

St Augustine's Survey for Women (April 2019)

Background

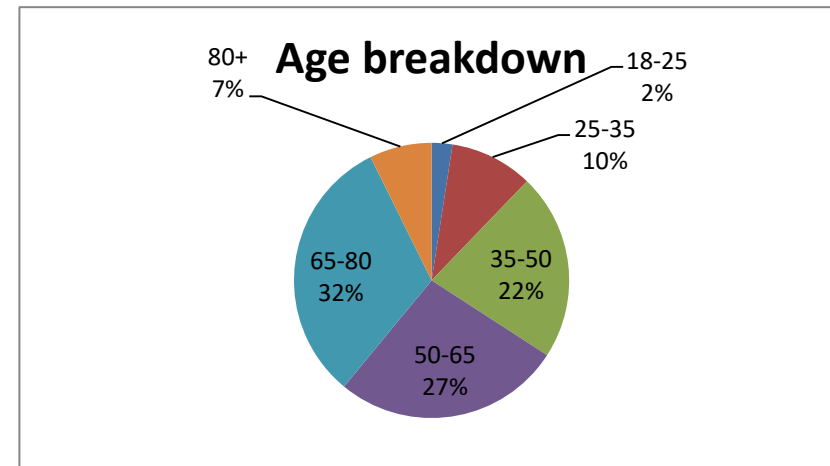
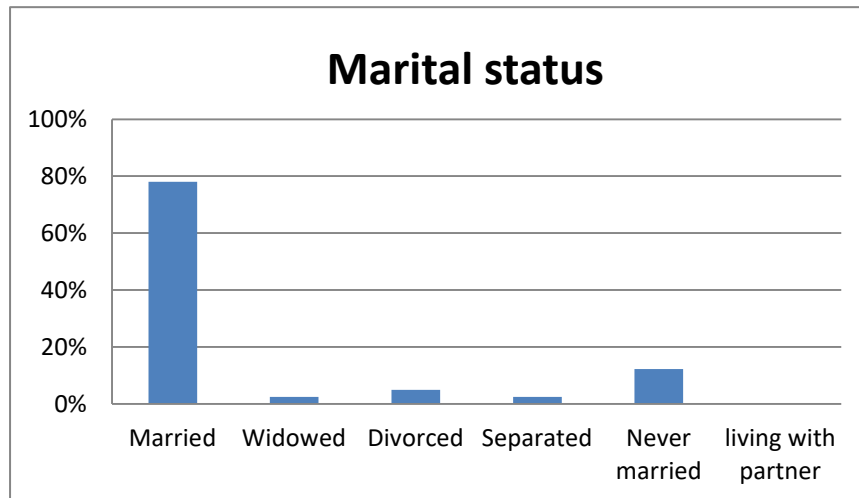
One of the top three concerns that came out of our parish plenary survey was about the role of women in the Church. After further discussion at our parish plenary meetings there was consensus that much could be done at parish level to empower and support women. The Parish Pastoral Council would like to find out what you want to see happening in this parish for women and this survey was designed to help determine what action for supporting and empowering women would be most useful.

A questionnaire was circulated to all women registered on the parish email list (80) and hard copies were distributed at Yass and Murrumbateman Masses. The survey was also promoted through the parish bulletin and the Mt Carmel Carmeletta. The survey period was 8 April – 4 May 2019.

Response Rate & Type

A total of 41 responses was received – 34 electronic and 7 paper. The total response represents approx 20% of females over 18yrs who regularly attend Catholic services in Yass, Gunning or Murrumbateman. This is quite a reasonable response rate for a survey of this nature.

66% of the responses came from persons aged over 60. Only 12% of the response was from the under 35 age group.



Interpreting the Results

For some questions, respondents rated how important they considered a particular factor was on a five point scale from not important (1) to extremely important (5). In other questions respondents rated how much they agreed with a statement on a five point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). In both cases the weighted response score for an item is calculated by adding all the rating scores and dividing by the number of responses for that item (usually 41). Thus the maximum weighted response of 5 would be achieved for an item if every response was “extremely important/strongly agree” and the minimum weighted response of 1 would be achieved if every response was “not important/strongly disagree”.

The results are illustrated in this document using bar graphs – the longer the bar the more important/more strongly agreed is the item. The bars are also colour coded to illustrate the proportion of respondents who gave each particular rating. Green colours indicate 4 and 5 ratings (positive sentiment) yellow indicates a 3 rating (neutral) and red colours indicate 1 and 2 ratings (negative). This allows you to distinguish between 2 items that might have the same overall score but where the make-up of the score is quite different.

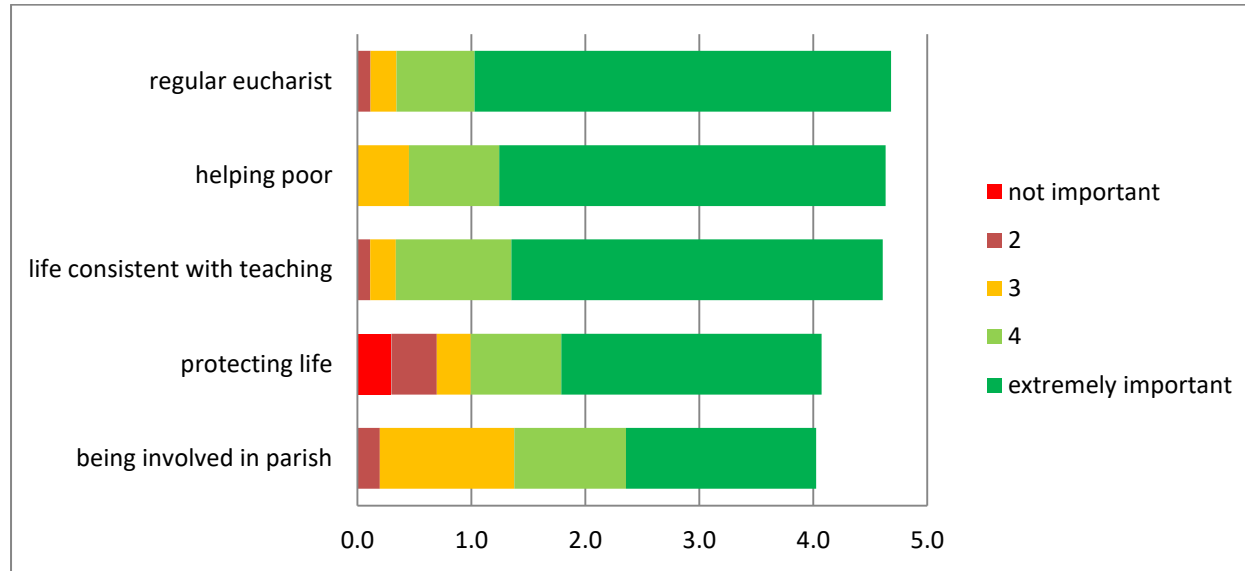
The exact wording of the response items and the numerical details of the responses are contained in Appendix 1.

It may have been instructive to segment the results of some of the survey questions based on marital status or age group. However the size of the segments in the survey sample are too small to allow this to be done in a statistically significant manner.

Overall Summary of Results

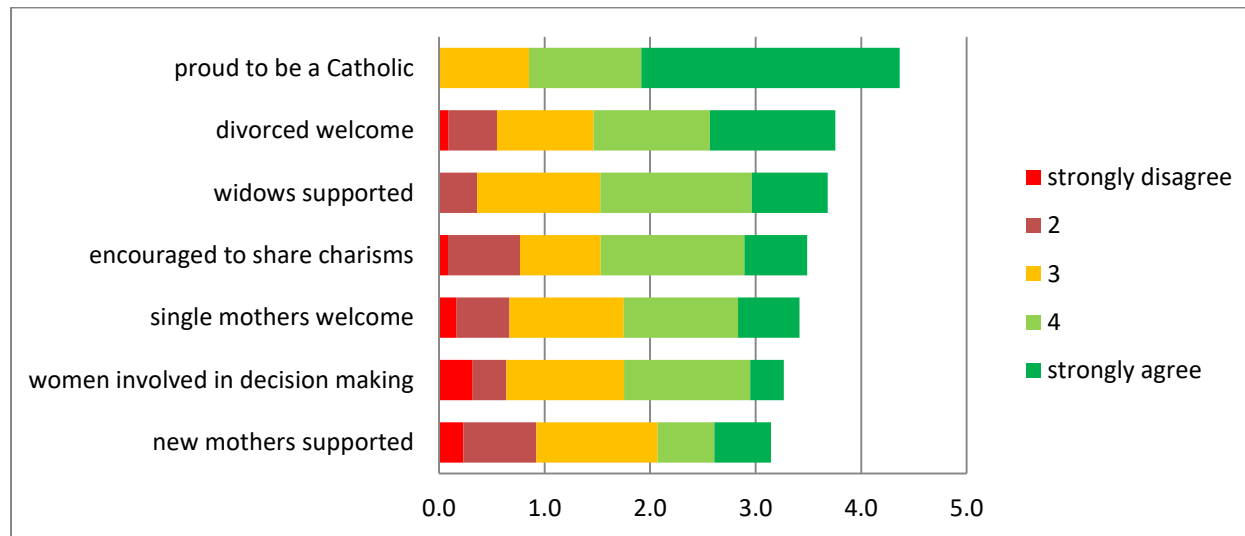
The factors which are the most important to parish women’s sense of what it means to be a Catholic are: “participating regularly in the Eucharist in my Parish, helping the poor and disadvantaged, and living my life consistent with Church teaching”. These are seen as having very high and about equal importance. Parish women are very proud to be a Catholic but are not convinced that “Women are involved in the decision making in my parish” or “My parish provides support for new mothers”. There is agreement that the parish is doing a good job of including women in the “parish community” but not in the “decision making of the parish”. A significant minority have personally experienced sexism within the Catholic Church and were prepared to elaborate on their experiences. Parish women are supportive of new initiatives such as an increased role for women in the liturgy but are not enthusiastic about the introduction of women-only events or groups. The most important thing for affirming and empowering women in our parish is the language used by the parish priest and other males. There is a small but significant group of women interested in training as a senior server. There is also a small group interested in being mentored by another woman in the parish, and sufficient women prepared to be mentors to support this. Respondents indicated that they have had experience in a large range of capacities in various Catholic parishes. A number of interesting additional comments and suggestions were made. With a few notable exceptions the results of the St Augustine’s survey were very similar to a major survey of US women identifying as Catholic which was carried out in 2017.

How important are the following factors to your sense of what it means to be a Catholic?



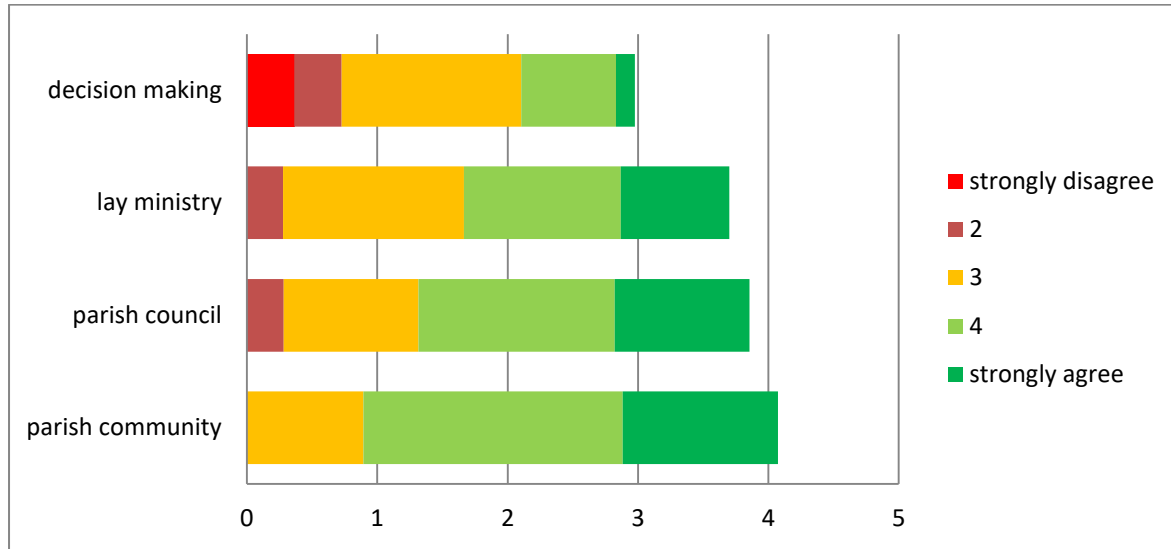
Commentary: All these factors are seen as quite important with the lowest rating being 4.0. Three factors “participating regularly in the Eucharist in my Parish, helping the poor and disadvantaged, and living my life consistent with Church teaching” are seen as having very high and about equal importance. The two other factors rate considerably lower, due to a significant neutral or negative response. It is a bit surprising that “being involved in my parish” rates the lowest given that “participating regularly in the Eucharist in my Parish” rated highest and given how involved in the parish women are as indicated in later responses.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



Commentary: Respondents indicate that they are mostly proud to be a Catholic despite reservations they may have. The other items rate relatively badly with significant neutral and negative sentiment. In particular the response to the statements “Women are involved in the decision making in my parish”, and “My parish provides support for new mothers” is concerning at 3.3 and 3.1 respectively

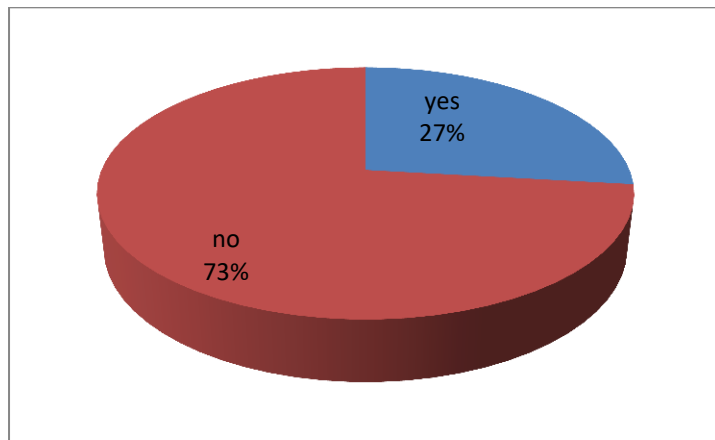
Do you agree that the parish is doing a good job of including women in:



Commentary: A minority of respondents feel that the parish is doing a good job of including women in “the decision making of the parish”. The rating of under 3.0 is the worst for the entire survey. Other factors rate better including “the parish pastoral council”. This may indicate that respondents do not believe that the parish pastoral council is a “decision making “ body

Other suggestions: music liturgy (strongly agree), positions of responsibility (strongly disagree)

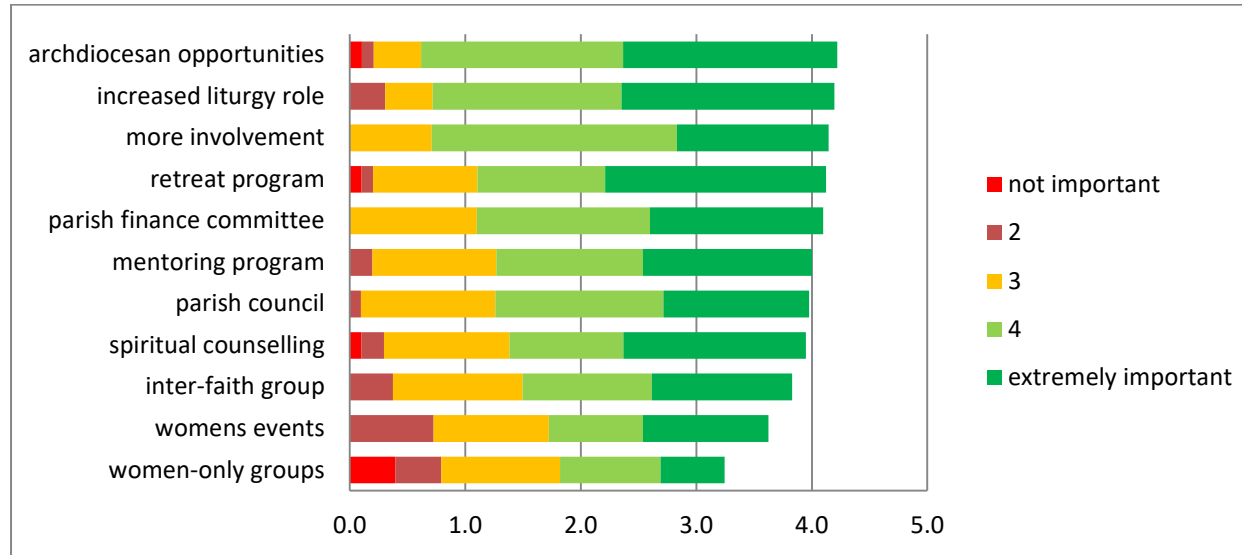
Have you ever personally experienced sexism within the Catholic Church?



If you answered YES please describe circumstances:

- Would prefer not to
- The Parish Priest only 'spoke' with the men about any important matters. He would say things like "Will the men stay behind after Mass, I'd like a word with them"
- not recently, but over the years in certain positions
- We experience sexism every day with only men allowed to be priests.
- Not allowed to be a priest or an acolyte
- It happens all the time - depicted in the homilies, the role women have in supporting the parish not decision-making or leading ideas and community, having a voice heard is listened to when coming from a man
- My children were not invited to participate in a Christmas concert because I am divorced and seem to be considered less of a person of value after leaving my marriage. My ex-husband's family were treated as the victims in the church community after a DVO was put in place on their son following an assault that my eldest child witnessed. I was told by a male church member during morning tea while still using a crutch that if I didn't have such liberated ideas about women's rights and continued to fight back that my home life would not be so bad. He appealed to my traditional ideas of the bible but failed to show any evidence of where it was an acceptable practice for a husband to beat his wife - it is quite the latter when you examine the teachings of Jesus. When seeking assistance for living in violence after losing an unborn child I was counselled on being obedient to my husband's demands and was actively discouraged from talking to services such as Health or Police despite obviously needing assistance. I was told by the same man that 'it was God's will' for me to lose my child and to endure the blood loss and physical pain rather than have a medical procedure would help 'cleans' me of the sin of losing a child because it was obviously my fault for not being able to carry the pregnancy. I use the term 'man' loosely, his conduct is not what I believe is the true nature of men. Needless to say I have walked away from that Church (not in Yass) and don't intend on returning. I am a proud sole parent for 'surviving' violence and will do everything possible to model to my children and other judgemental people in churches what a woman should and should not accept. I am answerable only to God.
- Inappropriate attitudes towards women and young girls. Singling out for criticism and degrading by males within the Community.
- Many years ago I was ignored by pp who wanted to speak to my husband. Happened on many occasions .As a female teacher in a public school I suffered disparaging comments. As a mother of children attending state schools I felt I was discriminated against May not have been because of my gender but was hurtful anyway
- Lack of opportunity to undertake certain roles, Feelings dismissed.

How important do you believe the following changes are for women in the parish?

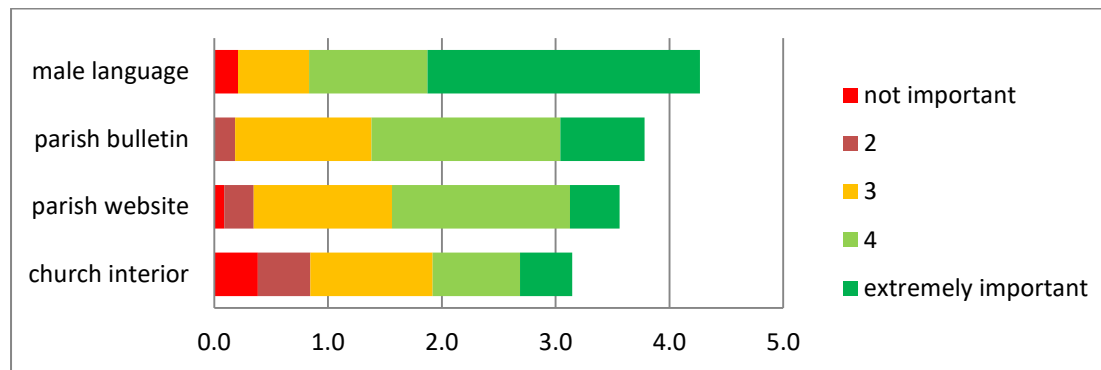


Commentary: Most of the suggestions for change have reasonable support including “Information on opportunities for women at archdiocesan level, increased role in the liturgy (eg senior server/female acolyte), and being involved in my parish (eg liturgy, youth, welfare)” Most suggestions attracted some negative sentiment particularly “Women’s breakfasts, lunches etc and Women-only groups” which scored low overall ratings (3.6 and 3.2 respectively)

Additional items listed as important by a respondent:

- Life in the Spirit formation opportunities
- It should not be about being Catholic, but being a woman of faith who happens to be a Catholic; the sense of belonging is the critical element to inclusion

How important are the following things for affirming and empowering women in our parish?

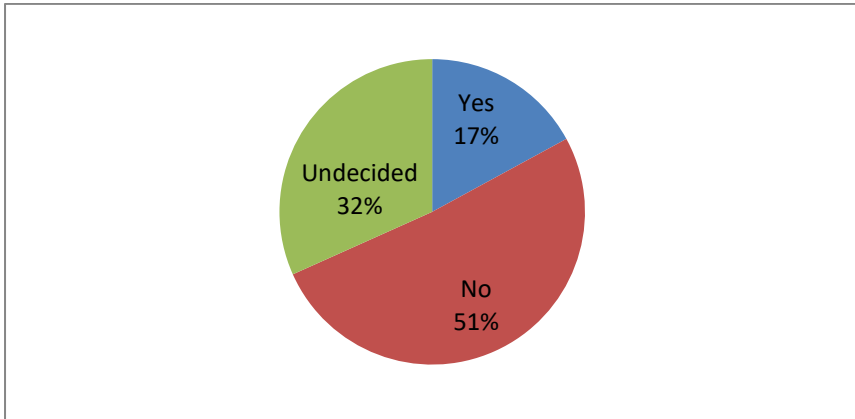


Commentary: “Language used by the Parish Priest and other males” is seen as the most important factor in affirming and empowering women in the parish by a significant margin. The Parish Bulletin is also seen as important

Additional comments on affirming and empowering women in our parish:

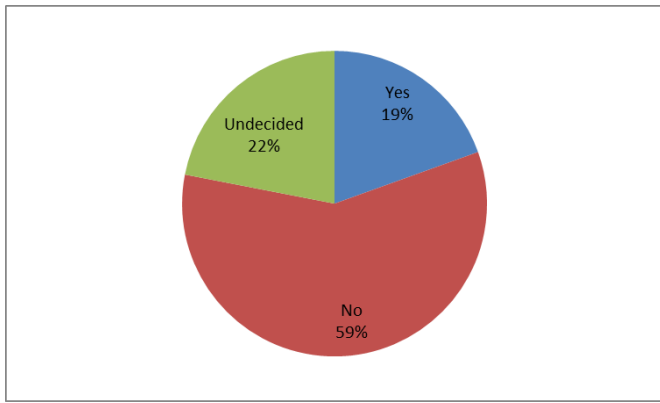
- Representation of diversity and inclusion in church artworks, including women and indigenous Australia
- not always having the women do the catering and support roles
- Compulsory training for all front line members with defined roles on Domestic and Family Violence
- There are not many images of women in our church but I used to take solace from the painting of married saints and women saints that I could see from where I sit in Mass. Then it disappeared.

Would you be interested in training to be senior server for the parish?

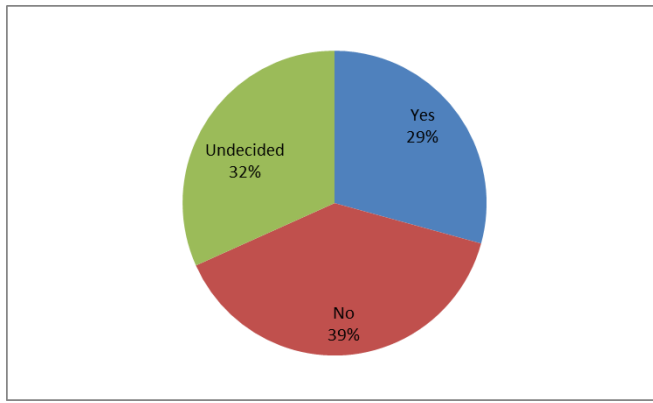


Commentary: While only 17% of respondents (7 women) indicated that they would be interested in training to be a “senior server” for the parish, this is still a significant number given the parish currently only has a pool of 10 acolytes. It suggests that there are enough women interested to boost the pool of senior servers/acolytes significantly.

Would you like to be mentored by another woman in the parish?



Would you like to be a mentor for another woman in the parish?



Commentary: The response to this question suggests that there is a reasonable number of women interested in being mentored by another woman in the parish, and sufficient women prepared to be mentors to support this.

Have you ever served in any of these capacities in a Catholic Parish?

23 catechist/RE teacher/sacramental team	3 Alpha team
14 Extraordinary minister of Holy Communion	12 Lector
7 Youth ministry	9 Carers Group
4 Altar server	7 Aged care support (eg Gwen Warmington)
18 Music Ministry	11 Meals on Wheels
13 Hospitality Team	9 The St Vincent de Paul Society
12 RCIA team	1 Yass/Gunning Belun
15 Prayer group (eg Call to Connect)	4 Marriage Preparation team
14 Parish pastoral Council	0 Parish finance committee

Commentary: The respondents have been involved in many different capacities except for a parish finance committee – an average of 4.5 different capacities per respondent. This is a good indication of the significant contribution women make to Catholic parishes

Additional capacities listed:

- Disciples of Jesus Community and Sisterhood
- Telephone counselling for child abuse/grief counselling
- Fundraising
- representing the parish and school with the diocese
- Teaching Natural Family Planning
- Church cleaning, washing altar linen

Would you like to make any further comments about the role of women in our parish including any changes that you would like to see happen?

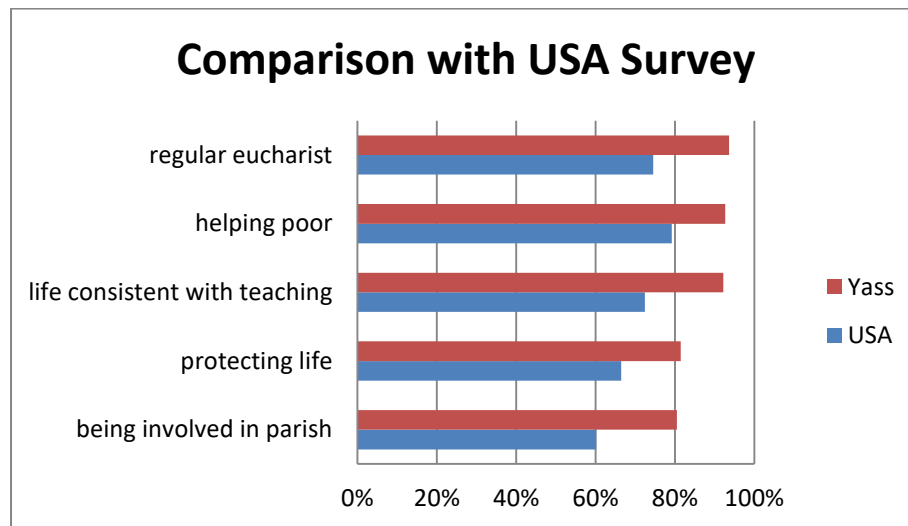
- I think some choices are 'symbolic' and place women in positions of being empowered eg giving out communion at the front of the church with the priest, leading communion service
- I am content with women participation in our parish. Father Mick encourages all women to participate. No pressure. The decision is up to us women.
- Just more activities or opportunities to be spiritually nourished and to 'give back'
- Need to have more leadership
- I think that the Parish is fortunate to have clever, well-educated, discerning women who need opportunity to be able to lead. I think that the truth is that the Church of tomorrow is in the hands of the women of today.
- I've never found there to be discrimination against women in the Yass parish. Women should be able to fulfil the same roles that men do in parish life but they both should have the skills for the role & that should be the criteria.
- Prayer chain reactivation (we had one begun for World Youth Day)... maybe like a cuppa, debrief and connect with a goal... and do the same with another. A less scary way to feel connected to Christ and reach out to other women, holding space and accepting what their worries are and praying with them, encouraging their faith growth and feelings of self-worth.
- I look forward to the day when the Catholic Church makes meaningful changes to its attitudes to women. For too long, women have been regarded as the servers, the second class, the "other" and this is troubling, because I don't think that is how Jesus regarded women. I believe he viewed women as equal partners, with talents that were equivalent to those of men. I guess it was his context that determined the role he could give them at the time. Generations of male leaders in the church have, in my opinion, devalued the talents of women, allowing them to mooch around in the background, cleaning the altar rather than serving on it, visiting the sick rather than delivering the sacraments.... I recognise that some changes have been made (female EMCs, female altar servers), but had those changes not been made the Church would be in an even more parlous state than it is now. And yet, I don't feel that the church world-wide or in Australia is ready yet for women to take a greater role. Sigh. End of rant.
- I am generally happy with the role of women being acknowledged and celebrated within our own parish. I feel it is more important that things change at a higher level, with women being able to be ordained as priests and act in positions at the highest level in the Church.
- Less gendered roles - eg women primarily being responsible for cleaning and morning tea etc
- there are some amazing women who contribute every week and they are not always known to others in the community
- The women in our parish do a wonderful job of creating connections and being a spirit of caring. We are blessed by their extraordinary gifts.
- At the moment we have an excellent PP who has a very open outlook but this is not always the case with PP's, but times are changing. However if we get a non-european PP in the future their attitude may be different as they have been brought up differently and with the best will in the world, will not always understand our ways.

Comparison with USA Study

A women's survey was carried out in the USA in August 2017 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in partnership with GfK, a survey firm. 1508 women from across the USA over age of 18 who self-identified as Catholic were surveyed. They were randomly recruited through a probability-based sampling technique.

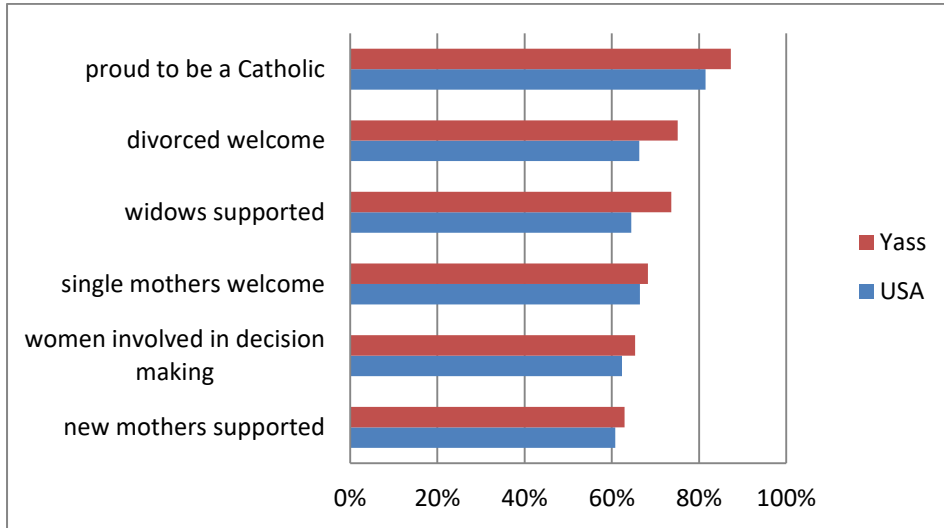
There were common questions in the Yass and the USA surveys and it is interesting to compare the results to see if the Yass results are similar to a broader survey, albeit in a different culture. Before doing so it is important to understand some differences in the characteristics of the two samples. Obviously the Yass sample is much smaller, although it is large enough to have reasonable statistical significance. Because of its collection methodology the Yass sample was biased towards regular Mass attenders while the USA had a much larger proportion of participants who identified as Catholic but did not attend Mass regularly - for example only 25% of the USA participants attended Mass weekly. The Yass sample had 10% fewer under 30 year olds and 15% more over 60 year olds which may also impact some of the comparisons. The marital status of the two samples was quite similar.

How important are the following factors to your sense of what it means to be a Catholic?



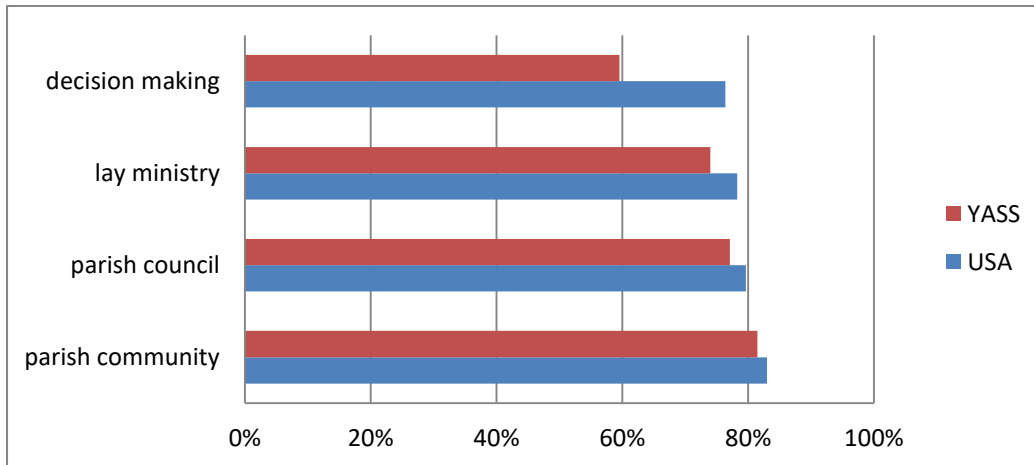
Commentary: The Yass sample rates all the factors significantly higher than the USA group. This is likely explained because the Yass group is more closely connected with the Parish (regular Mass attenders). However, the order of priority and relative importance of the factors is quite similar. The only exception is the factor “participating regularly in the Eucharist in my Parish” which can again be explained by the bias in the Yass sample towards regular Mass attenders.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



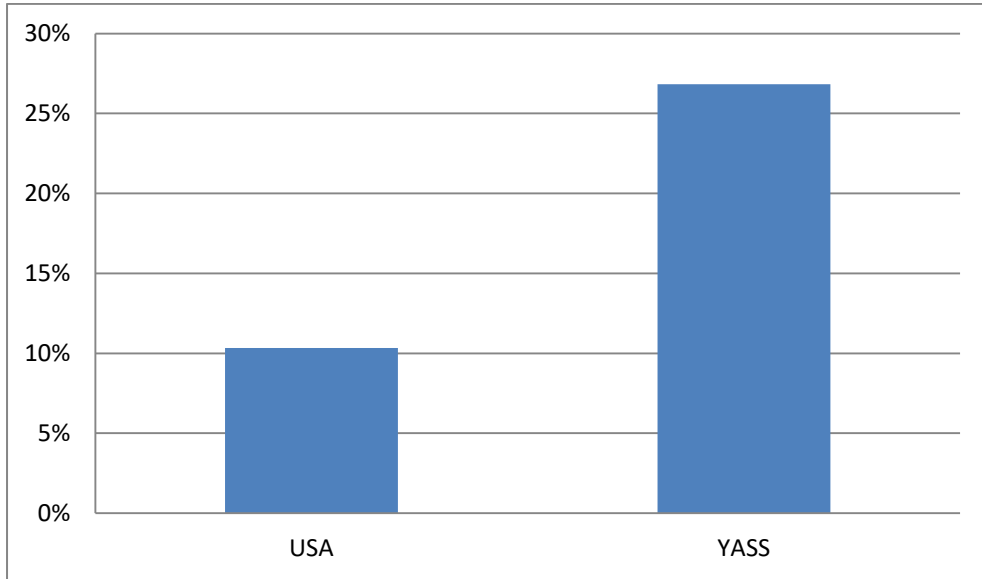
Commentary: The three items that don't rate well in the Yass survey – "single mothers feel welcome in my parish, women are involved in the decision making in my parish, my parish provides support for new mothers" all rated similarly poorly in the USA Survey. The items "Divorced/remarried Catholics feel welcome in my parish, my parish supports women who lose a spouse" rated significantly better in the Yass survey. Both surveys achieved a very positive response to the item "I am proud to be a Catholic"

Do you agree that the parish is doing a good job of including women in:



Commentary: The order of the ranking of these factors is the same in both surveys. However, the rating of "the decision making of the parish" is significantly worse in the Yass survey.

Have you ever personally experienced sexism within the Catholic Church?



Commentary: The Yass result is significantly higher than the USA survey response. This could be attributable to the small sample size and the fact that the USA sample has been less closely engaged with the Church

Appendix 1 – Survey Questions and Numerical Results

1. How important are the following factors to your sense of what it means to be a Catholic?

	<i>Not Important</i>			<i>Extremely Important</i>		<i>WEIGHTED SCORE</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	
participating regularly in the Eucharist in my Parish	0	1	6	2	32	4.7
living my life consistent with Church teaching	0	1	2	9	29	4.6
protecting life (eg opposing abortion, euthanasia)	3	4	3	8	23	4.1
being involved in my parish (eg liturgy, youth, welfare)	0	2	12	10	17	4.0
helping the poor and disadvantaged	0	0	4	7	30	4.6

2. How much do you agree with the following statements?

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>WEIGHTED SCORE</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	
Divorced/remarried Catholics feel welcome in my parish	1	5	10	12	13	3.8
My parish provides support for new mothers	3	9	15	7	7	3.1
My parish supports women who lose a spouse	0	4	13	16	8	3.7
Single mothers feel welcome in my parish	2	6	13	13	7	3.4
Women are involved in the decision making in my parish	4	4	14	15	4	3.3
Women of all ages in our parish are encouraged to use their charisms to enliven our community	1	8	9	16	7	3.5
I am proud to be a Catholic	0	0	8	10	23	4.4

3. Do you agree that the parish is doing a good job of including women in:

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>WEIGHTED SCORE</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	
- the parish community	0	0	9	20	12	4.1
- the parish pastoral council	0	3	11	16	7	3.9
- lay ministry positions	0	3	13	15	9	3.7
- the decision making of the parish	5	5	19	10	2	3.0
OTHER (please specify) _____						

4. Have you ever personally experienced sexism within the Catholic Church? (Yes [11] / No [30])

5. If you answered YES to Question 4 please describe circumstances:

6. How important do you believe the following changes are for women in the parish?

	<i>Not Important</i>			<i>Extremely Important</i>		<i>WEIGHTED SCORE</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	
increased representation on the parish pastoral council	0	1	12	15	13	4.0
increased representation on the parish finance committee	0	0	11	15	15	4.1
increased role in the liturgy (eg senior server/female acolyte)	0	3	4	16	18	4.2
being involved in my parish (eg liturgy, youth, welfare)	0	0	7	21	13	4.1
creation of a mentoring program for women	0	2	11	13	15	4.0
Information on opportunities for women at archdiocesan level	1	1	4	17	18	4.2
Retreat program for women	1	1	9	11	19	4.1
Spiritual counselling for women by women	1	2	11	10	16	4.0
Women-only groups (eg Catholic Womens League)	5	5	13	11	7	3.2
Women's breakfasts, lunches etc	0	8	11	9	12	3.6
Inter-faith women's group	0	4	12	13	13	3.8
OTHER (please specify) _____						

7. How important are the following things for affirming and empowering women in our parish?

	<i>Not Important</i>			<i>Extremely Important</i>		<i>WEIGHTED SCORE</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	
church interior (sculptures, artwork, liturgical banners)	5	6	14	10	6	3.1
Parish website	1	3	14	18	5	3.6
Parish bulletin	0	2	13	18	8	3.8
Language used by Parish Priest and other males	2	0	6	10	23	4.3
OTHER (please specify) _____						

8. Would you be interested in training to be senior server for the parish? (Yes [7] / No [21] / Undecided [13])

9. Would you like to be mentored by another woman in the parish? (Yes [8] / No [24] / Undecided [9])

10. Would you like to be a mentor for another woman in the parish? (Yes [12] / No [16] / Undecided [13])

11. Have you ever served in any of these capacities in a Catholic Parish? (please tick all that apply)

[23] catechist/RE teacher/sacramental team	[3] Alpha team
[14] Extraordinary minister of Holy Communion	[12] Lector
[7] Youth ministry	[9] Carers Group
[4] Altar server	[7] Aged care support (eg Gwen Warmington)
[18] Music Ministry	[11] Meals on Wheels
[13] Hospitality Team	[9] The St Vincent de Paul Society
[12] RCIA team	[1] Yass/Gunning Belun
[15] Prayer group (eg Call to Connect)	[4] Marriage Preparation team
[14] Parish pastoral Council	[0] Parish finance committee
[6] Other (please specify) _____	

12. Would you like to make any further comments about the role of women in our parish including any changes that you would like to see happen?