

Red Box Qualitative Research: Summary Findings

June 2024



We've worked on this together for a long time...we're ready to ask Red Box holders

What's the role of Red Box in an increasingly cashless society?

Who did we talk to and how did we find them?

- We emailed 20,000 'Red Box holders' asking them to complete a short questionnaire if they were interested in taking part in research:
 - 438 people responded! (very high response rate)
- We put in some criteria (Red Box holder, location, age, gender) and spoke to 18 people in 12 dioceses
 - Via Zoom interview: 8 one to one; 5 paired interviews



We asked them about...

- Their relationship with Red Box and how it fitted into their life
- Their motivations for giving
- A list of statements that could be used to describe Red Box and the issues we're facing
- What advice they would give us





We showed participants a list of statements designed to elicit a response, rather than describe the work of Missio/Mill Hill Missionaries/the Red Box

Which statement(s) do you think would resonate most with parishioners?

*Clue: the ones in **red***

1. *“Giving to missionary work enables me to respond to the call to mission I received at baptism and because I can’t actually go overseas, I want to support the missionaries who do”*
2. *“I support missionary work because everyone deserves to hear the Gospel and the news that God loves them and I believe that if we truly lived as Jesus wants us to, the world would be a better place for everyone”*
3. *“I want to support missionary work to help the Church develop and grow overseas because I am worried about fewer people going to Church here”*
4. *“Being part of my own parish community is important to me and in supporting the missions I hope others can experience being part of a faith community too”*
5. *“Because I feel blessed to be a member of the Catholic family, I want the Catholic Church to continue to grow overseas, but I don’t want to force my faith on other people”*

1. Red Box builds up the Church so that the love of God can be shared with everyone
2. Red Box is a symbol of my faith and a physical reminder to hold missionaries and those they support in my prayers Red Box creates a vibrant Catholic Church for the future
3. Red Box provides missionaries with the support they need to enable local people to build and sustain their own faith communities
4. Red Box is a way of sharing my blessings with those in need overseas
5. Red Box builds communities around the Eucharist, enabling them to flourish

“I support missionary work because everyone deserves to hear the Gospel and the news that God loves them and I believe that if we truly lived as Jesus wants us to, the world would be a better place for everyone”

Strong insight that hits 4 x important support drivers

Supports missionary work

- Direct reference to missionary work
- And, direct about support
- Leads with declaring support – emphasizes this and can clearly identify with it

Everyone deserves to hear the Gospel & news God loves them

- Taps into deep desire for others to have access to Christian faith and message
- Tension around ‘deserving’ implying might not get to hear the Gospel and miss out profoundly
- Simply put: references Gospel and God’s love – not highbrow
- Gospel transmits how to be a good person and is a guiding light
- Offering access ‘deserves to hear’ not forcing the message – leans towards collaboration but could be more explicit

Belief if truly lived as Jesus wants us to

- Powerful belief – he led by example
- Shorthand for being kind to others, not putting self first or abusing power, humility
- Important for kids to grow up with Jesus’ values
- Sense of a better life
- Collaborative tone ‘we/us’ not ‘they/them’ (not othering) – but collaborative idea of sharing *with* could be dialed up even further
- Giving others Jesus as a model for life

The world would be a better place for everyone

- The only statement with a clear pay-off for humanity – a profound impact we would all benefit from
- Irrefutable
- Hopeful
- A shift away from turmoil, wealth/power grabbing, hardship borne of inequity, media othering and shaming

Red Box provides missionaries with the support they need to enable local people to build and sustain their own faith communities

Collaborative progressive purpose is very engaging

Red Box provides missionaries with the support they need

- Clear sense of directing support to missionaries
- Desire to support missionaries given they have a calling to give their lives to the priesthood/Religious life and all they do for people – sense of solidarity
- Leaving it open to missionaries to channel investment where it's needed – giving them agency to be effective

...to enable local people to build & sustain

- Strong partnership relationship via 'enabling'
- Hopeful: building and sustaining and future leaning
- Not relying upon a missionary who may be stretched across a large region – needs engagement of local community
- A distancing from colonial conversion power imbalance

...their own faith communities

- Ownership lies with local community members
- Sense they will play an active part in their communities and benefit from
- 'Faith' assumed to be Christian
- Emphasises faith which is relevant to supporters but not confined to faith – building and sustaining suggests Christianity in Action in living standards/infrastructure ways too

**We have two strong statements which resonate.
Both statements place missionary work centre stage**

“I support missionary work because everyone deserves to hear the Gospel and the news that God loves them and I believe that if we truly lived as Jesus wants us to, the world would be a better place for everyone”

Red Box provides missionaries with the support they need to enable local people to build and sustain their own faith communities

We should not lose sight of these as we talk about Red Box and continue to work on our future

Four strong themes emerged from the interviews

- Support and awe for Missionaries
- Modern Mission
- The Gospel at work
- A global Catholic family

Engagement with Red Box and the organisation is highly influenced by relationship level with missionary individuals

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“I hear from the missionary priests who all strike me exclusively as holy men. They rarely fail to mention the need to help meet the the material needs of their flock as well as spiritual” **Male, Older, Local co-ordinator**

“It’s something really, it’s needed and it’s worthwhile. And if you read the magazines, they’re overjoyed at what little they get and what they can do with it” **Female, Older, Ex-Local Sec**

“I think people who are able to do this kind of work, to be out there to work with other communities or to empower communities to work for themselves, I’m in admiration of people who can do that. Because I think it’s a very special calling” **Female, Older**

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higher
Red Box/Missio/MHF/APF engagement
lower

- 1 Personal encounters with Mill Hill Missionaries/other missionaries
- 2 Sponsoring an overseas seminarian
- 3 Following Missio/Mill Hill Missionaries/Columban work
- 4 A general passive awareness

Strong sense missionaries are the best ambassadors for the cause – they’re walking the walk

Spreading Christian faith through enabling people to have the option to become Christian is an important driver and different from past associations of missionary work

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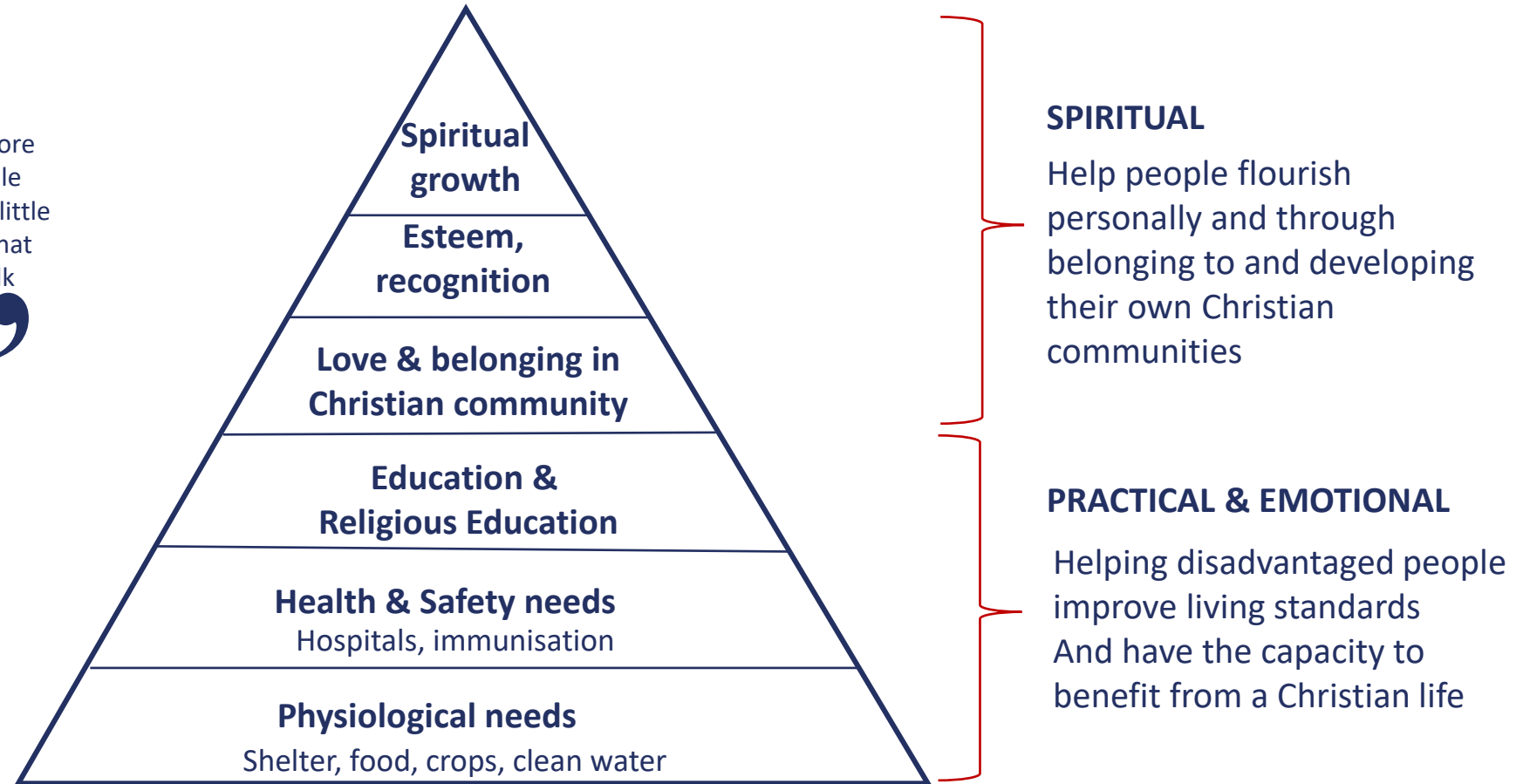
“I have first hand experience of what we call ‘rice Christians; so people who converted people for a bag of rice and used doing good deeds to promulgate the faith. And that’s not just Catholic, it’s been a sort of Christian thing and so I get hives every time I hear about it” **Female, Older**

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- Resistance to imposing Christianity or charity, or offering practical support conditionally in order to drive conversion to Christianity
- Modern mission is
 - Honouring people’s human dignity and resourcefulness
 - Avoiding ‘othering’ disadvantaged people
 - Ensuring local support and faith access is offered according to local people’s needs and wishes
 - Building communities and infrastructure with and through local people as stakeholders
- Motivations share faith can be:
 - To enable others to experience God’s love and know Jesus
 - Fellowship driven – want others to share experience of living and worshipping in the global Catholic family
 - To enable others to hear the Gospel
 - To make the world a better place through spreading Christian values and virtues

Supporting missionary work is considered a practice of faith: enabling others to experience the Gospel through deeds, words and fellowship; to know they are loved by God.

“It’s part of us here in the West in a rich country helping people who live much more simple lives...it’s part of helping out people with a lot less than you. Frankly it’s very little effort on your part. It’s just something that you should do ...you shouldn’t sort of walk past without doing it” **Male, Older**”



Enabling the Catholic family to keep growing overseas and potentially create new generations of priests to offer missionary support here can be welcomed

“

“Helping to spread the word of God in those countries where they have very little. We complain when churches close down or where I live we used to have four priests, now we’ve only got one priest...where you get one priest you have to cover several churches...they probably have one priest that covers practically the whole country so we shouldn’t really be complaining”

Female, Older, Ex-Local Sec

”

- Expansion of global Catholic **family** is more relevant than the Catholic Church *per se*
 - Prefer to think about the people who make up the Church coming together as a family
- Some do feel they **belong** to a global Catholic family
 - And there’s something special about this belonging that other Christian denominations perhaps miss out on
 - Most keenly felt by people born outside of the UK in India in our sample
- And this feels inclusive, rather than exclusive
 - Missionary work is about giving access to include people if they choose and welcoming them into the Catholic fold

However

- This is in sharp contrast to the prospect of growing the Catholic Church as an institution which can cause discomfort and brings up issues around:
 - Vatican wealth which can jar in the context of supporting disadvantaged people
 - Previous conduct of Catholic priests, nuns and not being held to account

In addition

- Training missionary priests brings hope there will be future generations of priests who may be able to support UK parishes
 - The shortage of priests and services/Masses is keenly felt in some parishes currently

But what about the future?



For some it's an obsolete collection box, for others it's more than just a box...

Functional & unique & meaningful

Overall sense, our contributors tend to relate to the box more here...

Obsolete ← *Lapsed tend to associate relinquishing box with Covid driving shift in behaviour away from cash*

...or relate to the box more here



→ **Some current relevance**

Functional

Functional & unique & meaningful

- A long standing valued traditional aspect of homes, faith and charitable giving.
- Imbued with nostalgia
- Kept missionaries, far flung countries and to some extent recipients front of mind and some did pray for
- Some local secretaries enjoy outreach opportunity: visiting housebound parishioners thereby maintaining their contact with the church/community

- Distinctive
- Clearly associated with the missions and Mill Hill
- There's nothing quite like it
- A tangible presence that's not out of sight/out of mind like direct debit and thus a reminder of/to:
 - Feeling blessed/fortunate in life
 - Help and pray for others
 - Support and appreciate missionaries
 - Support the recipients of missionary endeavor
 - The world being bigger than our parish
 - Keep contributing

Obsolete

- Don't have the coins to fill it anymore; it's redundant
- Box returners can feel guilt/sadness around not filling it and that a loss of the joy of contributing
- No longer have the satisfying 'moments of truth' of:
 - Emptying pockets and purses of coins before bed/at end of week/on way into home
 - An easy and briefly mindful act of giving
 - The routine of putting coins in and the agency to top up just before hand over to feel made a solid contribution
 - Encouraging young children to give over their pennies and think of others/appreciate their good fortune
 - Feeling it heavy when handed over/seeing or hearing of the total



Some current relevance

- Some Local Secretaries aware some elderly parishioners still using cash
- Church vestibule placement may attract some coins post Mass
- Young children enjoy collecting coin donations and rattling a box

Functional

There is a tension between the *box* and the *cause*



- On balance people have a sense the box is **obsolete**
- And those who still have one or recently gave theirs up can **feel it became/becoming impotent**
- The **simplicity, ease and moments of satisfaction of being a contributor/Local Secretary have faded**
- Sense it **doesn't have the power to make an impact** that it used to because change isn't accumulating
- There can be some **sadness and discomfort (possibly borne out of guilt)** that cash carrying behaviour change has disrupted the easy contribution flow

- The **cause continues to be relevant** the *need* can seem **more relevant than ever before**, given how much disadvantage and faith oppression exists in our world today
- There is a **strong desire to support**
- Switchers to direct debit **do still feel they are supporting** and making an impact if they have read Missio communications BUT...
 - **they have lost the many small satisfactions of putting away coins and the bigger satisfaction of handing over a full box...**
 - They have **less agency and less involvement** as contributors so they are **losing the practice** of briefly mindful charitable acts, and the frequency of **emotional and spiritual benefit of giving**

Considering ongoing Red Box presence in homes...

- There is still some desire to continue having a Red Box for collection purposes but needs quantifying
- If a different physical reminder of missionaries is offered, there are potential losses/wins to consider:

Losses

- If perceived wasteful or a physical burden
- If lacks some utility – being symbolic may not be enough
 - Current box’s meaningful nature is secondary to its utility
- If seems quaint/old-fashioned
- If not distinctive

Wins

- Encourages ongoing donations
- Reminder of:
 - Missio/Mill Hill Missionaries
 - Missionaries, their work, the people helped, the communities building, the world being bigger
 - Option to pray for missions
 - The enduring presence of Red Box within homes
- A sense of an evolving progressive organisation

It was hard for people to come up with suggestions that were focused on fundraising

Tapping machines:

- Collectors
- Placed at Church
- Providing the option to contribute after Mass when entering (priming)

Gift Aid on box:

Option to add to on box label

Offer a **new physical reminder to donate in homes**

And **pray** for missions (Isolated mention)

Have a **coin amnesty** before loose change gone from homes

Switch Red Box holders over to direct debit actively

via home visits from Local Secretaries

Sense limited window of time before boxes given up

Add Apple/Android Pay & PayPal to donations page on website

Place **boxes in Catholic schools**

Create cardboard Red Boxes for **kids' fundraising events**

In summary



The three big things to take away

1. Red Box holders have a deep love and an affinity for missionary work, there is a sense of loss around Red Box and a very strong desire to continue to support because everyone deserves to hear the Gospel and the news that God loves them – If we lived as Jesus wants us to the world would be a better place for everyone
2. Connecting donors to missionaries is crucial: when a parishioner has a connection with a missionary – through friendship, understanding, hearing their stories their admiration and love can last a lifetime – they are a rare example of the Gospel at work
3. There is a sadness amongst supporters that the Red Box has become redundant. They understand our plight but don't have any solutions. Solutions must compensate for the loss of the Red Box in homes and its power to build communities and connect us to the global Catholic family