coding demonstrates having achieved over 80% (green), over 50% (amber), or under 50% (red) of the growth from baseline to target figure in each case.

		April 2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>1. Growing Disciples</b>	Adult Sunday Mass attendance	115	157 (160)	189 (200)	179 (220)
	Average weekly attendance (adult)*	160	251 (225)†	222 (300)†	240 (340)†
	Numbers prepared for confirmation‡	12	10 (8)	11 (20)	14 (20)
<b>2. Provision for Young People</b>	Under-16 Sunday Mass attendance	10	30 (20)	30 (45)	28 (50)
<b>3. Quality of Discipleship</b>	Adult participants in teaching/discipleship programmes	25	40 (40)	153 (100)	120 (130)
<b>4. Diverse Leadership</b>	Minority ethnic leaders	2	- (5)	- (9)	11 (10)
	Lay leaders under age 40	0	- (4)	- (8)	10 (8)
<b>5. Serving the Community</b>	People reached by church-led social action	0	0 (50)	104 (400)	110 (500)
	New worshippers/disciples from social action	0	0 (5)	12 (60)	12 (100)
<b>6. Financial Strength</b>	Planned giving	£60,000	£57,000 (£70,000)	£63,000 (£90,000)	£67,000 (£95,000)

\*This measure was not included in the original application but later added as a summary of Sunday and mid-week attendance measures. †The target figures were seemingly created by combining application targets for Sunday, midweek and Konkani language Mass, which creates an inflated target, as AWA is unique individuals rather than a sum of total attendance. ‡ Colour coding for confirmations vs target is based on a baseline of zero, given that each year has completely new people for confirmation.

Overall attendance saw substantial growth in the early part of the project that tailed off towards the second half. The individual attendance figures of each church (shown in the graphs below) suggests that whilst St Marks has seen more steady ongoing growth, St Lukes grew initially more substantially but dropped back in 2025, whereas St Saviours has seen little change.



The reasons for this are not entirely clear but it is not unusual for attendance to grow relatively quickly when new services and activity is started and then plateau out to a steady state. Given the seasonal fluctuations and variation, any snapshot in time is not necessarily indicative of longer trend.

The diverse leadership measures used a broad definition of leadership being “*membership of the PCC/DCC/lay ministers or those involved in planning and leading worship*”, without the requirement for this to be a particular formal position or ongoing responsibility.

### 3.3.1 Natural Church Development data

Although not part of the project measurement plan, co-incidentally the parish took part in measurement before and during the project period using the Natural Church Development healthy churches process. This uses congregational surveys to score church health against eight different qualities that the research suggests are essential for growth. This has been used within the Church of England (most extensively in Coventry diocese) and across many other denominations.

This assessment suggests that St Marks is by some distance the healthiest church and most improved of the three, with high scores across all eight characteristics and an average of 83 (out of 100) from the June 2024 assessment, up from a score of 56 in 2021. St Luke and St Saviours scored much lower (52 and 49 out of 100 respectively), around the statistical average for churches in the data set, with more modest improvement from 2021. According to the Natural

Church Development model, this suggests that St Marks will continue to see growth, whilst St Lukes and St Saviours are less likely to do so.

### 3.4 Reflections on mission design

Generally speaking, the mission design as planned has been enacted successfully, through the hard work of the priests and lay staff, congregation and significantly under the leadership of Fr Toby.

The hypothesis of whether an evangelical methodology can be translated to a traditional Catholic context has been broadly proven. The social action activity has seen new people come into the church and become confirmed, as has been the case through the children's activities, Alpha and other events and activities put on. The focused effort has seen growth in attendance from all three of the target demographics and discipleship opportunities have seen many of the congregation engaged and indicating deepening of discipleship. Had the plans for social action and community engagement at St Aldhelm's and more frequent Alpha (and confidence in invitation from the congregations) been realised, it is likely that the growth seen would have been further still and possibly reached the original targets set.

The second hypothesis of whether it is possible to develop meaningful lay leadership in a traditional Catholic context has also to significant degree been shown that it can, although it depends very much on what one might consider to be 'meaningful lay leadership' which the project material does not substantially define. Certainly there has been increased lay participation in mission and ministry, serving in multiple areas at a task level and including in leadership of one-off or shorter term prayers, talks and events or as joining the PCC. A number of the events and activities in the project have relied on unpaid lay leaders to make them happen. This has however not on the whole as yet developed as far as multiple new unpaid lay people taking on ongoing responsibility for leading activity of mission or ministry (such as children's groups, discipleship groups, prayer outside of services etc.) with the notable exception of the Goan community worship at St Lukes. The significant majority of other new activity however is still organised and led by priests or paid lay staff which proves a sustainability challenge.

Although not a conscious focus in the planning or delivery of the project, it is interesting to reflect that the 'new worshipping communities' of the relaunched Sunday congregation at St Marks and Konkani Mass congregation at St Lukes, have been the focal point of the growth seen in the parish. It has often been observed across the church of England that starting new communities of worship, even following established and traditional practices, tend to see significantly more growth than when seeking to adapt existing communities. Although it may not be obvious on first sight, that appears to have been a significant feature in the growth of the parish, that was not explicitly worked into the mission design as such.

The impact of attendance growth seen at St Marks and St Lukes has not been evident at St Saviours. While it hasn't been possible to determine with any degree of certainty why this has been the case, it would appear that as a more stable and settled congregation with less change having been introduced, there appears to be more comfort with the status quo there and perhaps less spiritual energy than observed at St Marks and St Lukes. Whilst St Marks and St Lukes have found their role and focus within the parish, perhaps St Saviours is less clear on theirs. St Marks as the larger, more central and prominent building, with strong musical focus and wide age range, has found it's place as the natural gravity of Anglo Catholic worship in

Swindon, so those particularly seeking out an Anglo Catholic expression are likely to go there, as well as local residents. The buzz and energy of a newly restarted Sunday congregation adds to a sense of welcome and newcomers finding a home. St Lukes has its focus for the local Goan community in Broadgreen, with the Masses in Konkani being the most significant cause of the growth. St Saviours is less clear perhaps on its identity and despite the links with uniformed groups and somewhat successful Messy Church, it has seen very little change in its Sunday congregation. Focusing on its local community engagement more prominently, as it has started to do with a praying for streets initiative and now growing social youth group, are perhaps its route to seeing growth.

The drop in child attendance at St Saviours and St Lukes in 2025 is a concern and capacity of Sunday children's groups for differentiated age ranges may also soon prove a limit on further growth with families at St Marks. How to better engage children at St Lukes (with post Mass Sunday school perhaps) and considering why attendance has dropped at St Saviours are important areas to consider in near future.

Although not prominently mentioned in the mission design, Fr Toby's leadership has been a key element to the growth in the parish. His own confidence and spiritual aliveness in the Catholic faith have set the direction and others have followed his example. This no doubt was key in recruiting the high quality and experienced team and many of the congregation interviewed spoke about him (and the other priests and lay worker) with fondness and appreciation for his hard work, openness and availability, theological insight and encouragements to use their giftings. Many spoke of being supported, encouraged and met up with one to one which communicated an authenticity of faith and genuine care and interest that does more to establish a tone and culture than any number of formal events. Having such a leader is a fundamental necessity for building a wider platform for growth.

The key challenge remains for financial sustainability for the work (as explored in section 4) and to some lesser extent raising unpaid lay leaders, both of which can often be the case in new growth evangelical contexts too.

## 4 Efficiency & Sustainability

The question of efficiency of a project (impact achieved for resource required) can only be assessed by comparison to other projects attempting to achieve similar outcomes under similar circumstances. Given the nature of a more experimental project seeking to learn and prove a new model makes this almost impossible to do with any degree of confidence. In addition to this, such an assessment is made more complex given the project in Swindon New Town was supplemented with significant additional resources (of full time curate, external grants for increased lay capacity and activity resources) not part of the project funding but that had an impact on the same areas of work.

Nonetheless, in considering the additional resource and impact achieved, in very rough terms, the funding of £250k (plus external grants and diocesan resource) achieved during the project period weekly attendance growth of roughly 80 adults and 20 children, 35 confirmations (18 adults), 100 people supported in community activity annually, deepening discipleship and expanded and more diverse lay leadership. This is broadly in a similar ballpark to other funded projects of this scale, and whilst not as high an impact as some, is certainly much more

impactful than many, particularly given the traditional catholic context where there are relatively few examples of significant growth.

In terms of financial sustainability, this is where the parish has a significant challenge. The hope of increased parish income through planned giving, although not expecting to cover the full additional annual cost of roles during the project period, had targets to grow by around £30,000 per year. In reality, although there has been growth, it has been by much less than that and even when adding in one-off donations, growth from giving has been less than £10,000 per year. Although the parish has been very successful at getting grant funding of significant amounts from several funders in order to continue the mission priest and lay worker roles for a further two years, there is serious questions of whether this can be sustained in the longer term.

Although the parish did report undertaking a stewardship campaign in 2024, and talk about finances at the APCM, it would appear there is a lack of confidence and prominence in enabling giving. Although there are contactless giving machines in the churches, beyond a basic black and white instructions sheet, there appeared to be no material about the need for giving and generosity obviously visible in the buildings, beyond a basic note of how to give on the service sheet. Likewise the website does not feature any reference to giving at all, with no online means of making donations. Of those interviewed from the congregations, most hadn't heard much if anything about giving and were not particularly aware of how the churches are funded, although some had heard something about project funding coming to an end. The narrative from one or two in lay leadership interviewed was that it was difficult as people didn't have much and some cautiousness about asking about giving as a more prominent feature. Given the parish is in a relatively more deprived area, and anecdotally there is at least a portion of the congregation on lower incomes, it may not be as easy to grow giving as some churches would find it, however that can also be an excuse for not wanting to broach the topic that is awkward for many.

Developing a more confident theology of giving and generosity, and following the national church of England giving team advise (e.g. making prominent and engaging materials on giving and talking much more frequently about the role of giving and generosity in discipleship and what it enables) would likely make a significant difference, despite the relatively more deprived area.

Given the current approaches to developing giving and generosity, and financial trajectory in the parish, it is difficult to see how the parish at it's current resource levels would become financially sustainable without the ongoing receipt of significant levels of grant funding. Although it is not unusual for fast growing churches to take some time for giving to catch up with attendance growth (as the saying goes, the wallet is the last thing to be converted), here the trajectory indicates that it is not a factor of time but requires a step change in approach.

Alongside this, the further development of lay leaders to be able to take on greater levels of responsibility, releasing time of paid positions to be able to support further growth, is also likely to help the situation. This is already happening to some extent but with more intentionality could be developed further.

## 5 Learning questions

*To what extent has investing in priestly ministry in a Catholic context led to growth? To what extent has investing in lay ministry in a Catholic context led to growth? Reflection on the*

*relationship in the project between ordained ministry, paid lay ministry and volunteer ministry would be helpful.*

Undoubtedly the increased priestly capacity in the parish has enabled growth at a level that would have been very unlikely without it. Being able to deliver a weekly Mass in Konkani has been very significant, and the increased capacity more generally has no doubt allowed Fr Toby to have more time for reflection, planning and pastoral ministry, as well as having another priest to share and seek council with on a daily basis. To what extent the other additional regular Masses (around 5 additional each week) have led to growth is less clear and although they have seen some attending who wouldn't have done on a Sunday, they on the whole remain small. Beyond the Eucharistic role however, having theologically and pastorally trained people with leadership ability has also undoubtedly made a significant difference to scale of discipleship and pastoral support possible. While this isn't unique to priests, given ordination is the typical route within the Church of England for concerted training of this sort, it is relatively rarer to find people with this level of expertise and experience outside of clergy, particularly within an Anglo Catholic context that has perhaps not invested in lay leadership development to the same extent.

The lay mission worker is one of the rarer examples in that regard, being very well experienced and theologically informed, such that he is able to take on pastoral and discipleship responsibilities, as well as the more practical and community activity organisation. It is relatively rare to find children and youth workers with this level of experience, particularly in a traditional Anglo Catholic context, especially as many of the better ones go on to become ordained. His appointment and additionally the pastoral assistants have allowed increased worship, discipleship and community activity that would have been unlikely to have been possible to the scale and in the timelines otherwise.

The relative importance between additional priestly and lay ministry to growth within the project is difficult to say, particularly given the shortened tenure of the initial mission priest. Both appear to have been significant and certainly the absence of either would unlikely have led to the same level of growth. Access to the priests was mentioned as a significant part of the story for many of the newcomers in the parish interviewed, however whether that was because they were ordained, or because they were available and the obvious people to ask questions of a theological and spiritual nature, is not clear. It is conceivable that were lay positions more developed in that regard (such as lay leaders of small discipleship groups common in an evangelical context or more prominent LLMs for example) responsibility could have been more spread.

As explained in section 3.2.8, volunteer ministry has grown significantly but not yet to the level of taking on regular leadership responsibility across the activity of the parish. Although this does take time to develop, and particular when individuals have not been in a context where it has been common previously, it may also be that the presence of paid lay staff means there is somewhat less necessity to develop it further. Where people see gaps, they are much more likely to step up to them and inviting people to take specific smaller steps in leadership is more often successful than general, less well defined roles. What does not appear to have happened so far is the ongoing cascade of passing on established work from paid leaders (be they ordained or lay) to volunteer leaders on a rota basis, to free up paid leaders to start something else new or invest time elsewhere. This flow and gradual development is key to sustainability and ongoing growth and refreshing of activity.

### *How significant has learning from Evangelical contexts been?*

It would appear that the learning from evangelical contexts has been significant, in that many approaches more common in evangelical settings have been brought into a Catholic context during the project. Various areas of work successful in St Andrew's Avonmouth were tried in Swindon and although not all worked in the same way have been learnt from and adapted. To some extent what has been done in the project has been traditional Anglo Catholic church done well, but various elements that are not intrinsically theologically evangelical (such as use of social media, small discipleship groups, Alpha, lay leadership development, intentional relationship building etc.) but less familiar, have translated across generally quite well.

### *What evidence is there of the learning being utilised in other Catholic contexts?*

Although the parish has not hosted shared learning days (as was originally planned), it has shared learning through other means. In 2023 Fr Toby and the team shared reflections from their first year in the project at a CBS conference (Anglo-Catholic society) and they are also part of the Catholic Mission Network (for which Fr Toby is regional convener), through which there has been regular informal sharing with other parishes. It is not clear whether any other parishes have implemented any of the learning from Swindon New Town.

## 6 Recommendations

### 6.1 For Swindon New Town parish

There is a need to develop more volunteers and particularly leaders for children and youth, otherwise relying on one individual and paid staff will be a limit to growth. Initially introducing others to lead some Sunday group sessions would be a good start and splitting the age groups to provide more age appropriate sessions are likely to lead to more frequent attendance from families.

Consider how to refresh the culture and energy at St Saviours. Perhaps prayer meetings specifically for growth or considering how to develop a more local community focus.

Explore alternative options for running groups for children at St Lukes, such as immediately after or before the Mass, or other ways to involve children in the Mass more.

Focus some priest and staff time on helping grow a small core team of lay leaders within each of the churches who then in turn can take on further responsibility themselves, pastorally and in supporting and disciplining others.

Develop a confident theology of generosity and giving in the parish, with accompanying materials and practice following national giving advice (following the MINT and IDEA acronyms).

Develop more intentional discipleship pathways for each church. Identify what areas of discipleship this should cover as an outline of topics and how these might best be delivered. This could include activity or groups in lent, advent, pilgrimage, one to one sessions, volunteering in social action, weekly discipleship groups and so on. Consider freeing up the lay mission worker's time by developing a rota of volunteer leaders to lead weekly community activity (toddler group and Welcome space) to make available more time in discipleship groups and developing lay leaders.

Have more advertising material for the Goan community activity in St Lukes as bilingual with Konkani and English, e.g. website, social media posts, and prominent posters or boards on the outside of St Lukes and around Broadgreen. This should be particularly for the Konkani Mass but also other events at St Lukes.

Try running Alpha just for the existing congregation (possibly of each church in turn), in order to grow the confidence of those in the church in it as a quality event to invite friends to, as well as an easy introduction to discipleship and discussion type groups. This could then be used to follow on with a subsequent Alpha for inviting outsiders, or as a pattern for discipleship groups if successful.

Some churches have found that providing mental health support using resources such as Kinsugi Hope ([www.kintsugihope.com](http://www.kintsugihope.com)) or the Pillar ([www.stwins.org/thepillar](http://www.stwins.org/thepillar)) is a provision that is welcomed by colleges and secondary schools. A sympathetic staff member can also open the door for opportunity if they can be found.

As increasingly AI is used by online search engines and by people directly (such as ChatGPT), consider optimising the website to give explanations of what each of the churches are like through Q&A on pages to feed AI models. This will help AI models identify that St Marks is a traditional catholic service with strong choir and so in.

## 6.2 For the diocese and church at large

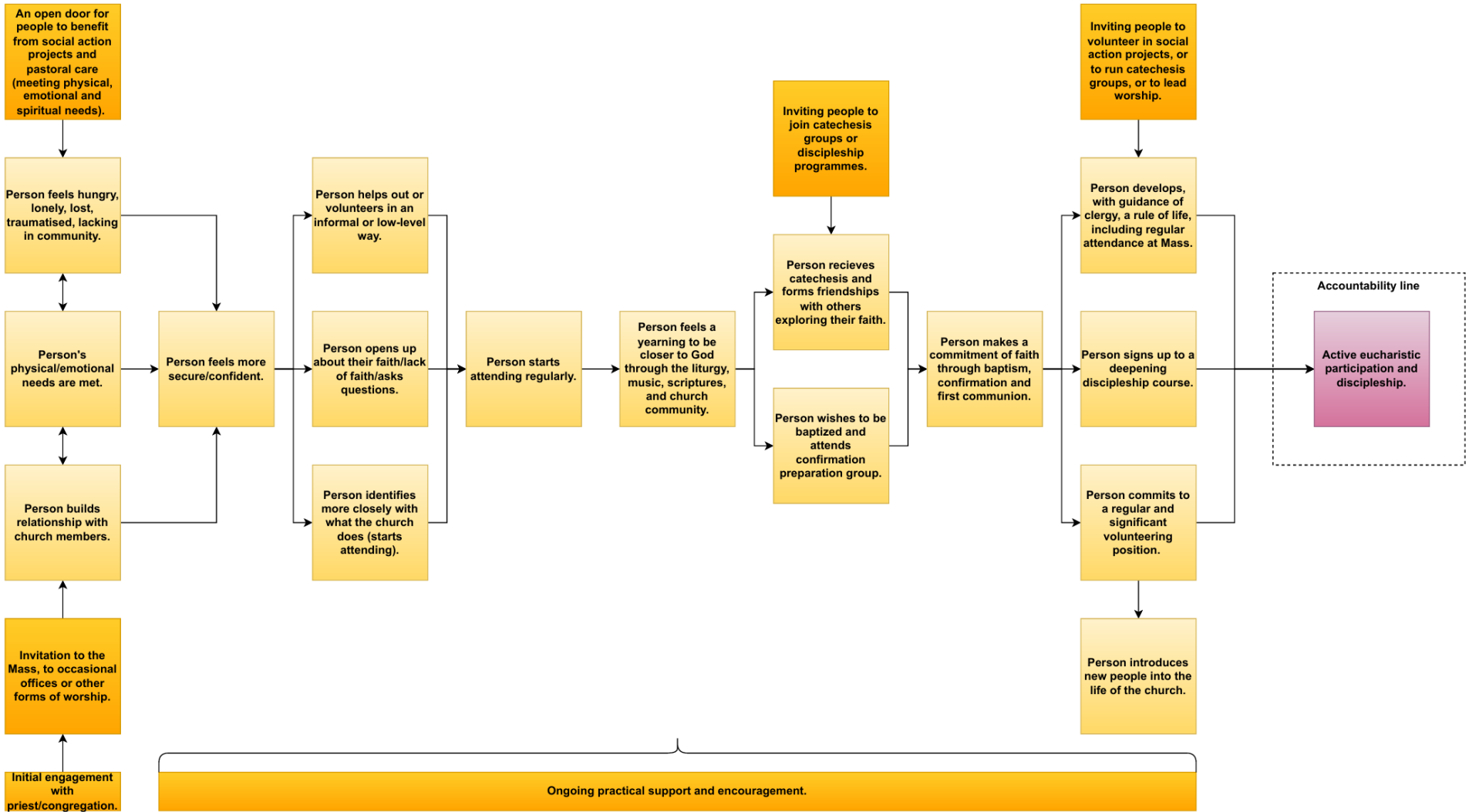
For traditional Anglo Catholic parishes seeking to grow, learn from the approach enacted at Swindon New Town. Consider starting a new or relaunched service with inspiring worship, quality music and provision for children and young people.

Consider providing placements for curates and ordinands from the Anglo Catholic tradition at Swindon New Town to learn from the experience they have.

# Appendix 1 – Theory of Change

## Good Growth in a Traditional Catholic Context: Theory of Change Diagram

Awareness of the church raised through the provision of social action projects and the provision of pastoral support.



Key:

ENABLING FACTOR

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

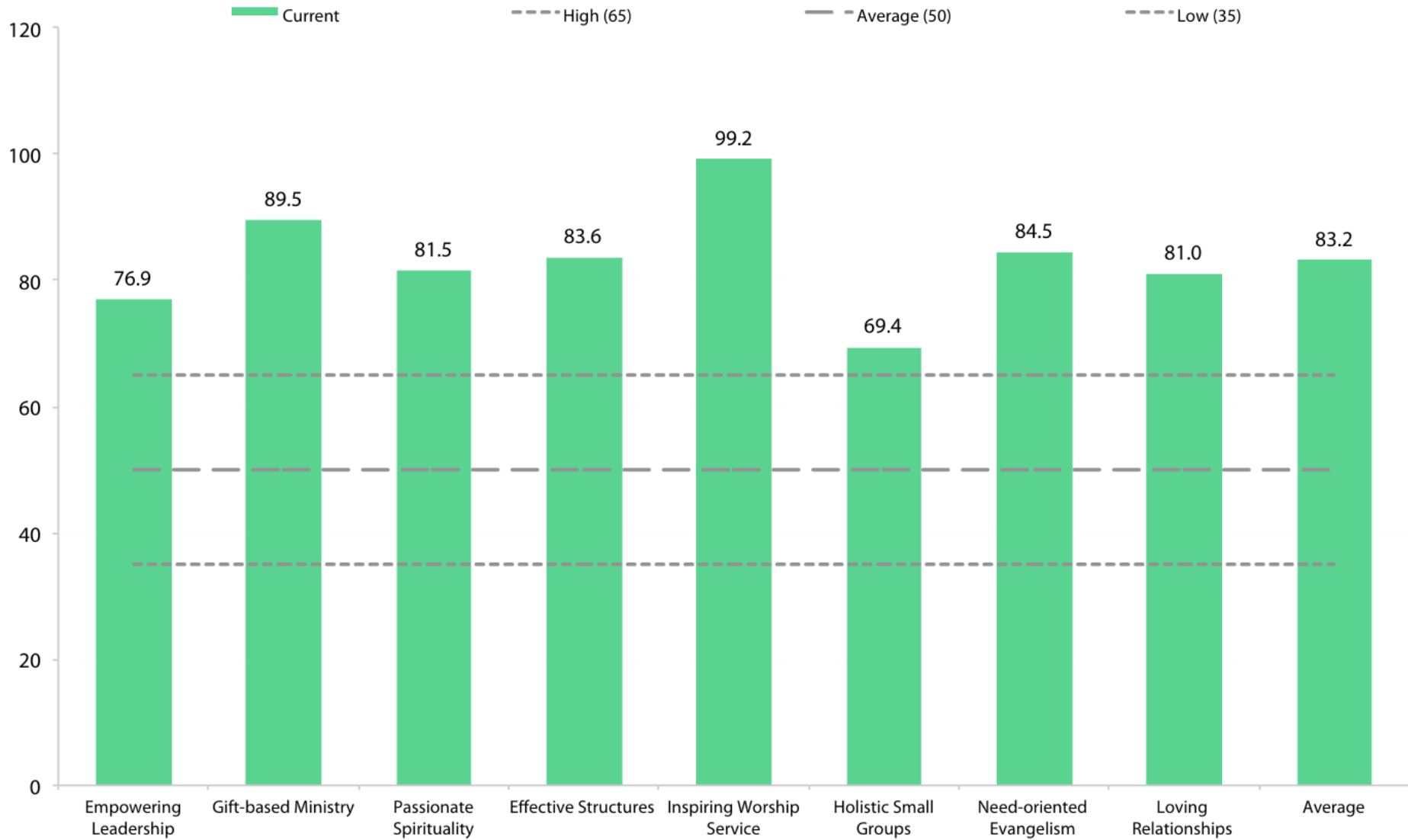
LONG-TERM GOAL

## Appendix 2 - Natural Church Development, 2024 profile



# Quality characteristic current profile

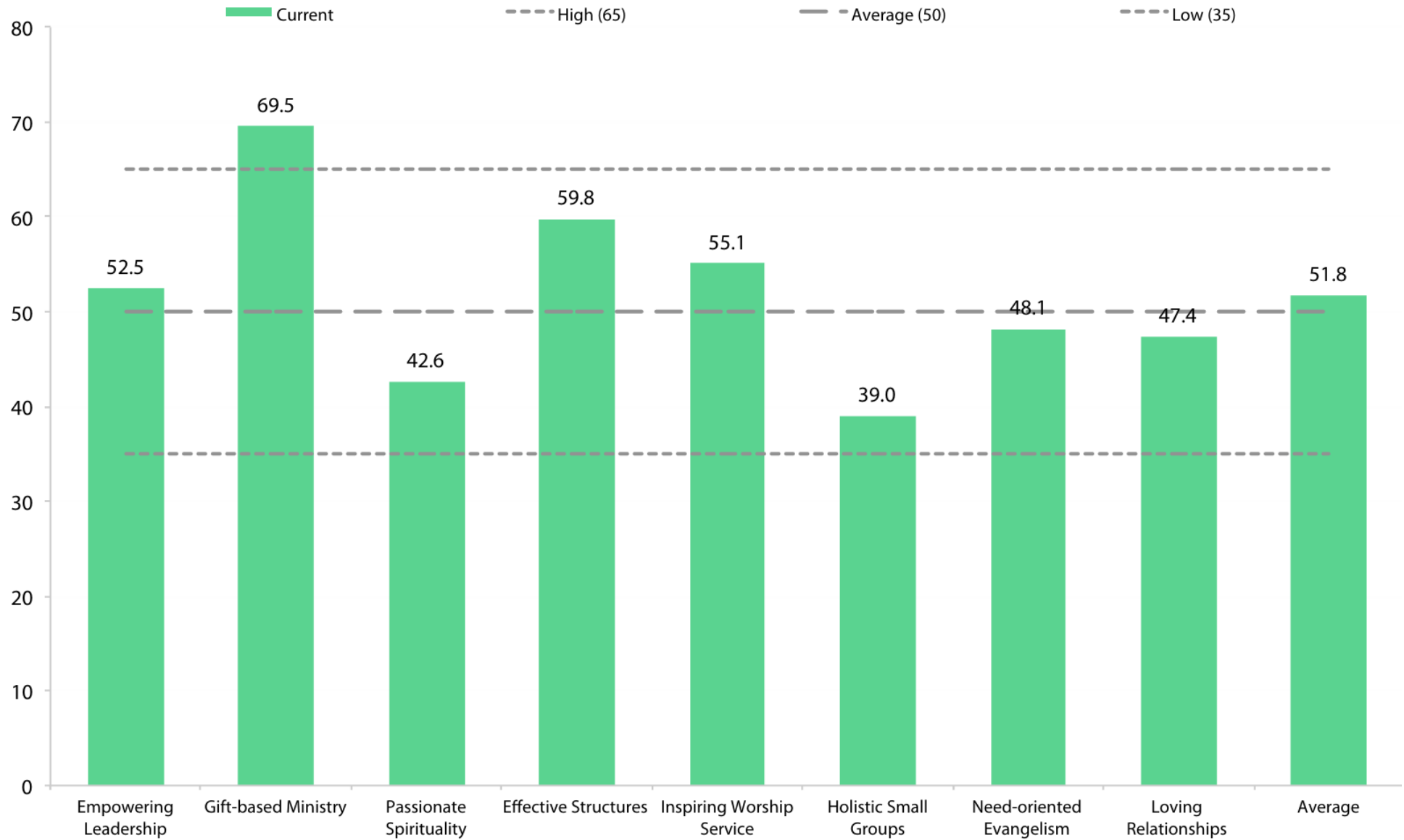
**ST MARKS**





# Quality characteristic current profile

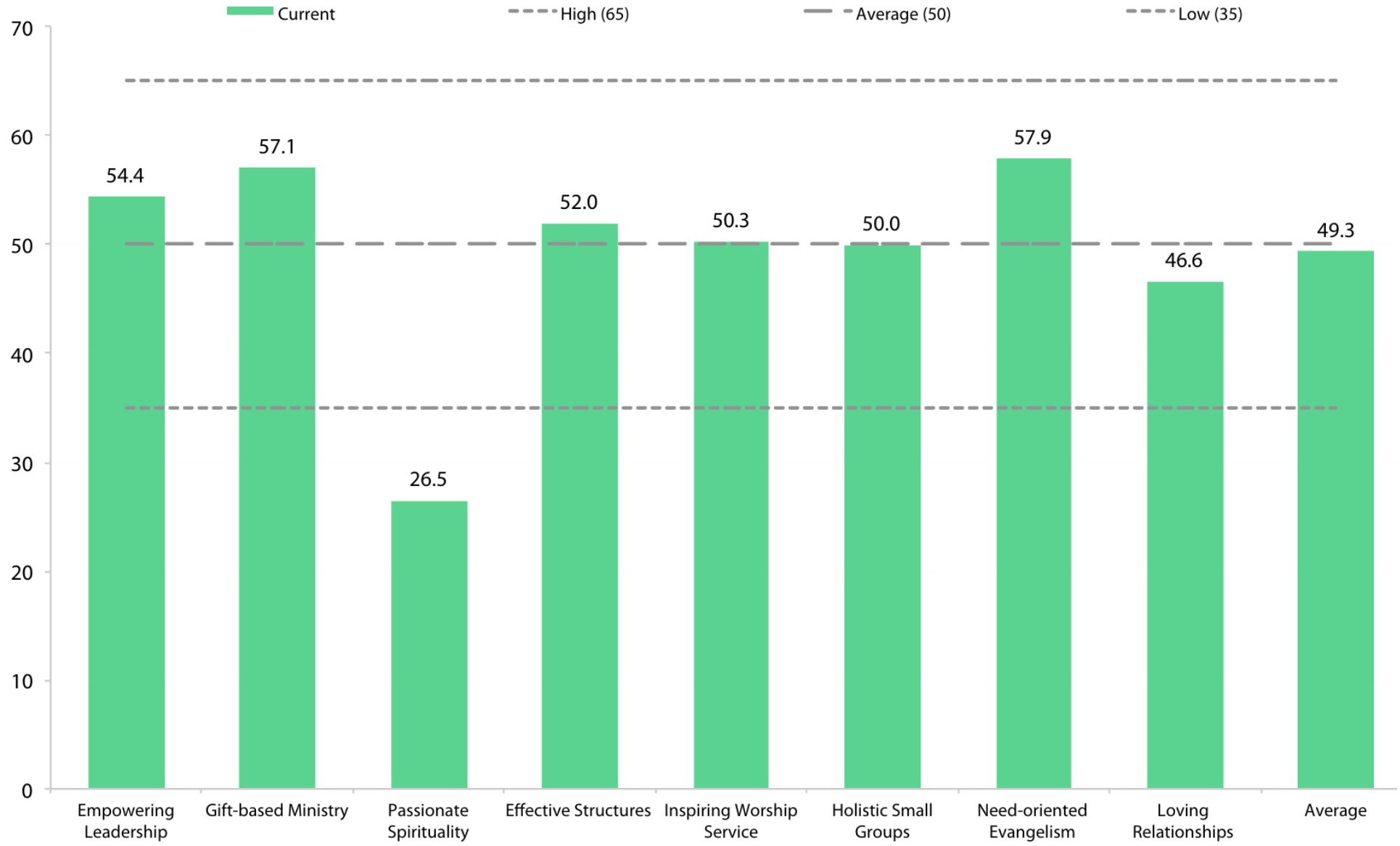
**ST LUKES**





# Quality characteristic current profile

**ST SAVIOURS**



## Appendix 3 – Interviews Schedule

Interviews were conducted with individuals and groups as outlined below on their experience of the parish during the period of the mission project.

### **PRIESTS AND STAFF**

Fr Toby Boutle (Incumbent)

Fr Adam Burnham (Mission Priest)

Fr Tim Davies (Curate)

Tom Dunbell (Lay worker)

Linda McEntee (Administrator)

### **LAY LEADERS**

Licensed Lay Minister

Goan community informal lay leader (attends St Lukes)

Former Goan Lay Worker – Young adult from Goan community (attends St Lukes)

Children's groups lay leader (at St Saviours & St Marks)

Church Warden St Saviours

Goan community, PCC member (attends St Lukes)

Young adult, PCC Member (attends St Marks)

### **CONGREGANTS**

5 interviews with new attenders of St Marks (2 young adults, 1 family, 1 youth, 1 other)

2 interviews with longstanding attenders of St Saviours (1 family, 1 other)

Multiple informal conversations with recent new attenders of St Lukes from Goan community

Multiple informal conversations with other new attenders of St Marks (families, young adults and others)

Multiple informal conversations with attenders of St Saviours

Multiple informal conversations with attenders of toddler group and Welcome Space (drop-in café) at St Marks

### **OTHER**

Archdeacon of Malmesbury (Chair of project board)