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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the use of participatory decision making in selected parishes of the Eastern Vicariate within the Archdiocese of Port of Spain. It focuses on determining whether such practises are adopted by the selected parishes, through the engagement of the lay faithful, as well as the view of the clergy. This work assesses the impact of the utilisation of such practises, as well as trying to ascertain reasons for the non-adoption and utilisation, given the tremendous benefits that are identified from its usage. It seeks to establish the importance of such a critical practise in ensuring full and active participation from the laity. It seeks to reiterate that the Church, as one unified Body of Christ, is called upon to promote unity and inclusion, and cannot promote division, as such activities directly contravene what Christ himself have promoted. The study emphasizes that division and non-inclusion bring scandal and affects the sacredness and sanctity of the Church. The study promoted active participatory decision making practises.

Key words: participatory decision making, inclusion, laity, parish

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In any organization such as boards, corporate headquarters, departments, and churches decision making exist with several structures in place (Colombo and Delmastro 2008). Decision making when properly undertaken, plays a critical role in the in the success of an organization (Santos et.al, 2020) whether undertaken by private or public persons, either in their individual capacities or at leadership positions in organizations. (Asikhia et al, 2021). Effective decision making in any organization involves the interchangeable use of past experiences, power politics, behavioral considerations, and logical thinking (Christensen, 2010). Critical decisions are made within organizations through the utilization of the organizational structure that exists. Most organizations are designed as hierarchies with lower-level managers reporting to their immediate supervisors. Within these hierarchies, however, variation can occur with individuals making independent and parallel decisions (Christensen, 2010). (Daft, 2014) further noted that information within organizations is flowed vertically and horizontally for an organization to achieve its objectives.

The early colonization by the Eastern world, saw the coming of Christopher Columbus in 1498, and the introduction of the Catholic Church to Trinidad and Tobago. The inception of the Catholic church in Trinidad and Tobago, saw the establishment of the Parish and Church of St. Joseph with the establishment of the Archdiocese in 1850 (Tappin, 2018). Throughout the years the Archdiocese of Port of Spain has grown from sixteen parishes (communities) to six (6) vicarates which consist of (59) parishes at present (CatholicTT, 2022). Parishes and its institutions such as schools, parish halls and social services agencies have played a critical role in aiding citizens for various reasons.

Rationale

The hierarchy of the Catholic church is a multi-faceted one that encompasses a vertical structure with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, sitting at the helm, followed by their ordained officers which consists of bishops, priests and deacons. It was noted by (McKenzie, 1969) that the bishop has the ultimate authority within the diocese. Each diocese is subdivided into parishes with the priest being the head. Additionally, associate pastors are attached to parishes to assist the pastor in the work of the parish and under the priest jurisdiction. These parishes, and their respective Churches, are the main links between the laity, and the religious as they gather together for worship and fellowship. In Trinidad and Tobago, the “Archbishop of Port of Spain possesses legislative, executive and judicial authority in his Diocese and is the Bishop Moderator for the Eastern Antilles Interdiocesan Tribunal” (Paponette – Chancellor, 2017). According to (Newman, 2001) within parishes, the pastoral council is the local body that consists of members of the parish community whose responsibility involves the management of the parish, and its various ministries.

Clement of Rome defined the laity as the non-Levitical element among the holy people or the people who are non-priestly. Additionally, (Canon #948) notes that the right to receive spiritual goods and help for the salvation from the clergy is a right of the laity. However, (Congar) noted that the laity’s position in the church was one that was non-existent and only differentiated according to Canon law. In the past fifty years however, the Catholic church has continually transformed towards a more actively engaged laity (Wojcik, 2003). (Mensah, 2020) notes that the laity is progressively gaining their role as active members of the church, however a greater understanding of the laity needs to be established concerning their role in the church. Through this reasoning, it is often viewed that there is limited or no input from the laity regarding decision making in parishes largely due to the hierarchy structures that exist.

This research is justified by the need to explore the current hierarchical structure that exist within the archdiocese of Trinidad and Tobago and determine the involvement of the laity regarding decision making within parishes. In all aspects this research will be relevant to the vicars and all other offices of the Roman Catholic Church. It will also be relevant to people within the management field and future researchers on the issue of laity involvement in decision making.

Thesis Statement

In this context the guiding question of this research arises: What involvement does the laity have regarding decision making within parishes?

This research seeks to analyze participatory decision making practices in parishes within the Archdiocese of Trinidad and Tobago, and to determine the level of influence such practices exert in the management and affairs of the Parish.

Parameters

This research focuses on the hierarchical structures that exist within the archdiocese of Trinidad and Tobago and the involvement the laity has in decision making within the parishes. This research encounters some constraints which limit the scope of the study.

- Availability of research material: the research material available regarding the church and decision making is insufficient and therefore limits the study.
- Time: The time allocated to conduct this research is an hinderance in gaining sufficient data.

Objectives

- To explore the hierarchy that exists within the archdiocese of Trinidad and Tobago.

- To determine the involvement of the laity regarding participatory decision making in parishes within the Archdiocese of Port of Spain
- To identify solutions that can promote the involvement of the laity regarding participatory decision making within parishes in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain

Methodology

This research intends to take an exploratory approach to discuss the hierarchy structures that exist with the Archdiocese of Port of Spain and determine the involvement of the laity regarding decision making within the parish.

Data collection for this research would involve primary data collection from surveys and interviews with members of four (4) parishes of varying demographics and one (1) parish priest. Based on the need for accessibility and time constraints this research would involve data collection from an online means such as Google forms in the collection of survey data. Interviews would be conducted via telephone or Zoom platform. Secondary data would involve analysis of existing literature that explored decision making within organizations, as well as newspaper articles and reports. This would allow for both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected from participants to in turn achieve the objectives of this study. Additionally, it allows for varying perspectives to be gained by the participants of this research. The data collected would be analyzed using content analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data gained.

Chapter Outline

This paper is organized into four chapters: Chapter one consists of the introduction with a rationale, objectives of the study, parameters, and methodology of the study. Chapter two explores the theoretical framework on which this research is based. Chapter three discusses the analysis of the

data collected from the issuance of questionnaires and the interview conducted. Chapter four concludes the research with recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

The Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, functions within the realms of a secular, multiethnic and multi religious environment. Decisions that are to be made by the parish priest or administrators revolve around ecclesiastical affairs, parish governance and impromptu circumstances that require immediate action or deferred judgement. Some situations require the ultimate decision of the parish priest such as those involving sacramental rites and the administration of such. Such decisions which are undertaken by the priest are usually guided by Canon Law together with the standardized practices of the local church. Historical reviews reveal that in the early church, the laity had a significant role in participatory decision making, but due to clericalism of the Middle Ages, the views and opinions of lay people were subdued. With Vatican II¹ there was a restoration of the constructive reflection of lay persons and their role in participatory decision making.

Ecclesiological Perspectives

The issue of participatory decision making in the Church and its affairs is expressed in sacred scripture through the first letter of St Paul² to the Corinthians. The early Church was extremely divided and torn by conflicts. He wrote,” Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for

¹ The Second Ecumenical council of the Vatican 1962-1965

² One of the most important persons in the Christian faith, who wrote epistles, outlining guidelines for early Christianity.

the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) His writings suggest that there was a definite role for the common folk, outside those who were specially selected. His writings claim that membership of the early Christian community, granted the faithful the task to assist in the spread of the Gospel values through evangelization, healing and witnessing to others from their personal faith and beliefs. The role and voices of the early Christian community were not just passive observers but were called to a higher active participation in the affairs of the newly formed faith.

St. John Paul II³ acknowledged the need for a participatory decision making in the affairs and governance of the Church, through the development and establishment of pastoral councils through his apostolic letters *Christifidelis Laici*⁴ in 1988(Nos 25,35,37,42,46,54,57,61) and *Ecclesia in Asia* in 1999.(no.25).The then pontiff, continued his call for a deeper level of active participation by acknowledging the necessity of structures of participation for advancing ecclesiastical communion at every level of the Church’s life by calling for greater listening by pastors which he insists are consultative and not deliberative (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* No.45)⁵.

The former leader, continued acknowledging the need for a greater level of participation from the faithful as he quoted from his post synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores Gregis*(No 44)⁶ which stated the need for each Bishop to develop, “A pastoral style which is ever more open to greater collaboration with all.” The Pope reiterated,” Within a sound ecclesiology of communion, a commitment to creating better structures of participation, consultation, and shared responsibility, should not be understood as a concession to a secular democratic model of governance, but as an

³ St John Paul II was head of the Catholic Church from 1978 to 2005. He was canonized in September 30th 2013

⁴ Translated to mean Christ’s Faithful Laity, written by John Paul II, 1988

⁵ At the beginning of the New millennium, written by St John Paul II, 2001

⁶ The Bishop, servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the hope of the world, written by John Paul II, 2003

intrinsic requirement of the exercise of episcopal authority and a necessary means of strengthen that authority.”

The documents emerging from Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium*⁷, defines specific roles and importance of the laity. The document addressed the faithful as God’s chosen people, who although not amongst the ordained ministers of the Church, Bishops and priest, are called, through one common and recognised Baptism in Christ, to service, and as such their views and opinions must be considered on issues that emerge in the Church. The Church, as a body, is composed of members who are God given, inter-related and complementary. (*Lumen Gentium* Chapter 2) The Church, therefore as one Body, must ensure inclusivity and acknowledge diverse opinions. In building up the Church, symbolically referred to as the Body of Christ, various members have roles and responsibilities, as there is no space for individualism or the promotion of personal choices.

*Aposolicam Actuasitatem*⁸ promotes and encourages lay Catholics to participate in the mission of the Church. The document acknowledges the diversity of God’s people, together with identifying commonality in roles and duties. *Ad Gentes*⁹, promotes evangelisation through the efforts of the faithful, and calls for the formation of strong Christian communities through dialogue and consensus with similar Christian faiths, as well as those who express diverse views and opinions. There are identifiable circumstances where the faithful are allowed to fully participate and make meaningful contributions.

⁷ The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Vatican II

⁸ Decree on the Apostolate of the laity

⁹ Promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Christi Fideles Laici*¹⁰, identifies the role and function of lay participation in human society. In addition to catechesis, all are called to share in the communion and mission of the Church. As members of the church, they are granted the responsibility to ensure the spread of the faith, and to bear living testimony of the wonders of the resurrected Christ. As such, they are required to demonstrate a keen interest through participation and involvement.

In the apostolic document, *Gaudium Et Spes*¹¹, there is the promotion of speaking for the voiceless, as it relates to the protection and promotion of the dignity of each human person. The Church is encouraged to stand before the world and denounce injustice and support peace. Participatory decision making provides the avenue where such injustices can be corrected, together with developing selfless service towards the defenceless and the marginalized. Through participatory decision making, oppression is highlighted and the plight of the poor and downtrodden receive importance, with the earnest hope in formulating solutions and implementation of plans and policies to eradicate such scourges.

The codes of Canon Law,¹² have specifically outlined the role of the laity, and highlighted their important roles and functions, together with the promotion of continuous participation in the decisions that are made within the parish structure. Canon 212, explicitly states, “ according to the knowledge ,competence and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful without prejudice to

¹⁰ Post Synodal exhortation of Pope John Paul II, signed in December 1988

¹¹ Hope and Joy, issued during the papacy of Pope Paul VI, 1965

¹² The system of laws and legal principles made and enforced by the Church's hierarchical authorities

the integrity of faith and morals with reverence toward their and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.”

Decision making, as it pertains to certain Church affairs, should never be considered as an isolated circumstance, that requires individualistic choices and personalised selection. Participatory decision making is a collaborative process, whereby choices are guided by God’s Spirit and wisdom. Participatory decision making is a process of communitarian discernment, in which clergy and the faithful are invited in the common listening of the Holy Spirit. (Cardinal Grech,2015)¹³

The lay community comprise individuals with vast knowledge, experience, and expertise, who possess enormous gifts and skills that can be utilised for the development of the Church. According to the former Pope, Benedict XVI, the lay faithful cannot be solely passive beneficiaries, but are the protagonists of the Church’s social doctrine at the vital moment of its implementation. He further highlights that the faithful are also valuable collaborators of the Pastors in its formation, thanks to the experience they have acquired in the field, and to their own specific skill.

Not all decisions can be made through a democratic process. Issues concerning the administering of sacraments, privacy issues and legal requirements require administrators to practise individual autocratic decision making. (Yukl 2010). In fact, participatory decision making is not a black or white issue but rather a choice that falls along a continuum based on several factors. (Hallinger 2011).

Participatory decision making within the Church, should be viewed as a spiritual process, that does not perpetuate animosity between clergy and the laity, but involves each person sharing their views

¹³ A Maltese member of the college of Cardinals, created a Cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012

amicably with each other in the church, with the shared desire to listen, deliberate and determine. Such a process of collaboration should never be viewed as a threat to authority, as authority is always involved in various ways, but not allowed to dominate and jeopardise outcomes. Participatory decision making is never about going against or without the person of authority, but always together with such persons with their consent. (Cardinal Mario Grech,2015)

Participatory decision making should never be viewed as a battle for supremacy or fight for positions of power between clergy and the laity. It is an exercise that should be devoid of conflict or contention. According to Monsignor Dianich,¹⁴ “All Christians are rich in charisms that are different for clergy and laity, so when a priest decides alone, he is in fact impoverished.” Such a procedure that involves collaboration, is a deliberate process of the Church community, which serves as nothing more than enriching the hierarchical ministry, with gifts and charisms that can serve each individual Bishop or priest. (Monsignor Dianich,2022)

Participatory decision making is encouraged among the clergy and laity, as the Church does not function like a monarchy or a Parliament, but it a church of clergy and lay people united in their common Baptismal identity and bringing their different ministries and charism together to discern and plan. (Cardinal Grech,2015)

The Catholic Church is envisaged as a *sui iuris*¹⁵ institution, affirming the autonomy of the church, insofar it has the right to promulgate and obey its own laws. The perception held by many, especially the laity, suggests that the Church exerts herself as a democratic institution, but the governance is distant from democratic principles.

¹⁴ A renowned theologian and expert on ecclesiology

¹⁵ A latin phrase meaning of one's own right. The phrase is used both in secular law and the Church's canon law.

CHAPTER TWO

Following the distribution of questionnaire using the google form platform, the data was tabulated and subsequently analyzed. The data revealed certain trends and were able to reveal further information regarding participatory decision practices

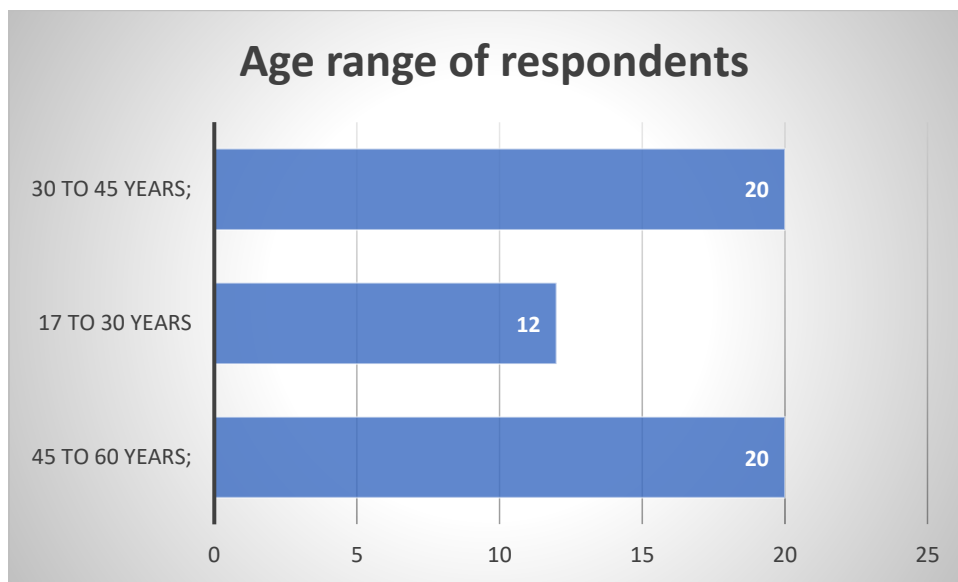


Table 1

Table 1 revealed that most of the respondents that participated in the survey came from the older range categories, while those in the younger age categories showed less participation. Such data similarly depicts youth involvement in Church activities, which traditionally varies depending on various factors such as the existence of youth ministries, catechesis, and formation programs, together with the characteristics of the parish priest.

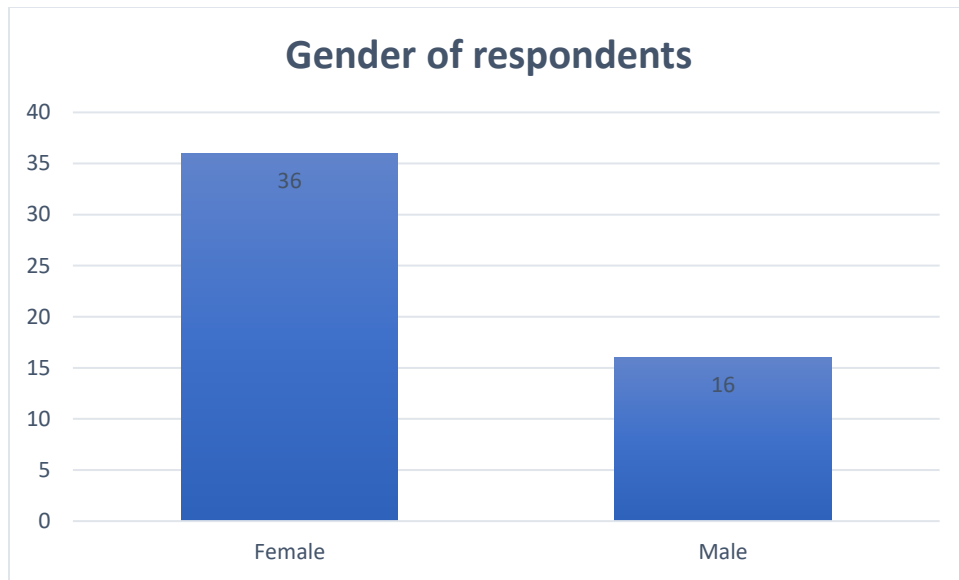


Table 2

Table 2 depicts the gender of the respondents, which is also a generalized reflection of the composition of worshippers at various liturgies. 69 % of respondents, were female compared to 31% represented by the male gender. Although the Catholic Church continues to be patriarchal and dominated by a male hierarchy, female participation and involvement continues to surpass that of the male counterparts.

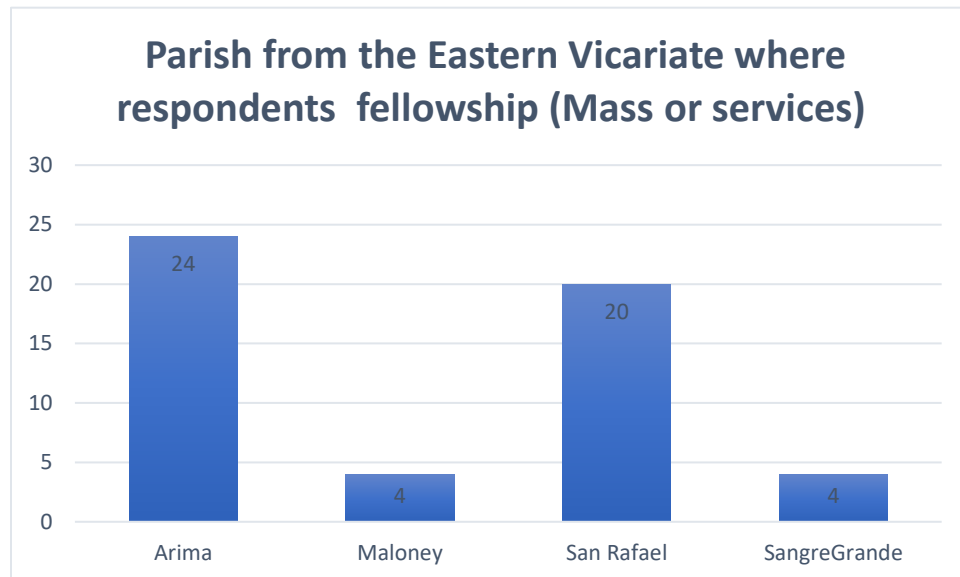


Table 3

Parishes from the Eastern Vicariate were used for the sample population because of accessibility to information together with ease of distribution of the questionnaire. The Parish of Arima, revealed the greatest level of participation, followed by San Rafael. Limited participation from Maloney and Sangre Grande was noted.

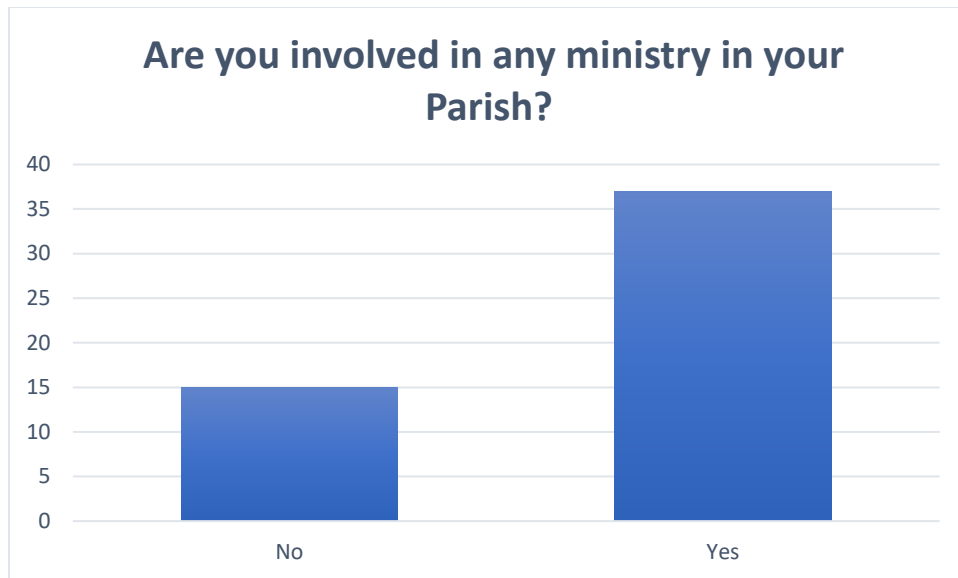


Table 4

Table 4 revealed that there was a high level of involvement in various ministries within the various Parishes. This direct level of participation included ministries such as lectors, catechist, eucharistic ministers, lay ministry, altar servers. This level of direct involvement reveals strong commitment towards the organization. Approximately 73% of those polled indicated that they were involved in various parish ministries, compared to 27% who were not involved.



Table 5

The Parish council serves as a decision-making body within the Church structure comprising the Parish Priest, Deacon, administrators, and members of the worshipping community. This council is highly recommended, although some parishes lack its inclusion in the everyday functioning of the parish. Approximately 77% of those surveyed identified the existence of the parish council, which will indicate some measure of inclusion and participation in the decision making in the parish. The 23% that indicated that they did not know reveals some level of non-participation or non-awareness of the various arms of the Church organization. The existence of a parish council also indicates the levels of active participation by the faithful in the affairs of the Church, as well as an advisory body in the decision making processes of the Church.

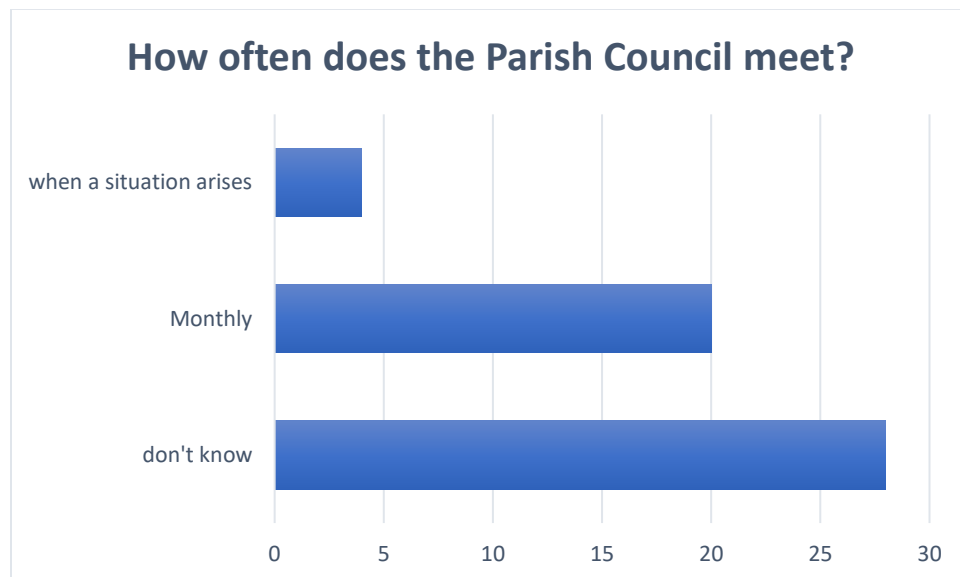


Table 6

Information gathered on how often the Parish Council meets, reveals that approximately 54% did not know, suggesting limited or no knowledge of the functions of the arm of the Church 38% of those surveyed, stated a monthly meeting was held.7% of the respondents stated that the council met when situations arose. Regular and established times for meetings ensure that communication, the dissemination of information and most importantly shared decision making occurs. Disregarding such meetings or haphazard conveying to discuss issues, limits growth and inclusivity thereby affecting the overall organizational success.

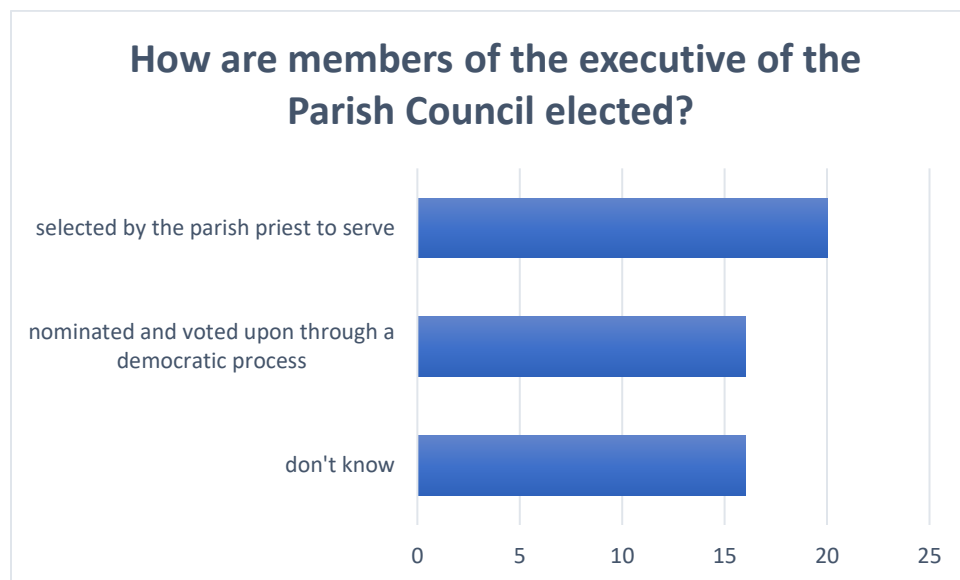


Table 7

Information gathered on the election process of members of the parish council, revealed the dominance of the Priest. Such situations when viewed may indicate bias or prejudice on the part of the Parish Priest, which goes against the principles of equality and fairness, which are fundamentally proclaimed by the Church. Various reasons may exist as to why such action is adopted by the parish priest including qualifications, skills, and competencies. The fact remains, however, based on the information gathered, an absence of democratic principles. The voice of the faithful, through democracy showed approximately 31 % of those surveyed, indicating such a process. Similarly, approximately 31 % had no knowledge of how such processes are undertaken.

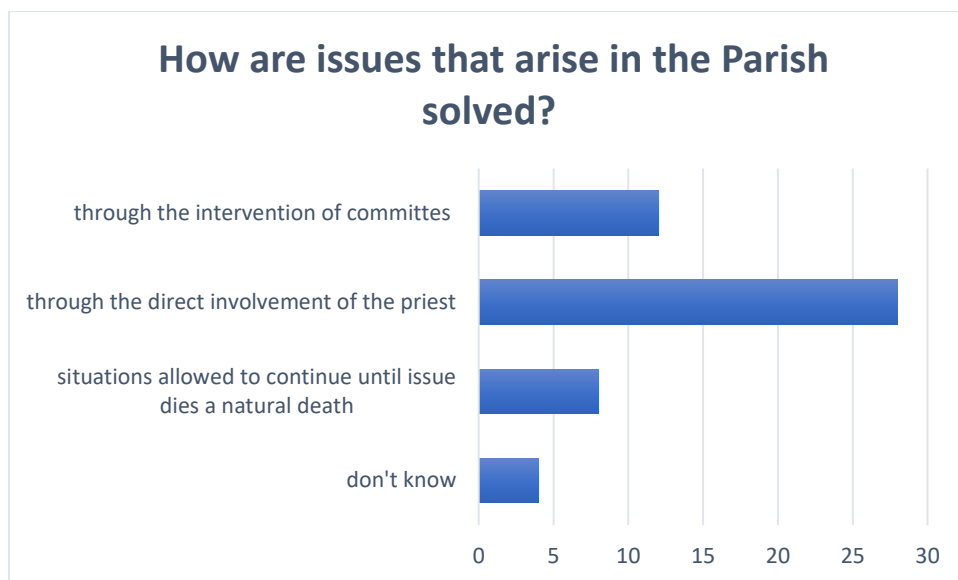


Table 8

When questioned on how issues that arise in the parish are solved, the majority of those that responded indicated that such was achieved through the direct involvement of the priest. The Priest has the responsibility in proper guidance and shepherding the faithful people of God, and also has to ensure that issues are rectified. Certain issues may require the sole discretionary input from the Parish priest, such as those dealing with ecclesiastical affairs, while on occasions, the need for proper consultation, and acknowledging the views and opinions of others is highly recommended.

There were those who stated that the intervention of committees, which includes the Parish Council, was adopted. The option of leaving situations to die a natural death as indicated by some was unfortunate, and presents instances for division and conflict.

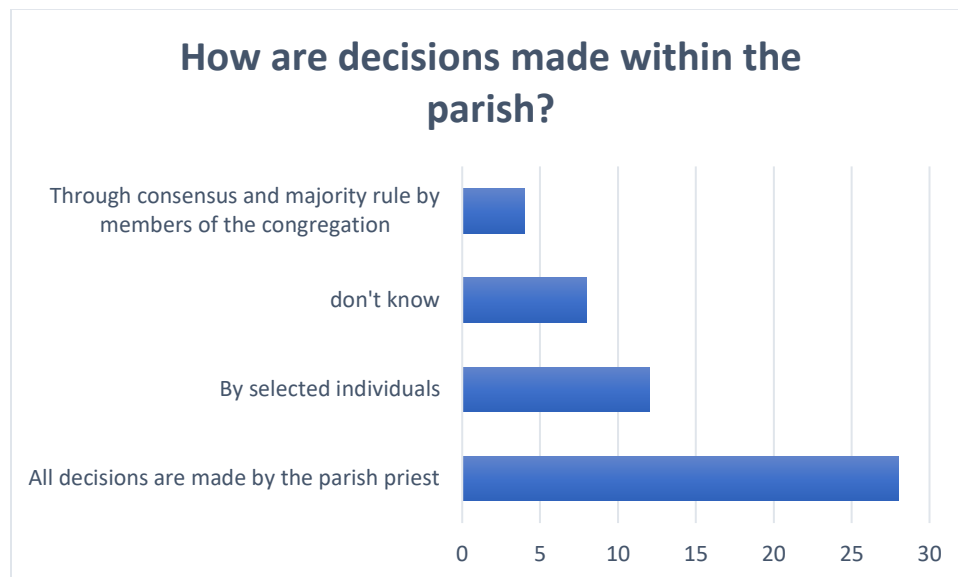


Table 9

The results obtained regarding decision making within the various parishes show a conclusive response which illustrates that in the majority of parishes, all decisions are made solely by the parish priest. Over 50% of the respondents sampled, stated that decisions are made by the priest, while in contrast, to the fact also, decisions are least made through consensus and majority rule by members of the congregation. A process whereby decisions are made by a single individual strongly indicate that participatory decision-making principles are not applied, in many of the parishes that form part of the population. Although some parishes have consultation and consensus, the majority revealed that this was not the dominant practice.

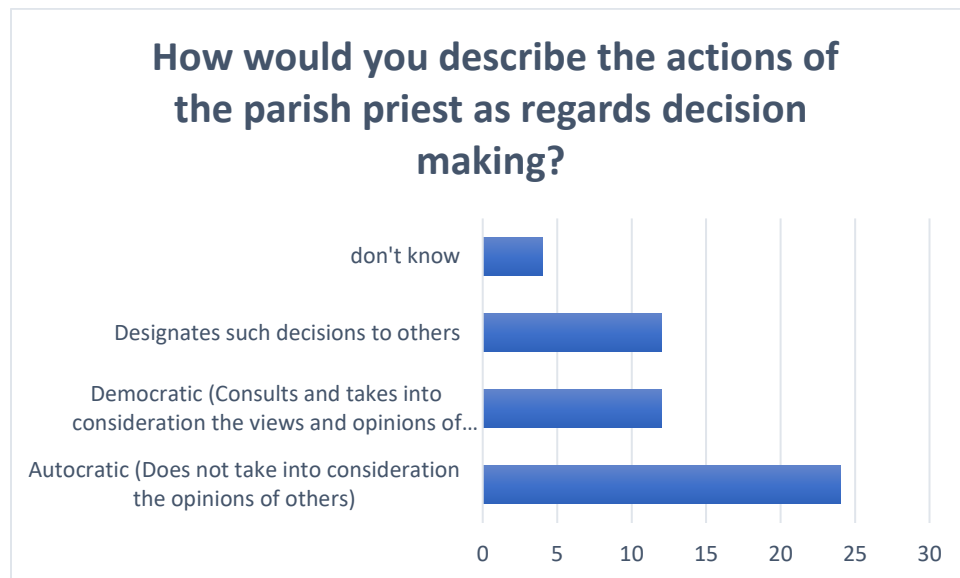


Table 10

The findings from the question posed regarding the description of the actions of the parish priest as regards decision making, reveal that the dominant actions were the least consultative as the majority identified the actions of the Parish Priest as being autocratic, which entails least consideration of the views and opinions of others. While there were some who indicated democratic, together with a shared approach, autocratic decision making was identified as being prevailing. Participatory decision making cannot exist in an environment where autocratic principles are predominant, as such a process requires inclusivity and taking into consideration the views and opinions of others.

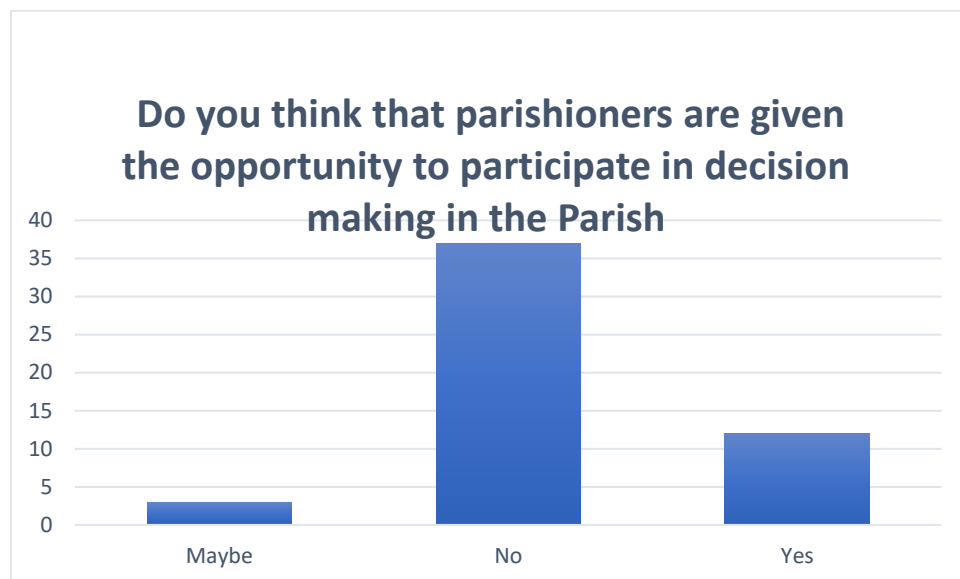


Table 11

When presented with the question regarding whether parishioners are given the opportunity to participate in decision making in the Parish, there was a definite response in the negative. 71% of those polled, indicated that no opportunity was given. 23% of respondents did indicate that there were opportunities available, but the general trend was towards no opportunities. Participatory decision making must allow for opportunities for full and active participation. There must be the creation of opportunities for input and contributions from parishioners. Such opportunities emerge through various times, and as such allowing for active participation builds the concept of fostering responsibility and shared decision-making practices.

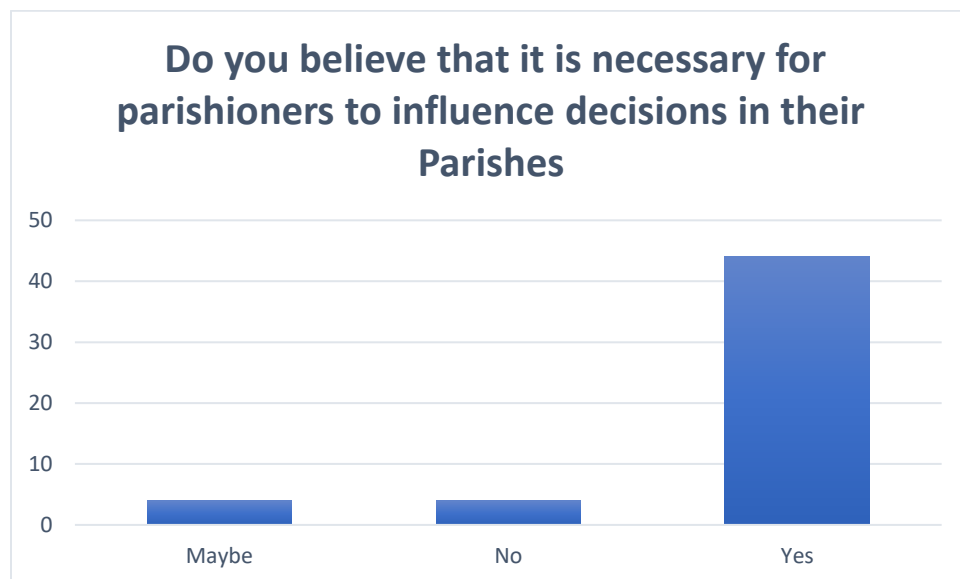


Table 12

When presented with the question regarding the necessity of including the views of parishioners in influencing decisions in Parishes, an overwhelming 85 % of respondents agreed. Such an indication reveals the strength of parishioners' opinion regarding decision making within their worshipping community. The views may also suggest that there is a general sense of concern as to the functioning of the parish, together with the need to direct and positively influence the goals of the organization. Parishioners' opinions and views need to be voiced in ensuring that the best decisions are made.

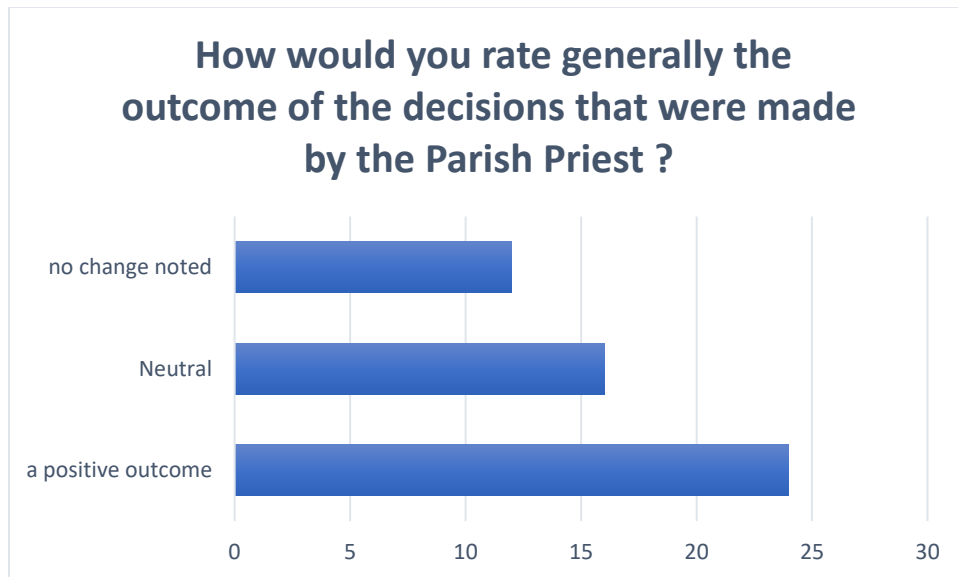


Table 13

Table 13 reveals the data gathered regarding the outcome of decisions made by the Parish Priest. Most of the respondents indicated that a positive outcome was noticed, while fewer indicated that no change was observed. Some also responded by being neutral. There are always consequences of decisions that are made. Within the Church context, furthermore, when such decisions are made solely on the discretion of the priest, it is genuinely hoped that a favorable outcome would be obtained. However, to err, is to be human, and since priest are human and not divine, unfavorable outcomes based on decisions made can be the reality. As such participatory decision making, in circumstances which allow for its adoption, should be practiced allowing for mitigation of errors and the most arriving at the most favorable outcome.

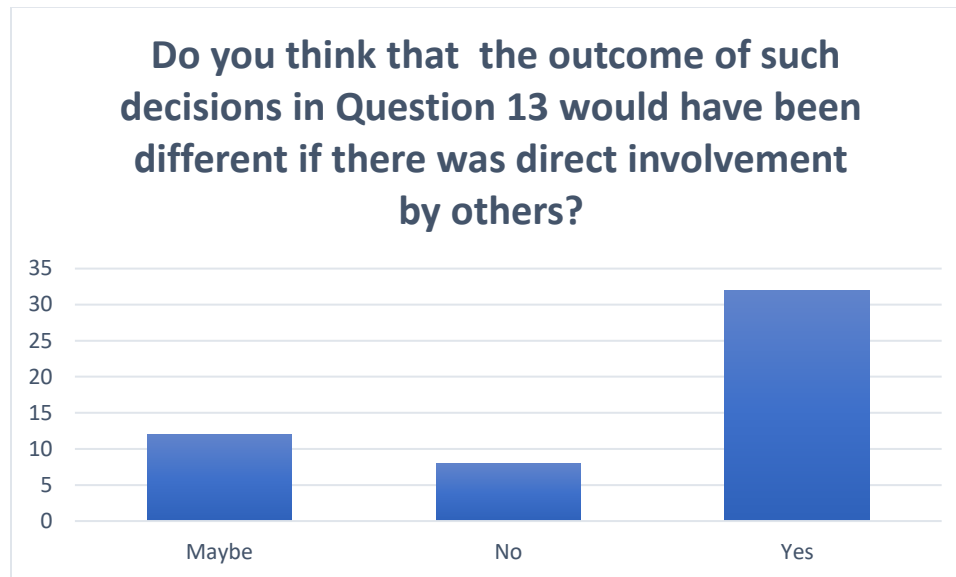


Table 14

The views expressed in response to the question regarding the outcome of decision if there was direct involvement by others, revealed most respondents believed that the outcome would have been different. A decisive 62% of respondents indicated a change in the outcome if participatory decision making was adopted. 13% of those surveyed believed that no change would have been noticed, while 25% were indecisive. The data reveals that the input of others should be taken into consideration to arrive at the best solution possible for the benefit of all concerned. The view that the inputs and opinions of others can alter final decisions and produce superior solutions, promote the view that participatory decision making is necessary in the organization.



Table 15

The overall dominance of the Parish Priest emerges in the responses of those surveyed when presented with the question regarding who exerts the greatest influence on decision making in the parish. 61% of the responders indicated that the Parish Priest or Deacon exerted the greatest influence. Significantly, approximately 8 % of the responders indicated lay persons. This significant difference in the responses, indicates the limited or non- adoption of participatory decision-making principles within the Parish. The hierarchical structure of the institution whereby the Priest is at the pinnacle within the Parish, unfortunately promotes the under-utilization of participation and inclusivity as regards decision making.

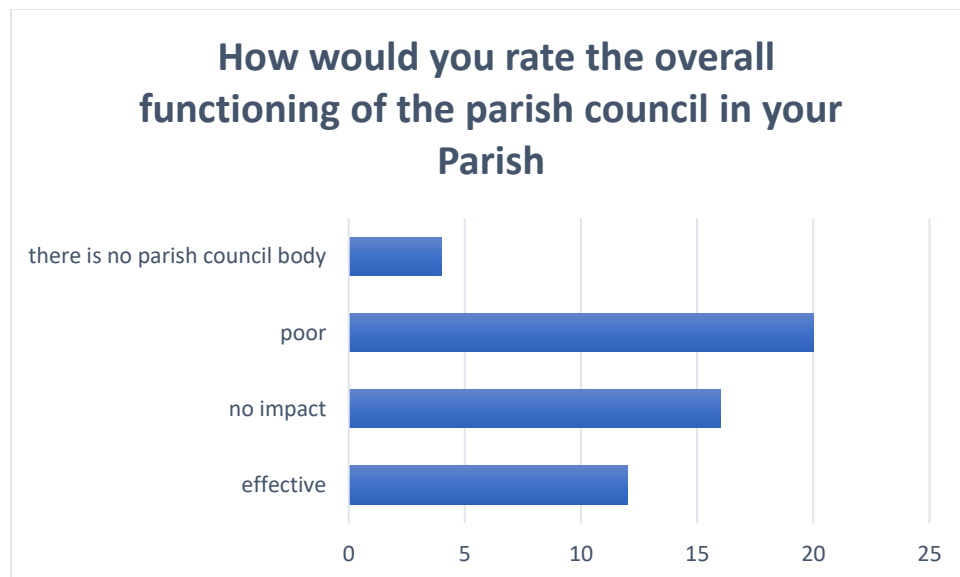


Table 16

The Parish Council is an avenue whereby effective participatory decision making is practiced. From the findings of those sampled, the data revealed that there was predominately a poor rating given for the overall functioning of the Parish Council, which negatively reflects on participatory decision making within the wider worshipping community. Those sampled also stated the absence of a parish council, together with responses of no impact, which all goes against principles of participatory decision making.

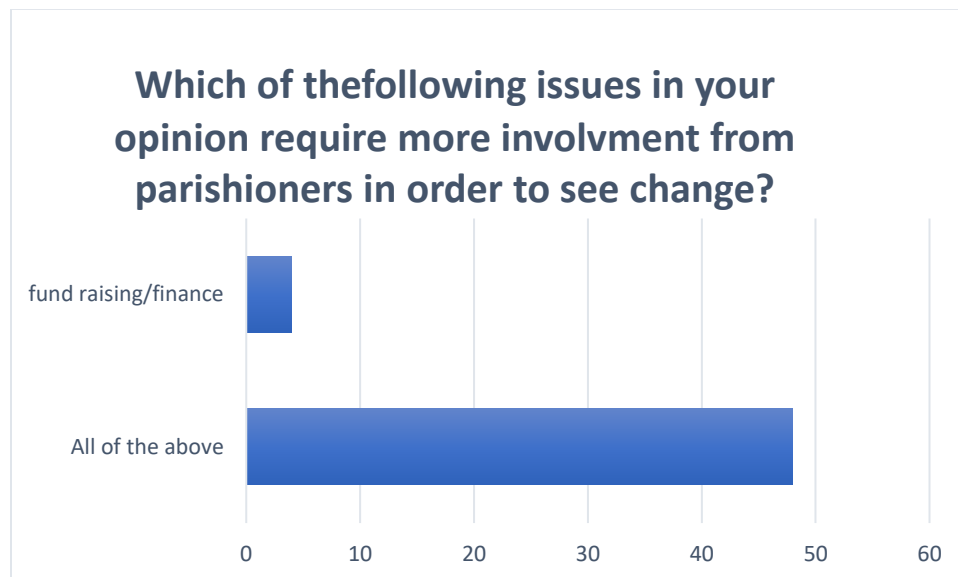


Table 17

There was an overwhelming response that issues involving fund raising/finance, family life, youth ministry and catechism need involvement from parishioners in order to bring forth change and development within the worshipping community. From those sampled, these issues are of extreme importance and as such require partnership via participatory decision making between the direct involvement of members of the worshipping community and the hierarchy of the Church. These problematic areas of concern and worry, based on research, present the major obstacles affecting the Church.

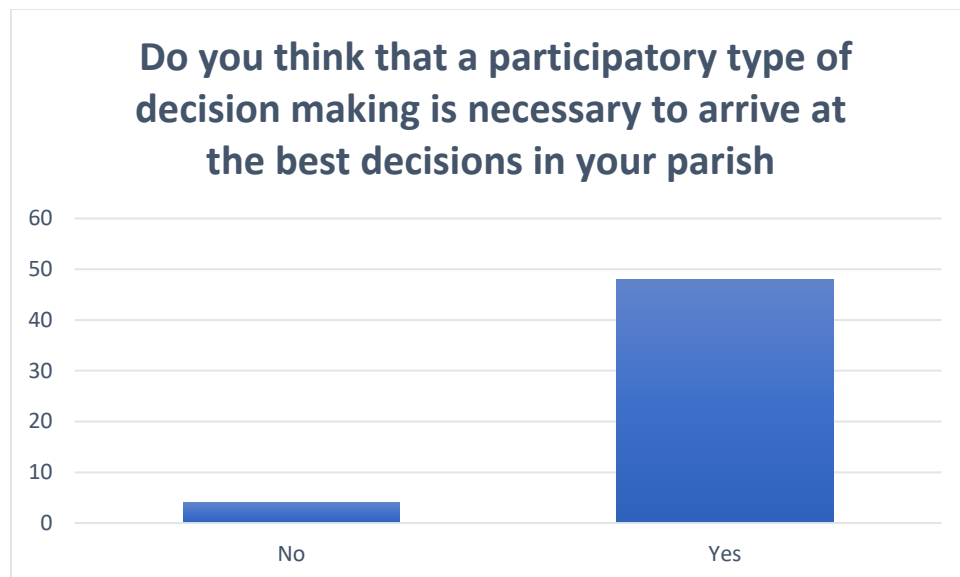


Table 18

The results of the question posed to participants convincingly revealed the necessity of a participatory decision-making process in parishes. 94% of those who participated highlighted the need for such a process. Individuals in various parishes would welcome such measures to ensure progress and growth amongst the community of believers. They would have recognized the importance of such a structure and appreciate the positive outcome that would be achieved from its implementation.

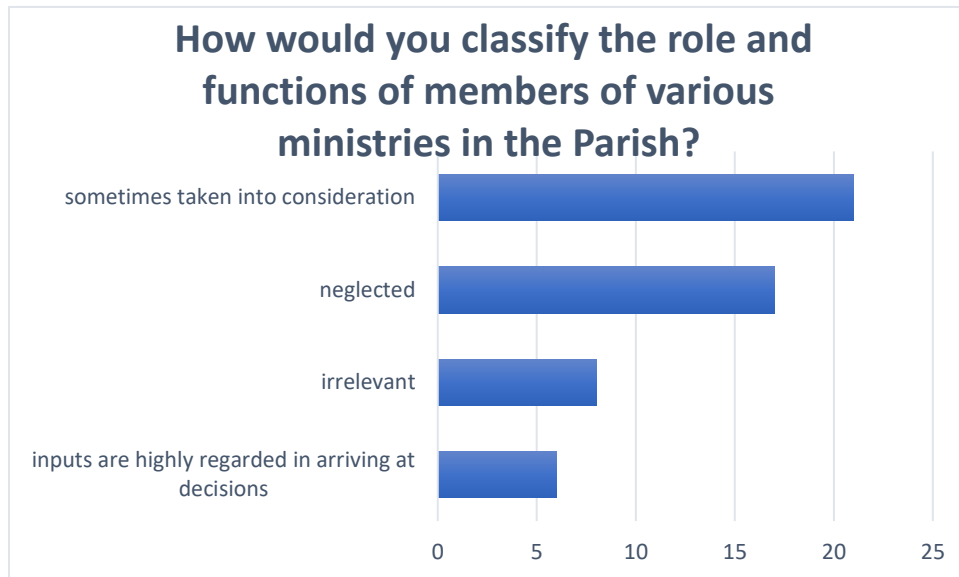


Table 19

The results regarding the roles and functions of members of various ministries in the parish highlighted that participatory decision making was not given prominence in Church affairs. Of the responses, the lowest responses (11%) claimed that inputs were highly regarded in arriving at decisions. The remaining 89% showed that Participatory decision making principles were not seriously practiced.

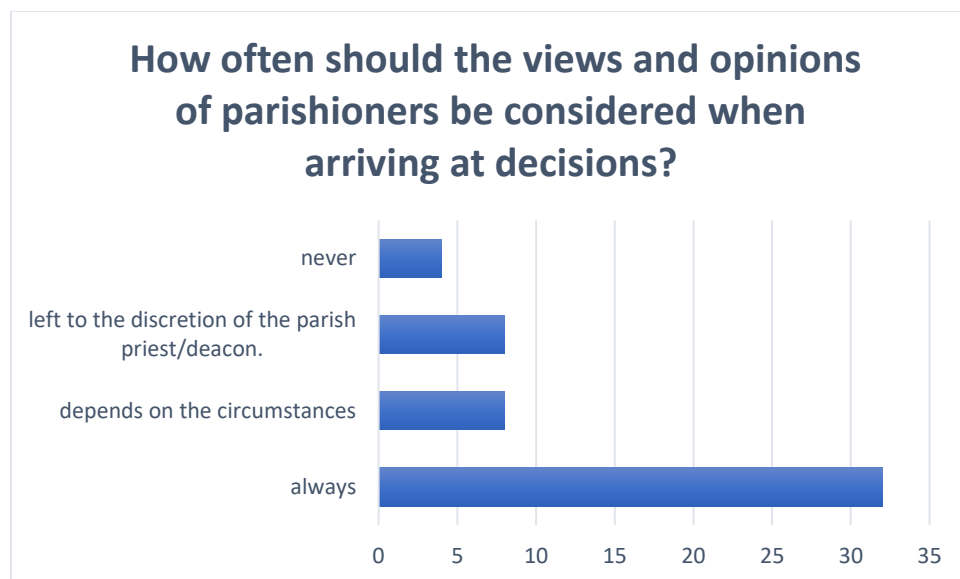


Table 20

The final graph shows the respondents' views on how often should the opinions of parishioners be considered when arriving at decisions within the parish. 62% of those sampled responded that there should always be consultation. It is impossible to seek the inputs and opinions of parishioners in all situations, hence others interviewed indicated that it would depend on the circumstances or left to the discretion of the parish priest or deacon. This strong belief of the need of inclusivity, together with the majority identifying as always, the need to consult, indicate that parishioners have a desire to be included at all times, in situations that affect their spirituality which the Church is expected to nurture and promote.

The interview conducted with the Parish Priest from one of the selected parishes, from which participants were sampled, revealed details regarding his views on participatory decision making. Father has been a Priest for the past twenty years and has served and administered in several Parishes across the Archdiocese of Port of Spain. His years of service towards God's people and experience with Parish affairs together with the intricacies of managing parish affairs, provided the unique and appropriate candidate for interviewing and gaining personal opinions on the topic of participatory decision making.

Father, when questioned about the parish council and its purpose and functioning, stated that he has always welcomed such a decision-making body and has worked in unison with its members. The issue, according to him, arises as regards competent individuals that are required to occupy the various positions on the council. He lamented that those selected to serve, using a democratic process, are done based on popularity and connections, rather than competence and skill. On many occasions, there was a wrong fit between the person selected and the positions they were nominated to occupy. The effects of such occurrences usually resulted in chaos and conflict, promoting division and further separation of the faithful. He boasted, however, that his choice and selection of suitable candidates ensured continuity and progress. Positions for the parish council were carefully selected by him, in many instances, competent individuals were placed in positions without a democratic process. He admonished the view of totalitarian control and the disregard for the opinions of others, insisting it was for the benefit of the wider community. He asserted that the function of the parish council was rather consultative rather than directing, and the choices that are

made can either gather his approval or disapproval, sine he is directly responsible for the affairs of the Parish.

According to Father, participatory decision making was encouraged as he always sought the opinion of the congregation on important issues. This was done through community meetings held impromptu or scheduled. He lamented the fact tough, that in many instances, when given the opportunity to express their opinion or state their views, many parishioners rarely contributed or offered their suggestions, resulting in many instances, the exercise being conducted in futility, and hence the desired outcomes became unachievable. When asked about the numbers of parishioners who attended such meetings, it was stated that attendance was minimal, with most instances, the same people would be in attendance. He insisted that the platform for participatory decision making was always part of his management style, but unfortunately, many had failed to cooperate and actively participate, given that the opportunity to do so was present.

When questioned regarding the possible reasons for the lack of participation, Father highlighted the fact that he always structured and planned meetings to accommodate most persons, which unfortunately failed to bring about desired outcomes and the level of participation he envisaged. Family commitments, lack of vested interest and concern, reduced attendance at Mass, together with personal issues were identified as possible causes for low participation and diminished interest in such meetings. When asked about using online platforms such as zoom and Google meets, to conduct and facilitate meetings, he responded by saying such avenues were explored, and initially some success was noted, but eventually a diminished participation was noted.

Father also noted that parishioners seemed more inclined towards participation in social events and fraternizing with fellow worshippers, as attendance at these social gatherings saw high attendance, compared to Church meetings. Such events included Harvest, Bingo, Church concerts

and fundraisers. Individuals, according to his response, had been gradually losing interest in Church affairs, adopting more towards the secular world and avenues for enjoyment through various social events and gatherings. According to Father, there is a distinct shift away spirituality towards that being offered by secular society.

Consensus and the views of parishioners would be sought in certain circumstances according to Father. Issues such as Church infrastructure and improvement, certain financial issues such as fundraisers, scheduling, and planning of various liturgical events, were some of the situations which the priest saw as requiring the input of wider community. He did agree that although consensus was sought, on many occasions he did exert autocratic influences in overturning decisions and granting permission or alternatively objections, to the execution of projects and activities. When questioned as to the reasons, he responded that in many instances such autocratic influence stemmed from personal beliefs as well as being guided by Church authorities and by established procedures. He did note that such autocratic influence was met with harsh criticism and vocal discontent by those opposed to such decisions, but he stood firm and did not allow the voices of disapproval to sway his decisions.

Father insisted that he was in support of participatory decision making thereby involving the views and opinions of the wider worshipping community, but such practices should never derail or limit the smooth functioning of the parish, as well as compromise the duties, roles, and functions of the Parish Priest. He shared the view of such practices affecting progress, as such consultations and seeking the views of the wider community are time consuming and difficult to coordinate. Father insisted that efficient communication channels need to be properly implemented and the challenges of miscommunication presented serious issues as information usually gets misconstrued and such misinterpretation often leads to conflict and confusion.

Father lamented the sad reality that in all the Parishes he had been deployed, there was a tendency to leave all activities involving planning, coordinating and implementation up to the Priest. Sadly, when plans are implemented, discontent and disapproval suddenly emerge and many respond negatively, by making wrong accusations challenging his governance style. He reiterated the lack of general participation and community involvement by many. He hoped that such situations would generally show improvement with the dialogue and discussion currently being undertaken with the ongoing Synod conversation.

CHAPTER THREE

Conclusion.

The investigation on participatory decision making within various Parishes revealed important findings which need to be highlighted. Emerging from the investigations, through the questionnaire and interview processes, it can be concluded that certain aspects of participatory decision making are being utilized, but such practices are limited and need improvement and further development. From the findings it can be concluded that there were differing views and beliefs regarding participatory decision making within the parishes. The process is utilized with apprehension and a degree of reservation, as the findings reveal, which may result in its full benefits being unrealized.

Research, and existing literature have determined the tremendous benefits that can be attained from utilization of such practices, as many of those sampled shared similar sentiments regarding its utilization. In comparison, however, disadvantages of employing such a process were identified as well. Employing such practices reduces error and limits poor quality decisions. It can be concluded however, from those sampled, that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages, as many have issued a highly supportive opinion for its proper utilization and full implementation.

There are benefits to be gained from the utilization of principles of such a process, as recognized by those polled. Tremendous benefits can be beneficial towards improving organizational strength and further development, especially in an unceasingly changing society amidst new emerging cultures and trends. The Church, as an organization with tremendous human resources and capital,

must continually be renewed both spiritually and with the adoption of new and familiar strategies and techniques. This, however, involves compromising and allowing others to exert influence.

The Church, despite its established hierarchical structure, does not exist in isolation, and its focus is geared towards bringing salvation to all of humanity. The functioning and the various arms of the organization are designed to operate in unison and pursue a common mission and objective, which unfortunately were not revealed in the findings. For participatory decision making to be effective, both the religious and the laity, need to work in harmony for the greater benefit of all, and the proliferation of Gospel values and ideals.

Overcoming such challenges in the implementation of participatory decision-making strategies is no easy accomplishment as it entails planning, organization, and restructuring. Implementation also involves dismantling established structures and rebuilding and reengineering new formats and techniques. Such procedures take considerable time and commitment by all involved for measurable change and improvement to be noted.

Recommendations

The implementation of participatory decision-making techniques is proven to bring measurable levels of improvement in the decisions, both in quality and accuracy, together with arriving at the best alternatives and precise solutions. Hence its adoption can reap rewards, for all those involved.

Initially there must be some level of introduction to new plans and practices, which involve educating and notifying those involved. The gradual implementation of certain aspects of the process is highly recommended. Sudden and swift changes on many occasions bring additional

stress and confusion. Every party involved must be given clear guidelines and procedures to follow and as far as possible stick to such plans, limiting alterations and personal adjustments.

In the implementation of any new strategies, importance must be emphasized on monitoring progress, and modifying strategies if obstacles and problems emerge. Participatory decision making and its many principles may often result in misinterpretation of new procedures. As such, constant reminders and reinforcement should be undertaken. The adoption of new strategies through the compromise of personal opinions promotes cohesion and sometimes limit discontent.

According to Monsignor Dinich, the present Church is rediscovering its original purpose, which is that it exists not for itself, but to evangelize. The laity are the people in the peripheries who exist in communion with others in a similar culture and environment. They are therefore the best candidates for this mission, which can be achieved through involvement and allowing them to fully participate in the decision-making processes of the Church.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Please click on the response which best answers the questions presented.

* Required

1. Kindly indicate your age range from the list presented *

☐ 17 to 30 years

☐ 30 to 45 years

☐ 45 to 60 years

☐ over 65 years

2. Kindly indicate your gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Which parish from the Eastern Vicariate do you fellowship (Mass or services)

- ☐ Arima
- ☐ San Rafael
- ☐ SangreGrande
- ☐ La Horquetta
- ☐ Maloney
- ☐ Manzanilla
- ☐ Mayaro
- ☐ toco

4. Are you involved in any ministry in your Parish?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. Is there a parish council established in your Parish?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't now

6. How often does the Parish Council meet?

- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Yearly
- ☐ Never
- ☐ when a situation arises
- ☐ don't know

7. How are members of the executive of the Parish Council elected?

- ☐ nominated and voted upon through a democratic process
- ☐ selected by the parish priest to serve
- ☐ volunteer
- ☐ don't know

8. How are issues that arise in the Parish solved?

- ☐ through the direct involvement of the priest
- ☐ through the intervention of committees
- ☐ from the assistance of lay persons
- ☐ don't know
- ☐ situations allowed to continue until issue dies a natural death

9. How are decisions made within the parish?

- ☐ All decisions are made by the parish priest
 - ☐ Through consensus and majority rule by members of the congregation
 - ☐ By selected individuals
 - ☐ don't know
-

10. How would you describe the actions of the parish priest as regards decision making?

- ☐ Autocratic (Does not take into consideration the opinions of others)
- ☐ Democratic (Consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of others)
- ☐ don't know
- ☐ Designates such decisions to others

11. Do you think that parishioners are given the opportunity to participate in decision making in the Parish

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

12. Do you believe that it is necessary for parishioners to influence decisions in their Parishes

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

13. How would you rate generally the outcome of the decisions that were made by the Parish Priest ?

- ☐ a positive outcome
- ☐ a negative outcome
- ☐ no change noted
- ☐ Neutral

14. Do you think that the outcome of such decisions in Question 13 would have been different if there was direct involvement by others

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

15. Whom in your opinion exerts the greatest influence on decision making in your parish?

- ☐ Parish Priest/Deacon
- ☐ Parish Council
- ☐ Lay persons/Leaders
- ☐ Don't know

16. How would you rate the overall functioning of the parish council in your Parish

- ☐ effective
- ☐ poor
- ☐ no impact
- ☐ there is no parish council body

17. Which of the following issues in your opinion require more involvement from parishioners in order to see change?

- ☐ fund raising/finance
- ☐ family life
- ☐ youth ministry
- ☐ catechist
- ☐ All of the above

18. Do you think that a participatory type of decision making is necessary to arrive at the best decisions in your parish

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. How would you classify the role and functions of members of various ministries in the Parish?

- ☐ neglected
- ☐ irrelevant
- ☐ inputs are highly regarded in arriving at decisions
- ☐ sometimes taken into consideration

20. How often should the views and opinions of parishioners be considered when arriving at decisions?

- ☐ never
- ☐ always
- ☐ depends on the circumstances
- ☐ left to the discretion of the parish priest/deacon.

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