

**Catholic Voices
& Word on Fire
Conference 2023
Feedback Report**

Conference background

This conference was organised and hosted by the Word on Fire Institute and Catholic Voices. [Catholic voices](#) was founded in 2010 to tell the Church's story in the media with charity and clarity and to train others to in everyday life.¹ [Word on Fire](#) is a non-profit global media apostolate which supports Bishop Barron's work and aims to evangelise into or back to the Catholic faith.²

In total, 1282 tickets were issued. This includes the venue organisers, volunteers, speakers and others involved in event production. According to demographics provided upon purchase of the tickets **19%** were 18-30, **17%** 31-40 **19%** 41-50 **19%** 51-60 and **26%** 60+. This means that this conference attracted a greater proportion of younger Catholics than exist in the overall population.³

Conference Aims: *To explore the Church's story in England and Wales today, share resources, bring together and equip gatherings of Catholics particularly those involved in influencing the today's Church*

During the conference participants were questioned on their primary reason for attending. Out of the 742 that answered a **slight majority** (53%) cited their motivation as to see Bishop Barron. Following this, just **over a quarter** said they attended to gather in person with a large group of Catholics and just **over a fifth** were there to represent a parish, ministry, or organisation etc.

The advertising strategy focused on promotion through social media platforms and communications with relevant individuals/organisations. Participants shared how they heard about it...

- Online 38%
- Word of mouth 34%
- Organisation 18%
- Parish 7%
- Other 2%

Participant Demographics

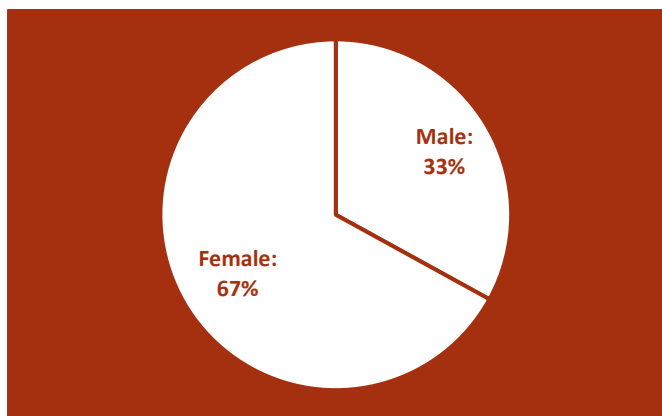


Figure 1: Gender demographics

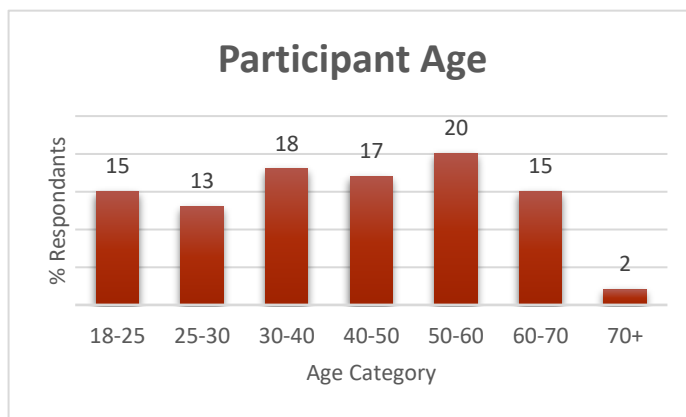


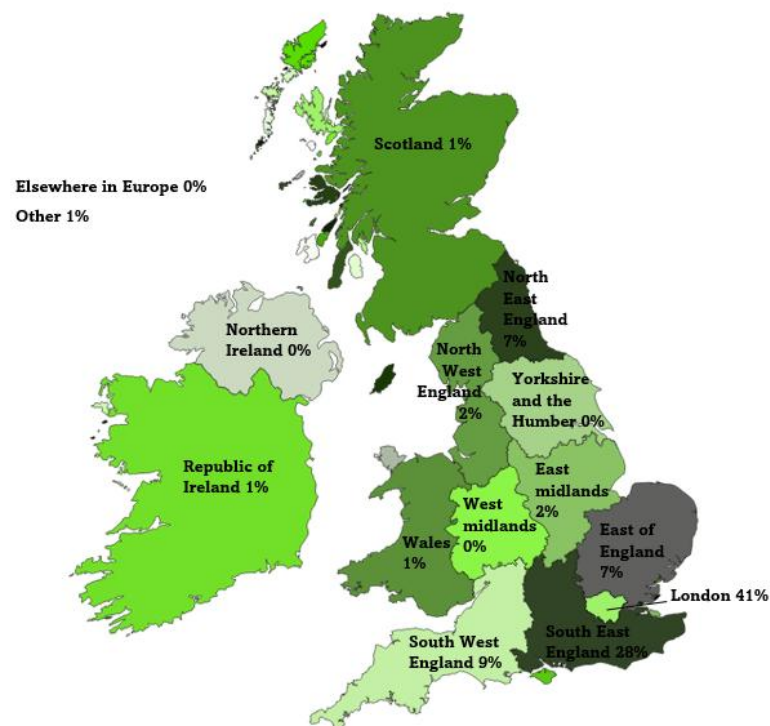
Figure 2: Participant Age

Participant sex demographics reflect sex differences in both religious practice and in survey participation. Women are on average more likely to be religious³ and complete surveys.⁴ An error in

Footnotes:

1. Catholic Voices *WE TELL THE Church's story...and train others to do the same* <https://www.catholicvoices.org.uk/> [Accessed: 20 February 2023]
2. Word on Fire *About Word on Fire* <https://www.wordonfire.org/about/> [Accessed: 20 February 2023]
3. Stephen Bullivant *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data Catholic Research Forum Reports 1* (London: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016) <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-feb-contemporary-catholicism-report-may16.pdf> [Accessed: 30 May 2023]
4. Richard Curtin, Stanley Presser and Elenor Singer 'The effects of response rate changes on the index of consumer sentiment' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64 (2000), 413–428 (p. 413)

the age categories (they overlap) reduces accuracy but the spread is not completely dissimilar to that provided upon ticket purchase.



Regarding regions, the largest proportion of participants derived from **London** (48%) followed by **South East England** (28%). This is somewhat reflective of the spread of UK Catholic affiliation as London is amongst highest.⁵ **South West England** (9%), **North East England** (7%) and **East of England** (7%) were next. North West England harbours the greatest proportion of UK Catholics thus is underrepresented-likely due to conference location.

Only 1% from **Scotland**, **Wales** and the **Republic of Ireland**, with none from **Northern Ireland**, the **West Midlands** and **Yorkshire and the Humber**, again reasonably reflective of the population.⁵

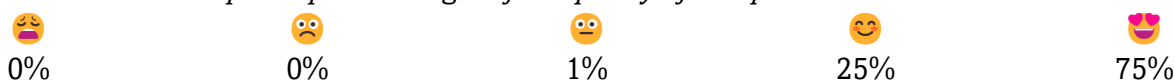
The extent to which data reflects the target population indicates its reliability.

Participant Evaluation

Those with a more positive impression of the conference may be more invested and therefore more likely to fill out the survey- making it unrepresentative of all conference attendees. However, the results do provide a strong indication of the conference meeting its goals.

- **80% of participants** rated the event overall *very good*, the remaining **20%** selected *good*
- A majority of **55%** felt it *exceeded their expectations*, for **43%** it *met theirs*. The remaining **2%** stated it *did not meet their expectations*. None were unsure.
- **62%** were *very satisfied* the conference was good value for money, **31%** *satisfied*, **6%** *neutral* and **1%** *dissatisfied*

What participants thought of the quality of the speakers and sessions:



Please rank these sessions in order of your enjoyment:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 3.57 | Session 1: Opening Prayer, introduction & Bishop Barron Keynote |
| 2.86 | Session 2: Bishop Barron with Tom Holland |
| 1.93 | Final session: Mgr Armitage & adoration |
| 1.59 | Session 3: Breakout sessions |

Footnotes:

5. Stephen Bullivant Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: *A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data Catholic Research Forum Reports 1* (London: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016)

<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-feb-contemporary-catholicism-report-may16.pdf> [Accessed: 30 May 2023]

Conference goals:

Met goal?

For a majority participants to feel **more** confident in **sharing the Church's story**

78% said they were (5% no, 17% maybe)

YES!

Increased **awareness** of Catholic Voices

65% knew familiar Catholic voices, 1% unsure and 34% had not heard of Catholic voices

YES!

Generate high likelihood of **future participation** in Catholic Voices events

74% very likely to attend a future conference ran by Catholic Voices with 20% likely, 4% neutral, 1% unlikely & 1% very unlikely

YES!

What was your favourite experience or moment of the event?

- 46 mentioned Bishop Barron
- 24 mentioned adoration
- 19 mentioned Bishop Barron in conversation with Tom Holland

[Regarding Tom Holland] *"Having Bishop Barron in conversation with a non-Catholic had a great impact and showed first-hand what happens when you go beyond ones little circle."*

24 shared it was the Catholic community- meeting people, old friends, seeing young Catholics...
"Seeing a united, zealous and joyous Church manifested in the attendance of the event".

For 6 people it was Monsignor Armitage, 11 mentioned speakers/talks generally, 4 specified the Tolkein workshop breakout session, 3 the choir during adoration and 3 the poetry.
"All the sessions had something that made me think differently about our faith"

Many other mentions including Brenden Thompson's talk, book stalls, the prayer room, workshops and QE2 staff.

"The whole conference was beautifully put together."

"Hope for the future"

"The realisation of the wonderful work is being done"

What, if anything, could be improved about the conference?

#1 mentioned: provision of tea and coffee

#2 mentioned: food available onsite/provided

#3 mentioned: venue temperature

A range of other suggestions were provided; change in scheduling (*ranging from starting earlier/finishing later/longer breaks/opportunity to attend >1 breakout session*), more opportunity for prayer including Mass, better communication and more opportunities & encouragement to mingle.

Some positive comments were provided at this stage:

"day went too fast"

"It was perfect, heads up about more events like this in the near future"

"more often"

As well as some specific proposals:

- Student discount
- Topics: being catechists, parents/married couples, practical evangelisation tips
- Lyrics to all songs (including for benediction) onscreen

What topics or speakers would you want to hear about at future conferences?

TOPICS: The most frequently mentioned topic was **evangelisation** (16 participants) with an additional 7 asking for **practical tips**. Next most popular was:

- **Youth involvement and role** (12)
- **Marriage/parenting** (6)
- **The Bible** (6)
- **Difficult issues** (4) in addition some specifically mentioned **sexual morality**, **pro-life** topics, **assisted suicide** and **Church abuses**

Other popular topics included: **catechesis** (4), **apologetics** (3), **Catholic social teaching** (3), **prayer** (3), **vocation/discernment** (3), **CV method** (3), **science and religion** (2), **Church teachings** (2), **Catholic education** (2), **saints** (2) and **Marian discipline** (2).

SPEAKERS: A number wanted to hear from the speakers at this conference again. A range of additional names were put forward; both local and international. The most popular was **Fr. Mike Schmitz** who was mentioned by 14 participants. **Matt Fradd** was next, being mentioned twice.

Some suggested organisations such as pro-life charities, religious as **Franciscan Friars of the Renewal** and **Dominican Sisters of St Joseph**. Others mentioned evangelisation-focused organisations such as **Divine Renovation** and **Ascension presents**. Two called for greater representation of females amongst speakers, and one asked to hear from **Catholic MP's**.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about the event, or which you'd like us to know?

52 responses. Nearly 50% of these were **praise**. Many **suggestions overlapped** with the previous question on conference improvement. Some additional feedback included: *again in an alternative part of the UK, clearer timings, more practical evangelisation tips, and improved advertising.*

Final comments...

"I hope we can have more of this calibre and variety of talks."

"There's clearly a thirst for events like it - I think there's great scope for conferences to bring together people within the Church who would not normally choose to attend the same retreats due to different charisms/worship styles etc"

"Thank you so much for organising this - I hope to be able to work with you in the future and attend your events"

"The expo market was beyond blessed by God's providence in meeting people"

"I'm leaving with a full heart and desire to share the Church's story"

