

Clonard Solemn Novena

2015 Survey



Findings and Objectives

Background to the Survey

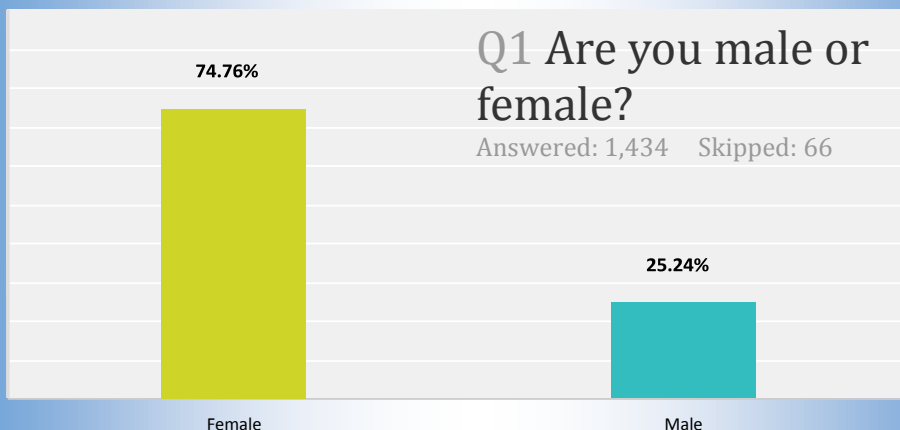
The annual Solemn Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help at Clonard is one of the largest religious festivals in Ireland. Despite many changes in faith and practice, this Novena continues to attract many thousands of people from every walk of life. Down through the years, the voice and the concerns of the people of God have shaped its content and format. With this in mind, it was decided to solicit the views of the people through an online survey which dealt with some important elements for the future of the Novena. In this pamphlet, we present the principal findings which give us an insight into demographics, preferences for times of sessions, liturgies, services and how best to communicate with you. Finally, we present our aims and aspirations for the future.

Who completed the survey...

1500 people took the survey and over 1200 people completed it. Nearly 60% of respondents attended the Novena every day, with a further 18% missing only 1 or 2 days. Therefore, this is a very significant statistical pool and we are confident that it gives an accurate representation of Novena goers.

Furthermore, there was a good spread over the various age groupings with the largest number of respondents aged 60 and over. This mirrors the age profile of our church going community and confirms that all ages have an online presence.

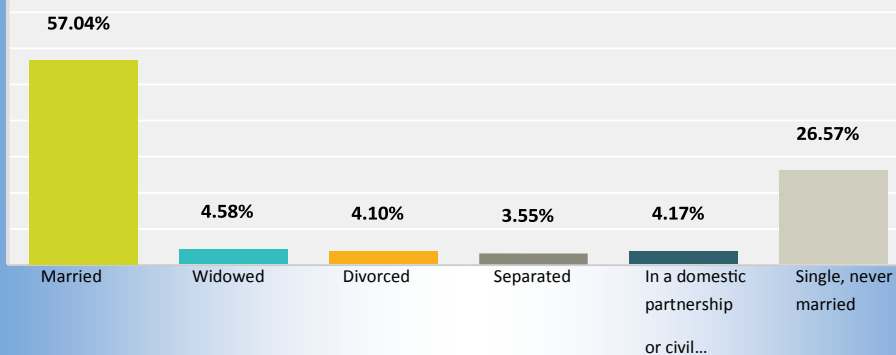
20% of respondents took the survey via our website, while 80% took it through a weblink on Facebook and Twitter. Social media is fast becoming the most significant form of communication with church goers. Nearly three quarters of respondents were female. Although not a reflection of church attendance (we assume men represent more than 25% of our Novena goers) it does confirm the significance of the support women offer the church. It challenges us to find ways to reflect women's voices and concerns in our preaching and liturgies, and to ensure they are gender inclusive.



Nearly 57% of respondents are married, 26% are single while there was an even distribution of respondents who were in partnerships, widowed, divorced, or separated. The Novena must continue to be inclusive, while encouraging and supporting married people in their struggles.

Q3 Marital status

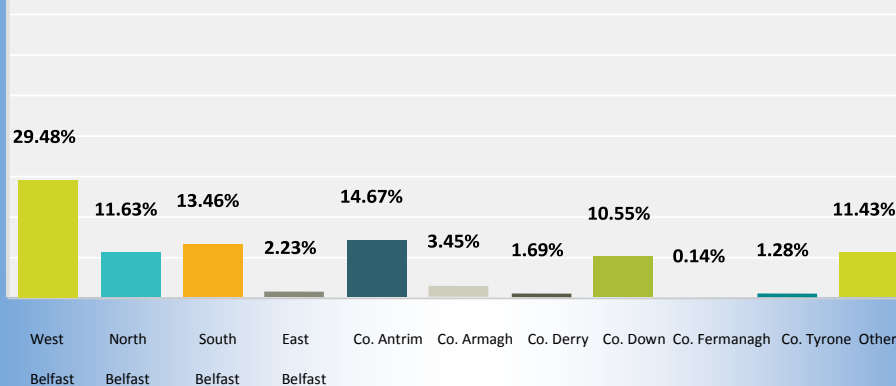
Answered: 1,464 — Skipped: 36



Clonard Novena attracts people from many different locations. From these statistics we can see that the Novena continues to have a strong West Belfast feel. The Clonard Novena is a local festival of faith which spreads out to the hearts and homes of people from many other places, including overseas via our webcam.

Q4 Where do you live?

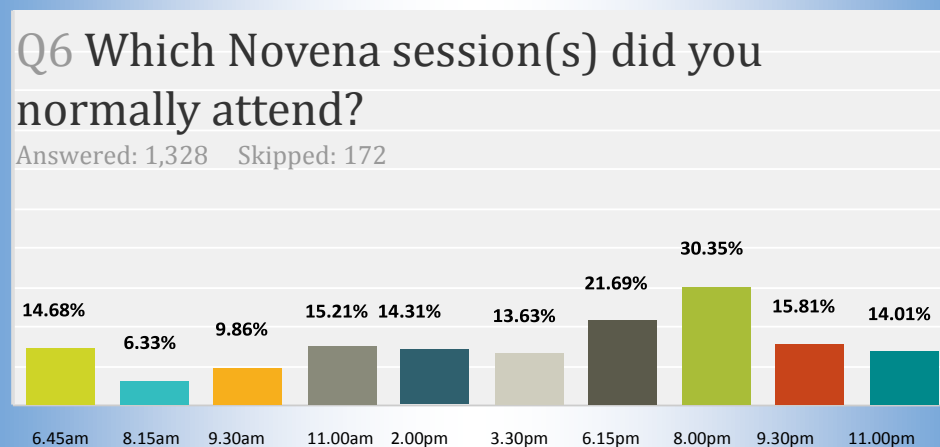
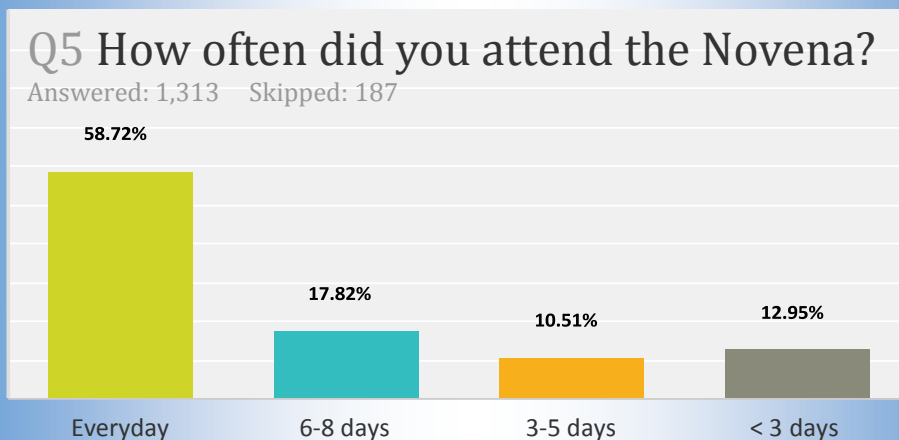
Answered: 1,479 — Skipped: 21



Times of Sessions

Five of the 18 questions were directed towards the times of the sessions with the highest attended session showing to be the 8pm and the lowest attended session to be the 8.15am. However, if we were to remove the 8.15am session, nearly half of the people who go to that session said they would move to an evening session. This would add extra pressure to sessions that are already full. Therefore, the 8.15am is an important session to reduce overcrowding in the evening.

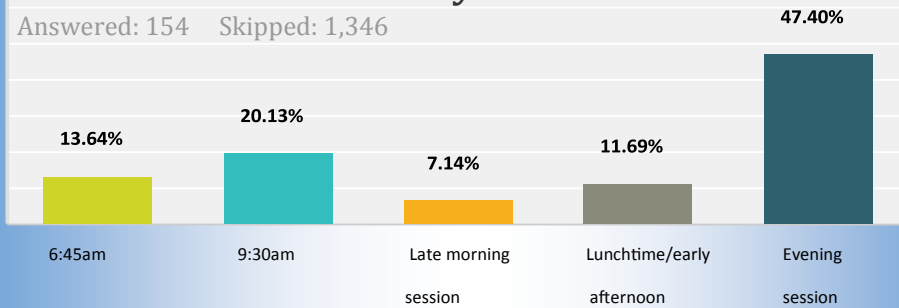
In the comments, some people proposed other morning times such as 7.30am, 8.00am, 8.30am, 10am. It will always be difficult to suit everyone, but we must allow sufficient time between sessions for traffic clearance.



Times of Sessions

Q8 If there was no 8.15am session, which session would you attend?

Answered: 154 Skipped: 1,346

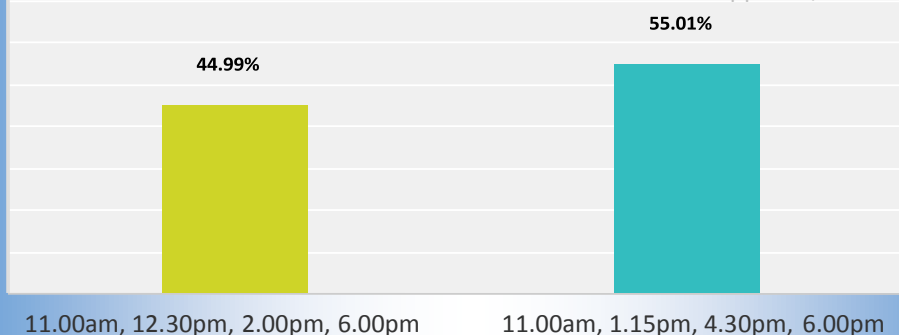


People had inquired about a session around lunch time that might suit flexi-workers. In giving 2 choices, 12.30pm and 1.15pm both attracted about 12% interest. We propose an in-between time of 12.45pm that will be a short 35 minute session for workers.

The existing schedule does not provide for a substantial break in the day. This makes it difficult for timetabling, and often priests and volunteers are on duty from early morning until late afternoon, with only a short break before beginning the evening sessions. Also, with so little time between sessions, cleaning and addressing health and safety issues, such as leaks, broken seats etc., is problematic. A long break half way through each day is necessary. In the survey respondents preferred a long early afternoon break.

Q9 Which Lunchtime/afternoon schedule is best?

Answered: 389 Skipped: 1,111



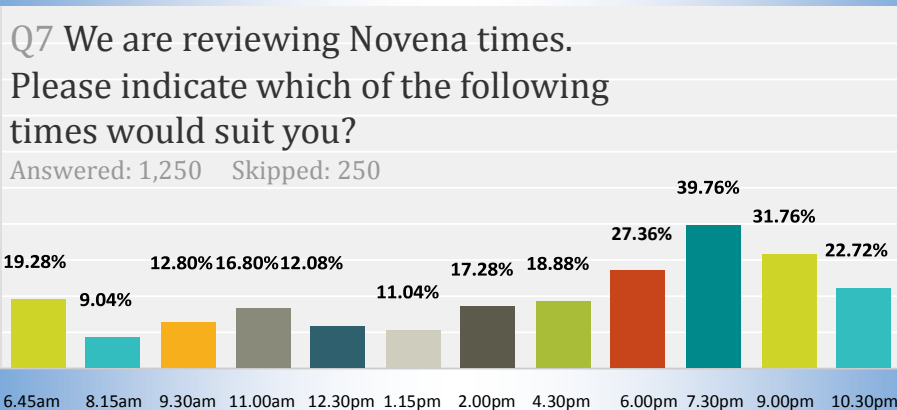
Times of Sessions

In the comments, many people lamented the loss of the 5pm session. This was dropped a number of years ago because it coincided with rush hour traffic. The possibility of a 4.30pm session, however, showed a 5% higher level of interest over a 3.30pm session. Also, in the comments many expressed a hope that this session might suit teachers and students as 3.30pm was too early and that the extra half an hour will allow people to get here before the rush hour.

Regarding the evening sessions, some people complained that the 8pm session was too crowded and that the 9.30pm was too late for those who travel. This poses health and safety challenges. With the final session at 11pm, volunteer cleaners have to wait until midnight to begin cleaning. It is becoming very difficult and unreasonable for volunteers to wait so long as many have day jobs too.

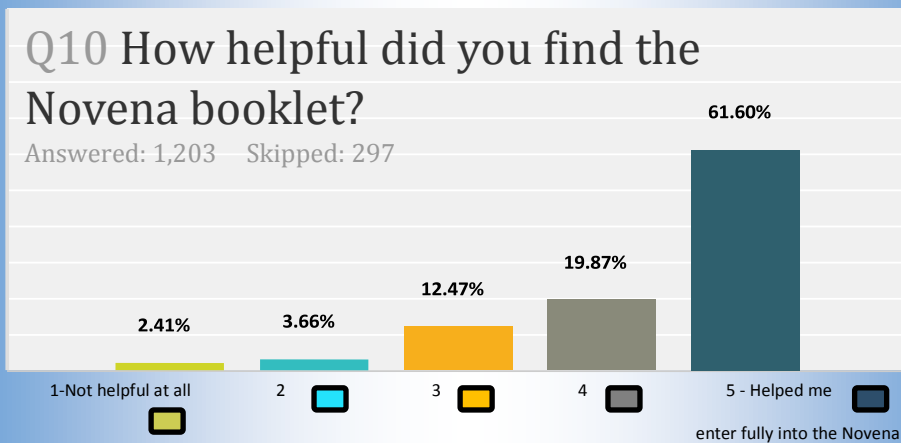
Responses to the survey suggest that an evening schedule with a session every 1.5 hours starting from 4.30pm will spread the overly-crowded 8pm session over 2 sessions—7.30pm and 9pm.

In the comments and in the planning group, it was noted that the weekend times were very different and caused some confusion. It was also noted from previous experience that people did not attend very late sessions at the weekend.

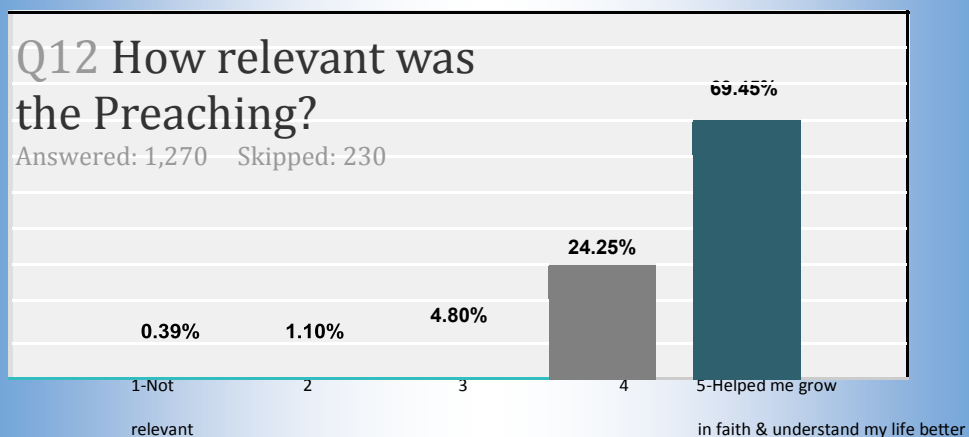


Presentation of Themes and Preaching

The large Novena booklet received a 60% top approval rating with another 20% finding it very useful. In the comments others thought it was too large and some complained that they did not receive one as they entered through the side doors. Online viewers did not have access to the booklet and suggestions were made to make it available as an online download.

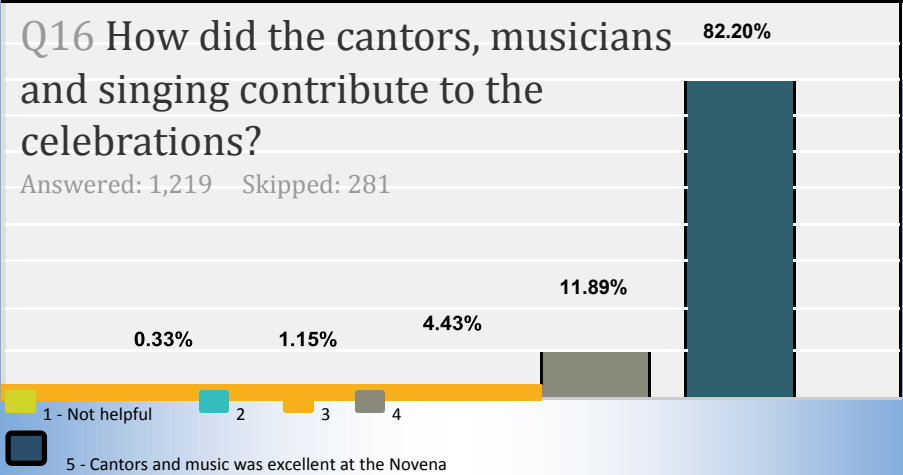


Preachers received many complementary comments and a high rating. Preaching is often a matter of taste and preference and this was reflected in the comments. However, it is encouraging that efforts to make preaching relevant, faithful and faith-filled have been acknowledged.

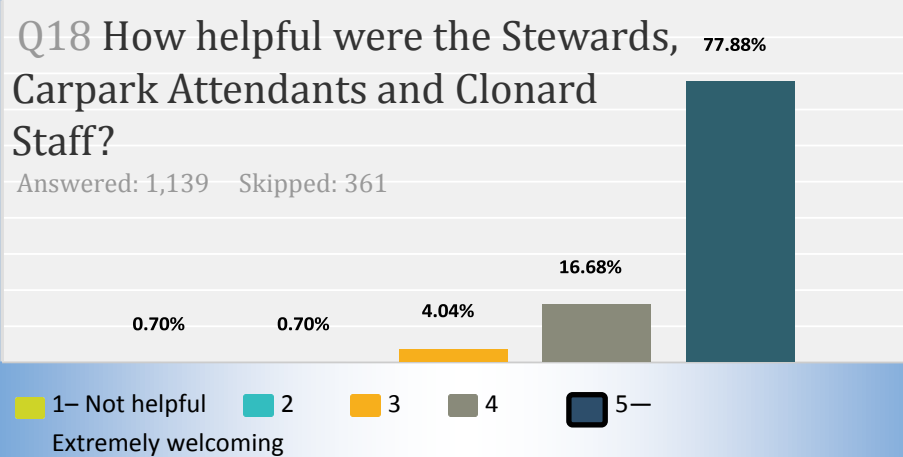


Music and Welcome

Cantors and musicians received great praise, with some commentary about the importance of setting the right mood through animation rather than just singing, and the need to sing in a key and at a pace that is suitable for congregations.

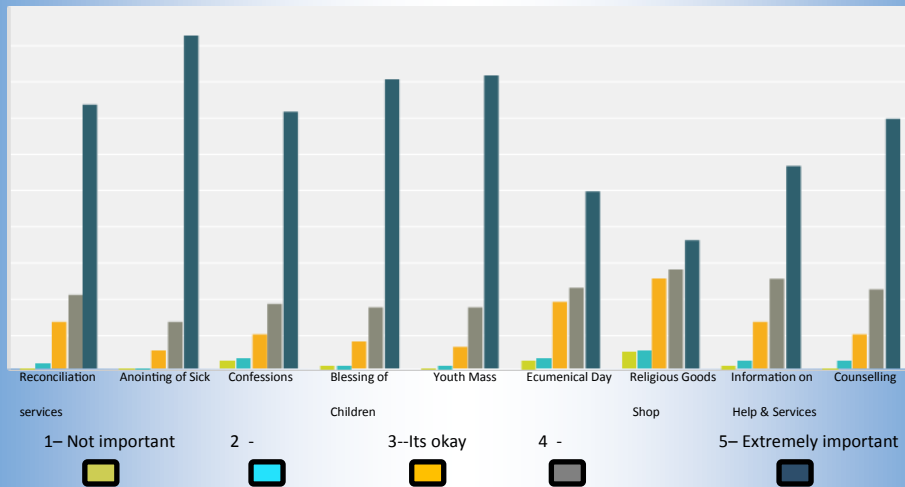


Carpark attendants and stewards were highly praised for their efficiency and friendliness while doing a difficult job. Some respondents drew attention to the pressure they are under, which sometimes resulted in them appearing abrupt.



Special Liturgies and Services

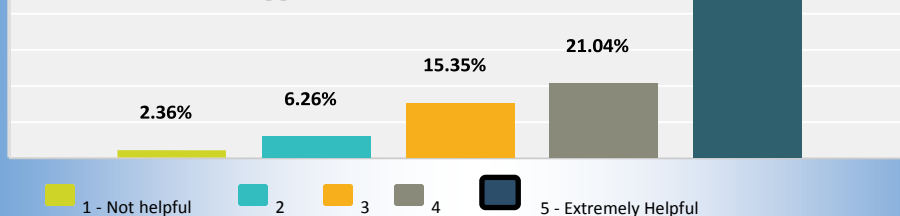
All of the special services were rated very highly, with the anointing of the sick and the services for babies and young people receiving particular praise. Other suggestions included services for grandparents, married couples, the dead, for children who died in the womb, vocations, and the need for access to support services.



Although guest speakers did not receive as high a rating, it was still clearly a favourable rating. Many comments in this section underlined the importance of this element of the Novena, especially given Clonard's ecumenical commitments. The audience at the Novena should be borne in mind for the choice of guest speakers, ecumenical or otherwise.

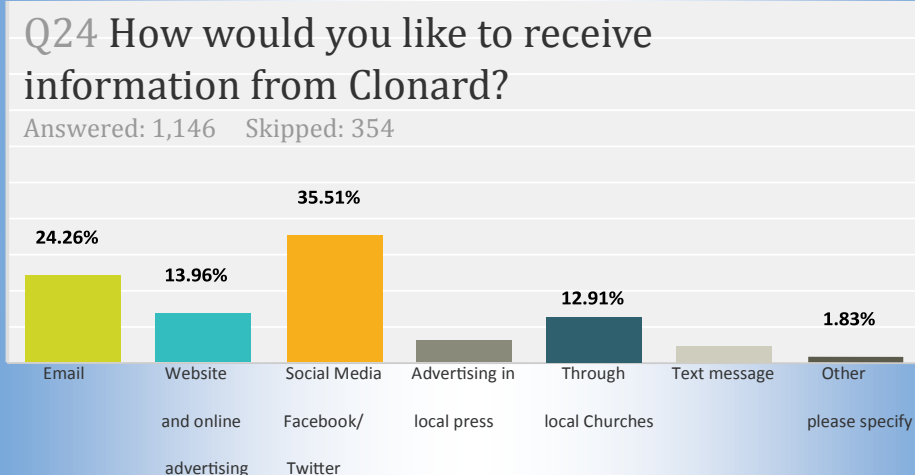
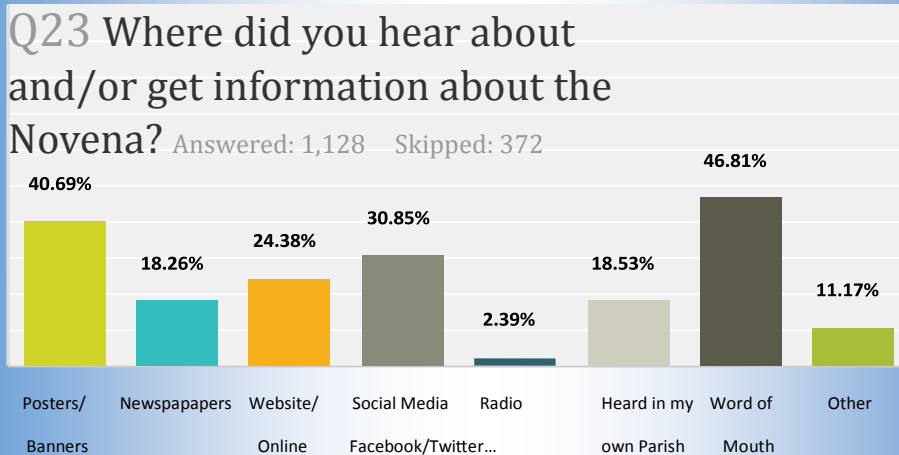
Q14 Peace and Reconciliation Ministry - how helpful were the guest speakers from other churches?

Answered: 1,231 Skipped: 269



Communication and Advertising

Word of mouth and posters/banners were rated the 2 best means of advertising the Novena, again attesting to its local flavour. The next most effective means is social media and then website. Local printed press is becoming a less dominant means of communication. When asked how people would like to receive information, again we note that social media, email and website score highest. However, word of mouth begins with having accurate information so posters, banners and local press will continue to be important avenues of advertising.



Objectives based on the findings of the survey:

- ⇒ Objective 1: To build on the involvement of local people through engagement with community groups, schools and resident associations.
- ⇒ Objective 2: To ensure that Clonard Novena flourishes as a fully inclusive festival of faith, through relevant preaching and giving voice to the concerns of both women and men.
- ⇒ Objective 3: Balancing the concerns of staffing, health and safety requirements, ease of traffic access, convenience of volunteers and the rhythm of the working day, with the need to offer a good choice of session times.
- ⇒ Objective 4: To provide the large format Novena booklet again and to try to make an online version available.

Moving forward

Steps needed to begin acting upon the objectives:

- ⇒ Key roles and responsibilities need to be identified and delegated for the effective management of the Novena.
- ⇒ More volunteers need to be recruited in the a way that adheres to Redemptorist policy for recruitment and selection.
- ⇒ Deliberate recruitment and selection of volunteers that represent those from all age groups, both genders, various catchment areas and from the different ethnic backgrounds in our communities.
- ⇒ Current and new volunteers - Stewards, Readers, Eucharistic Ministers.. to undertake renewed formation to gain a better understanding of their role & responsibility.
- ⇒ To build up more effective community cohesion with the local area & parishes. This involves better communication with local parishes, community groups, schools, charities, sports clubs and resident associations.
- ⇒ To involve young people in the planning, organisation and running of events in Clonard, in particularly the annual Novena, by promoting opportunities in local schools, clubs and on social media.
- ⇒ To select preachers and preaching topics that break open the Gospel in an inclusive and relevant way.
- ⇒ To trial the following new timetable for sessions at this year's Novena:

Weekdays: 6.45am, 8.15am, 9.30am, 11.00am, 12.45pm, 4.30pm, 6.00pm, 7.30pm, 9.00pm, 10.30pm

Weekends: 6.45am 8.15am, 9.30am, 11.00am, 12.45pm, 3.00pm 4.30pm, 6.00pm, 7:30pm.

We sincerely thank all who took the time to complete this survey and hope that, in its findings and objectives, you will recognise your voice .



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For the most up-to-date information on our many outreach ministries, as well as correct Mass and event times, check out our facebook page and twitter feed:



Clonard Monastery



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