



## Article

# Religiosity of Polish Catholics in the UK: Attitude towards Faith, Affiliation, Membership and Religious Practices

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**Abstract:** This paper is based on sociological quantitative studies carried out in 2019 on a sample of 620 Polish Catholics living in London, Swindon, or Oxford. Those studies and their findings are limited only to those Catholics who make up the communities around major Polish institutions in the UK, such as Polish parishes, Saturday schools, and community houses. The goal of this paper is to describe selected aspects of Polish migrants' religiosity in the new social and cultural milieu. What we focus on here is how Poles themselves describe their faith, how they understand and evaluate their membership of parishes or other religious communities, and how they approach religious practices, especially Sunday Mass attendance. We address the following questions: how do the Poles living abroad describe their attitudes towards faith? How many of them are active members of Polish parishes? What do their religious practices and membership of other community organisations look like? How do specific factors affect the results across these areas?

**Keywords:** migrants; Polish Catholics; religiosity; affiliation; religious practices

## 1. Introduction

With United Kingdom leaving the European Union (Brexit), there are a number of economic and socio-cultural changes to be expected. Many economic migrants are considering a return to their homelands. A large group among those are Polish Catholics. It was those migrants, among others, who helped revive Catholicism in the UK. Statistics clearly show that, in the UK, Sunday church services are attended by more Catholics than Anglicans, not only percentage-wise, but also in absolute numbers, even though Catholics are a religious minority ([UK Church Statistics 2018](#)). The British religious landscape has clearly been shaped also by the Catholics from Poland. Currently, the UK has about five million Catholics, who represent about 8.0% of its population, with approximately one million going to church regularly ([Christian Research 2018](#)). For instance, after 2004, i.e., following Poland's accession to the European Union, as Polish economic migrants began to come to the UK, the number of Sunday Mass attendees in North London grew tenfold, which resulted in the need to increase the number of Sunday liturgies. During that time, approximately 15.0% of Poles attended such services ([Romejko 2015](#), p. 516). Catholic practices became more stable, not only as a result of Polish migrants' influx into the UK, but as Poles return back home, the number of practicing Catholics in the UK can be expected to decrease in the near future ([Christian Research 2018](#)).

In some parish churches, Poles have the opportunity to participate once a month in a service held in Polish, while other Sundays Masses are held in English. For example, a survey conducted in 2010–2011 among Poles who came to the local church to attend Easter food blessing in the Maidstone

parish, South East England, showed that the regular attendance at Masses in Polish—or in English on the Sundays when the Polish Mass is not available—was declared by 13.1% of respondents. A slightly higher number of respondents (14.3%) admitted that they participated in a Polish Mass every month, and only occasionally in a Mass in English on other Sundays. The proportion of those attending every month only the Mass held in Polish was 16.6%, while those attending such Masses irregularly accounted for 14.3%. Every one in four respondents (25.0%) admitted that they did not attend Sunday Masses at all, everyone in twenty (4.8%) did so occasionally, whatever the language of the Mass, and 2.4% of Poles attended Masses in English churches regularly. There were no data for 9.5% (Krotofil 2013, p. 135).

Based on 71 in-depth interviews conducted between 2008 and 2013, Kerry Gallagher and Marta Trzebiatowska concluded that some Poles continue practicing religion the same way they used to before they emigrated. Others start questioning their faith and, in consequence, completely abandon all obligatory religious practices. Yet others take advantage of the opportunity to practice religion in their native tongue—for the majority of them Polish as the language of liturgy is a crucial precondition of their attendance at a Sunday Mass (Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017).

A study carried out in Hertfordshire among Polish Catholics has produced some interesting insights. It found that the majority of migrants (28.7%) participated in religious practices on an irregular basis, i.e., nearly every week (11.8%) or about once a month (16.9%). The largest group was represented by Poles who declared involvement in religious practices only several times a year (27.8%)—they generally attended only the major Christian festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, and occasionally weddings or funerals. One in ten respondents (9.7%) participated in religious practices less than once a year, and 8.4% were not going to church at all (Kapinos 2018, p. 138).

In 2018, Stephen Bullivant, a British sociologist and theologian, used aggregate data from the European Social Survey<sup>1</sup>, to compile a report on the religious affiliation and practice among young adults, aged 16–29. The report shows that the frequency of attendance at religious services, outside of special occasions, for young adults from Poland is nearly five times as high as that of their British peers (39.0% vs. 7.0%). The frequency of prayer outside of religious services is also higher for Poles than for Brits (50.0% vs. 18.0%) (Bullivant 2018, p. 7).

With their devotion to Catholicism, Poles in the UK are an interesting element of the religious and cultural melting pot of British society. The very religiosity and religious practices of Poles abroad have undergone a rather curious evolution; hence, the goal of this article is to describe some selected aspects of this religiosity. What we will focus on here is how Poles themselves describe their faith, how they describe and evaluate their membership of parish and other religious communities, and how they approach religious practices, and especially Sunday Mass attendance. This study and its findings are limited only to those Catholics who make up the communities around major Polish institutions in the UK, such as Polish parishes and parish organisations, schools, and community houses. Such purposive sampling seems justified for two reasons, namely the need to examine the specific group of Polish migrants who are integrated around Catholic/social organisations abroad, and the possibility of contacting respondents. Based on the results of our own sociological study conducted in three locations in England (London, Oxford, and Swindon) in the autumn of 2019, in this article we will address the following questions: how do the Poles living there and making up the Polish communities abroad describe their attitudes towards faith? How many of them are active members of the Polish parishes? What do their religious practices and membership of other community organisations look like?

### 1.1. Polish Catholic Parishes in England

The Polish-language parishes constitute the oldest institutional form of bringing together the Polish diaspora in the UK. They operate as a part of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales, and have their own structure, authority, and priests. What contributed to the development of the Polish ministry

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<sup>1</sup> European Social Survey ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)).

abroad was the local legal situation and the need to establish local communities based on different forms of engagement, not only pastoral (Romejko 2015), but also cultural. The involvement of the faithful with Polish-language parishes, which—of all Polish community institutions abroad—continue to attract the largest numbers of migrants from Poland (Krotofil 2013), means a broadly-defined affiliation with such institutions and participation in their decision-making, including policy development to define future directions for, and objectives behind, their growth (Legutko-Kobus 2018). Elżbieta Firlit has identified several traditional modes of social participation in the functioning of Polish parishes, including a strictly religious mode, associated with liturgy and receiving of the sacraments; the mode of priest visits—regular visits by priests to lay people at their homes; the catechistical mode—religious instruction; the association mode—parish organisations; the mode of parish microstructures, such as administration, pastoral, and economic councils; the economic mode concerning parish infrastructure and its maintenance, often in the form of voluntary service; the mode of interaction with official representatives of various social, administrative, or service-related institutions; the mode of educational or cultural projects implemented by church bodies, often in or around church buildings, in partnership with people of science, theatre, or art; the pilgrimage mode; the mass media mode; and the foundation and association mode (Firlit 2010, pp. 279–80). Each of the above-mentioned areas where the Polish Catholics in the UK are active provides a natural substrate for building the social and human capital, including, in particular, a sub-capital known as the moral capital. This capital includes such virtues as fairness, honesty, reliability, reciprocity, conscientiousness, and helpfulness, which are crucial for any social group to be able to function normally (Wódka 2017). In this sense, the moral capital plays a role in the membership of any human community, and parish in particular.

Polish Catholic parishes in the UK are perceived as well-organised communities with a large number of believers, but the internal force that consolidates such communities is weaker for migrants. The reason for this is the rapidly changing axionormative consensus, and the diminishing power of social control (Mariański 2015). Consequently, as people tend to identify less with the parish, the community undergoes atomisation. Involvement in the life of the parish becomes passive and selective in relation to its pastoral and integration/social options, and over time its members start treating it like a service provider rather than a community. Janusz Mariański argues that an antidote to this could be various initiatives, not only pastoral, through which parishioners could grow to become more involved in the life of the parish, identify with it, and share its affairs and problems (Mariański 2008).

Affiliation with a parish does not always mean religious affiliation or a self-declaration of faith, and this can also be observed among Polish migrants. There are a number of intermediate categories, such as agnosticism and religious indifference. A declaration of having no affiliation with any parish does not have to mean irreligion, and conversely, affiliation with a specific religious community or parish does not mean a passionate interest in matters related to religion and religiosity. Therefore, people can be outwardly religious while virtually never reflecting on the essence of their faith. On the other end of the spectrum, there are a growing number of atheists who pay a lot of attention to spiritual and existential matters, or show a certain determination in their search for answers to questions addressed by theology (Kozak 2015). What we mean by this is a number of phenomena referred to as *the new spirituality*.

## 1.2. Religiosity among Migrants

Stephen Bullivant has observed that the percentage of people aged 16–29 who identified themselves as Catholics was 82.0% for Poland, and only 10.0% for the UK (Bullivant 2018, p. 8). Grace Davie, a British sociologist of religion, who has studied religiosity among British people for many years, describes this phenomenon as *believing without belonging* (Davie 1993, p. 88), and argues that typical Christian involvement with the Church generally comes down to customs associated with Catholic traditions. Furthermore, based on earlier works of Abby Day, Davie says: “those whom she terms ‘natal’ Christians are not, for the most part, concerned with either belief or practice; they do however

assume a connection between their religious affiliation, expressed in Church of England baptism, and Englishness. It was for this reason that many of them checked the box 'Christian' in the 2001 Census" (Davie 2015, pp. 92–93).

In order to understand the religiosity of Poles and the frequency of their religious practices, which are unique Europe-wide, it is important to consider the position of the Catholic Church, and Catholicism in general, in their country of origin. In Poland, Catholic parishes have become woven into the local fabric (city/town, commune, village, or district), not only geographically, but also socially and culturally. Roman Catholics represent more than 85% of the country's population. Many of them are involved in the life of their parish on an everyday basis. A recent study has shown that in 2018 the percentage of people regularly attending Sunday Mass (*dominantes*) was 38.2%, and the percentage of people receiving the Eucharist (*communicantes*) was 17.3% (ISKK 2020).

Some of the Poles in the UK constitute a kind of endoethnic community focusing on its own socio-cultural system. What makes up their identity are many links to places from their past, including affiliation with some parish in their country of origin (Kapinos 2018). As they leave their previous home, migrants miss everything that is Polish, and this is probably why there are so many Polish Catholic parishes abroad. This is where Poles find "a piece of their homeland". In Polish communities abroad, they can join their fellow countrymen to celebrate personal or family events (birthdays, name-days, wedding anniversaries), religious festivities (religious holidays, including Christmas, Easter, baptism, and First Communion), or national celebrations (anniversaries of various historical events considered important for the state or the nation). All these make up a steady and inherent part of their ethnic culture, and it becomes particularly important for emigrant communities to celebrate these. Many Poles abroad tend to celebrate holidays of religious origin (Kapinos 2018). Of course, those claims concern some Poles and should not be generalised to all Polish migrants in the UK.

### 1.3. Parish Membership

In Poland, social involvement is generally growing. The Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) has asked Poles about such things as their active membership of charities and communities for almost twenty years now. The number of positive answers among all respondents has doubled over these two decades, from 3.6% in 1998 to 7.9% in 2018. Nearly two in three (66.0%) of those who practise their religion several times a week are members of at least one such organisation. For people practising once a week, this percentage is 44.0%; once or twice a month, 42.0%; several times a year, 42.0%; and among the non-practising, 36.0% (Bożewicz 2020, p. 6). Studies clearly show also that the increase in the frequency of religious practices and growing involvement with social organisations are intercorrelated.

This is similarly true for studies of Catholic parish members, in that religious and social involvement are correlated. Negative answers to the question about such involvement were given by only 7.0% of the respondents who went to church several times a week, by 20.0% of those practising once a week, and by about one in four (from 24.0 to 28.0%) of those practising rarely or never. Those who practise their religion (i.e., go to church) several times a week, were also more likely to be willing to do volunteer work for their community, including their parish (34.0%). This was true for nearly one in four of those practising once a week (23.0%), only 18% of those practising irregularly and occasionally, and one in nine (11.0%) of the non-practising (Boguszewski 2016, p. 127).

This seems to be quite different for Polish Catholics living abroad as migrants whose parish involvement is more likely to be passive. Marcin Lisak has studied the involvement of Polish Catholics in parish communities in the UK and Ireland. He describes this involvement as being typically characterised by the passive participation of laypersons in the life of their parish (Lisak 2010). This is similar to other Western European countries and the USA. Polish Catholics are not likely to engage in the work of Polish community organisations or Church centres abroad. A 2013 study showed that only 11.9% of them were involved with such organisations, and as many as 40.5%, despite formally being members of Polish parishes, were not interested in becoming involved in their functioning (47.5% not

applicable/no data) (Fiń and Nowak 2015, p. 153). In that study, its authors reported that the level of respondents' involvement with their own immigrant community was correlated with such factors as time and length of their emigration. Active attitudes predominated among those who had left Poland prior to the country's political transformation. In this group, one in three respondents (33.6%) declared engagement with Polish community organisations abroad, while, among the post-accession migrants, this was true only for 19.0%. The level of involvement in the life of the immigration community was also higher among the respondents who had stayed abroad for more than five years, with nearly one in four declaring such involvement (24.1%). The lowest percentage of those actively participating in the life of the immigration community was among people from the middle age groups, 24–34 and 35–44 (Fiń and Nowak 2015, p. 153).

In a 2018 analysis of a qualitative study on the participation areas among Poles in the UK, some respondents declared their membership of religious organisations operating within Polish parishes. Two approaches were identified when this membership was analysed—for some people, such membership was a dynamic opportunity to join pro-social activities initiated within the parish, while others approached social participation in the parish solely as a space for religious practices, and a place where Polish diaspora could organise (Szymczak 2018). Dynamic involvement means practising every day to meet the needs of the parish related to the liturgical year and current events, while in the other case, participation is generally not connected with the desire to be part of what happens in the parish. Both forms of involvement and possible contribution to Polish parishes abroad provide individuals with emotional, cognitive, and spiritual support, and create opportunities for people who struggle with the day-to-day life as migrants to establish meaningful relationships (Szymczak 2018).

One of the goals behind our study was to determine how many Poles in the selected locations in England were actively involved in what happened in their Polish parish and other Polish diaspora communities abroad. The study did not cover their population as a whole, since this would not be easy to complete, given how dispersed the Poles are in the UK. This was observed by Jakub Isański, who observed in relation to that fact that: (1) we do not know the exact number of migrants living in specific locations, and all statistical data are only estimates, which is also related to the fluid nature of migration itself (this is especially true for the most recent migration); (2) there is increased domestic migration within the destination country; (3) migrants have been returning home; (4) working on a shift basis makes it difficult for many migrants to keep in touch with their parish; (5) loose affiliation with the parish, e.g., for married couples from mixed religions or nationalities; and (6) diverse and subjective approaches to the relationship between migrants and Polish parishes (Isański 2019). For migrants, on many levels, religiosity can atrophy (Davie 2015), and the new religious identity that emerges as a result is often described as “lapsed Catholic” (Trzebiatowska 2010, p. 83). Therefore, there is no direct correlation between being a Pole and being an actively practising Catholic in the UK.

## 2. Data and Methods

The analyses that follow are based on collective results of our study based on a group-administered questionnaire. This sociological study was conducted in late September/early October 2019, on a purposive sample of 620 Polish Catholics living in London, Oxford, or Swindon. The study was carried out in major Polish community centres in these locations, i.e., Polish Saturday schools (parents, employees), Polish community Catholic parishes, and Polish centres within parishes. This method seems optimal for migration conditions, where it is difficult to reach each respondent on an individual basis. While this sample might not be representative, purposive sampling has been successfully used in many social science studies designed to, e.g., forecast developments in social structures across their many dimensions (Kozak 2015). From the methodological perspective, this approach is correct, provided that extreme care is exercised when generalising the findings to the population as a whole (Jabkowski 2015), but with this study, we decided not to make such generalisations. It is important to remember that, in 2019, the number of Poles in the UK was about 827,000, while other sources report this number to be more than a million (Clark 2020).

## 2.1. How Polish Catholics Abroad Describe Their Faith

The British approach to religious freedom and tolerance, developed over centuries, is consistent with a more general model of cultural pluralism. This is supported by the influx of migrants. As a result, British society becomes more culturally and religiously diverse, which, in turn, requires research perspectives to be constantly updated (Kurcewicz 2015). Some sociologists who have explored religiosity among Polish migrants to the UK have claimed that their faith has become individualised. Many Polish migrants have started to approach faith as a personal experience, not as closely related to customs, national historical and patriotic events, and national culture, as it is in Poland. Religious experience has become personalised and individualised. Such Catholicism among migrants can be characterised by less frequent religious practices, separation from national traditions, and weakening of inherited religious identity, but the quality of such faith, which becomes a more conscious act, can improve (Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017).

Migration can free many people from the social pressure associated with practising one's faith. However, this does not mean that religion is unimportant for Polish Catholic migrants. For many of them, migration raises questions about the meaning and direction of their goals in life, and encourages them to reconsider their attitudes towards religion. For the majority of the respondents, their relationship with the transcendent plays a very important role in building their identity. God is important as someone who controls the world and guides the life of each individual. A relationship with God provides protection against the chaos of chance and gives meaning to life's experiences. The institutional aspect of religion does not play such an important role in the development of such a relationship between the individual and God, as it does in the case of ritual religiosity. However, religious individualism is manifested through the search for, and discovery of, transcendence (Adamczyk 2018).

In our sociological study, we asked respondents to describe their faith. Six in ten respondents (59.0%) described themselves as religious, and one in four (26.3%) as deeply religious. One in eleven (8.9%) described their attitude towards faith as undecided but attached to religious traditions. Similar percentages were recorded for no answer (2.1%), religiously indifferent (1.9%), and non-religious (1.8%).

Table 1 shows how respondents from the different locations where the study was conducted described their attitudes towards religion:

**Table 1.** Which of the following best describes your attitude towards faith and religion?

Possible Answers	Swindon		Oxford		London	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Deeply religious	50	21.5	69	35.0	43	22.8
Religious	137	58.8	116	58.9	113	59.8
Undecided but attached to religious traditions	23	9.9	8	4.1	24	12.7
Indifferent	6	2.6	2	1.0	4	2.1
Non-religious	5	2.1	1	0.5	5	2.6
No answer	12	5.2	1	0.5	-	-
Total	233	100.0	197	100.0	189	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 20.813; df = 8; p = 0.008; C = 0.182.$$

The percentages of religious and deeply religious people by age group were as follows:  $\geq 50$ : 45.5% and 53.0%; 40–49: 62.8% and 27.2%; 30–39: 61.0% and 24.2%; and  $< 30$ : 61.8% and 14.7%, respectively. The number of undecided but attached to religious traditions decreased with age (11.8% for  $> 30$ -year-olds; 11.0% for 30–39-year-olds; 7.3% for 40–49-year-olds; 1.5% for those aged 50 or more). Religious indifference was declared by 5.9% of respondents aged 30 or less, nearly half as many (2.7%) 30-to-39-year-olds, and only one 40-to-49-year-old (0.5%). There were nearly twice as many non-religious respondents among the youngest study participants as there were among those in their forties (4.4% for those aged less than 30, and 2.1% for 40–49-year-olds); and there were only three such

answers among people in their thirties (1.1%). One person aged under 30 (1.5%) did not provide any answer (no data) ( $\chi^2 = 43.789$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.263$ ).

Job type produced the following differences between respondents—two in three blue-collar workers (64.2%), and more than half white-collar workers (56.9%), described themselves as religious. One in four blue- and white-collar workers (25.9% and 25.3%, respectively) described themselves as deeply religious, and the answer *Undecided, but attached to religious traditions* was given by one in nine (10.9%) white-collar workers and one in thirteen (7.6%) blue-collar workers. Religious indifference was recorded for similar numbers of respondents across the two job types (1.8% for white-collar, and 1.7% for blue-collar), but the number of the non-religious was twelve times as high among white-collar workers (3.6%) as it was among blue-collar workers (0.3%) ( $\chi^2 = 10.774$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = 0.030$ ;  $C = 0.137$ ).

Respondents representing different levels of English-language proficiency also described their faith differently. Nearly two thirds of the respondents who described themselves as being intermediate English speakers or having a working knowledge of the language, considered themselves religious (65.9% and 61.9%, respectively). The same was true for more than a half (54.5%) of those describing their English skills as fluent, and for 48.7% of respondents having poor or no knowledge of English. Declarations of being deeply religious were recorded most often among people with poor or no knowledge of the language (43.6%), much less frequently among those with a working knowledge of English (26.9%), and for every fourth person who was intermediate or fluent in English (25.1% and 24.8%, respectively). The number of respondents who were undecided but attached to religious traditions was twice as high for those considering themselves fluent English speakers as it was for those with a working or intermediate knowledge of English, and nearly five times as high compared to people with poor or no English language skills (12.8%, 7.5%, 7.1%, and 2.6%, respectively). We found more respondents who considered themselves religiously indifferent but attached to religious traditions among those with a poor or no knowledge of English than in the group of fluent English speakers or those with a working knowledge of the language (5.1%, 3.5%, and 0.7%, respectively) ( $\chi^2 = 28.071$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ;  $C = 0.211$ ).

Some interesting results were obtained for *Involvement with Polish community organisations abroad*. Two in three respondents (68.5%) moderately involved with such organisations considered themselves religious. This number was much lower (59.1%) among those with low or no involvement, and for those with active or very deep involvement, it was one in two (50.3%). As respondents became more actively involved, they were also more likely to be deeply religious (low or no involvement 21.5%, moderate involvement 23.3%, active or deep involvement 40.0%). The percentage of the undecided but attached to religious traditions was twice as high for people with low or no involvement, compared to those actively or deeply involved, and three times as high in relation to those describing their involvement as moderate (13.2%, 5.5%, and 3.4%, respectively). Religious indifference was declared by eleven respondents with low or no involvement, and one person from the actively or deeply involved group (3.6% and 0.7%, respectively), and the smallest number of the non-religious was found among those with low or no involvement (1.7%), with similar percentages across the other groups (2.1% each) ( $\chi^2 = 38.839$ ;  $df = 8$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.250$ ).

It is important to note that, in our study, we identified a correlation between how respondents described their faith, and their involvement with Polish community organisations abroad. As many as two in three (68.5%) respondents who reported moderate involvement with such organisations, and every other (50.3%) among those actively or deeply involved, considered themselves as religious. Even more distinctive was that, as respondents became more actively involved, they were also more likely to be deeply religious (low or no involvement 21.5%, moderate involvement 23.3%, active or deep involvement 40.0%).

## 2.2. Membership of Polish Parishes in the UK

As part of this study, we analysed the sense of membership of a Polish parish as a religious community. Respondents were asked about their membership of Polish Catholic parishes, which in

the studied locations operate as part of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (Table 2). In addition, they were also asked about the nature of this membership, as shown in the table. For positive answers, the percentages were almost identical (*I am a member and I am actively involved*—34.3%; *I am a member but I am not that involved*—34.2%). A slightly lower number of respondents (28.9%) answered that they were not members of Polish Catholic missions, and missing answers represented 2.6%.

**Table 2.** Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales is the largest Polish community organisation that brings together Poles in the UK. Are you a member of a Polish parish in England or Wales?

Possible Answers	Swindon		Oxford		London	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I am not	51	21.9	56	28.4	72	38.1
I am a member, but I am not that involved	85	36.5	71	36.0	56	29.6
I am a member and I am actively involved	88	37.8	65	33.0	59	31.2
No answer	9	3.9	5	2.5	2	1.1
Total	233	100.0	197	100.0	189	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 12.517; df = 4; p = 0.014; C = 0.143.$$

In the study, we asked respondents not only about their membership of Polish parishes, but also about the nature of such membership. The answer *I am a member, but I am not that involved* was considered to correspond to *passive membership*. The answer *I am a member and I am actively involved* was considered to mean *active membership*. The highest number of people from the group characterised by *active membership* was recorded among migrants with higher education (bachelor's degree 38.1%; master's degree 35.0%), and slightly less for those having general or technical secondary or post-secondary education (32.5%), and those with primary or vocational education (31.3%). Reverse proportions were found for passive membership (general or technical secondary or post-secondary education, 42.6%; primary or vocational education, 39.6%; bachelor's degree, 33.9%; and master's degree, 26.9%). More educated people were less likely to be members of parishes (master's degree, 36.8%; bachelor's degree, 27.1%; general or technical secondary or post-secondary education, 22.5%; primary or vocational education, 27.1%) ( $\chi^2 = 17.073$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = 0.009$ ;  $C = 0.166$ ).

Similar to education, job type also produced statistically significant differences between respondents. Active membership of Polish parishes was declared by 35.1% of blue-collar workers and by 31.0% of white-collar workers, passive membership by four in ten blue-collar workers (39.9%) and by three in ten white-collar workers (30.7%), and no membership was much more likely to be declared by white-collar than blue-collar workers (37.2% vs. 22.9%) ( $\chi^2 = 13.706$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ;  $C = 0.156$ ).

People with poor or no knowledge of English were the most likely to describe themselves as active members (43.6%). This was true for a slightly lower number of those having good or working knowledge of English (38.4% and 35.1%, respectively), while fluent speakers of English were the least likely to be actively involved (29.2%). Passive membership was reported by one in four respondents with working knowledge of English (39.6%), slightly less intermediate speakers (36.0%), one in three of those having poor or no English language skills (33.3%), and rarely by those fluent in English (31.0%) ( $\chi^2 = 19.198$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ;  $C = 0.176$ ).

Involvement with Polish parishes proved to be strongly correlated with involvement with other Polish communities and organisations abroad. As respondents became more actively involved in what happened in their parish, they were also more likely to support other Polish community organisations in the UK—low or no involvement, 23.1%; moderate involvement, 37.0%; active or deep involvement, 57.2%. Involvement with other Polish community organisations abroad decreased in passive membership of Polish parishes—low or no involvement, 43.6%; moderate involvement, 34.2%; active or deep involvement, 19.3%. Similar observations were made for the declared non-membership

of any Polish parish (32.3%, 27.4%, and 22.1%, respectively). No data was recorded for about 1% in each group ( $\chi^2 = 53.186$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.288$ ).

Active membership of Polish parishes increased along with the length of stay abroad—up to 10 years 29.5%, between 10 and 20 years 36.3%, more than 20 years 57.1%. The percentage of passive members proved to be nearly three times higher for the migrants staying in the UK the shortest, compared to those who had stayed there the longest (35.5% for 10–20 years, 35.0% for less than 10 years, and 9.5% for more than 20 years).

### 2.3. Religious Practices among Polish Migrants in the UK

Poles who practise their religion represent a major part of the Polish community in the UK, and are the ones who make up the Polish diaspora and influence its cultural, moral, and—obviously—religious qualities. Religion and religious practices become a foundation on which migrants from specific countries or regions can form minority groups (Kurcewicz 2015).

Leaving one's homeland can be perceived by migrants as a new theological experience, and religious practices can provide a "shelter" for new arrivals. Migrants often treat religious communities as a form of therapy to remedy the painful separation from their families and everything that was native to their homeland. Marta Trzebiatowska describes religious practices in one's native language as a *balm to the spirit of an immigrant*, which provides a sense of security in the new environment and ensures emotional wellbeing (Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017, p. 433).

But not all scholars share these views. Nigel Biggar argues that in the UK churchgoing has become *the sport of a minority* (Biggar 2011, p. 21). Following their arrival to the UK, Polish migrants enter a relatively lay and multicultural world. The reality of economic migration, the need to adapt to the new society, the lack of family interactions, and the economic pressure make some Poles abandon their religious practices. This could explain their limited church attendance (Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017).

In our sociological study, we asked respondents: *how often did you attend a Holy Mass at the church over the last year?* (Table 3). A third of all respondents (36.9%) answered that they went to church every Sunday, and a quarter (26.3%) almost every Sunday. Irregular practices (once or twice a month) were declared by 15.8% of respondents, and every eighth respondent (12.4%) only celebrated major holidays. About four in a hundred respondents (3.9%) said they never practised throughout the year, and 2.6% only went to church for weddings or funerals. Missing answers represented 2.1%.

**Table 3.** How often did you attend a Holy Mass at the church over the last year?

Possible Answers	Swindon		Oxford		London	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Every Sunday	77	33.0	86	43.7	65	34.4
Almost every Sunday	60	25.8	53	26.9	50	26.5
About once or twice a month	24	10.3	43	21.8	31	16.4
Only during major holidays	41	17.6	11	5.6	25	13.2
Only for weddings. funerals. etc.	10	4.3	-	-	6	3.2
Never	9	3.9	3	1.5	12	6.3
No answer	12	5.2	1	0.5	-	-
Total	233	100.0	197	100.0	189	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 38.682; df = 10; p = 0.000; C = 0.245.$$

The core variable we adopted produced significant differences in answers. Those who went to church every Sunday were usually from Oxford (43.7%). Such attendance was reported by one in three Londoners (34.4%) and a similar number of Swindon residents (33.0%). The number of people

who went to church almost every Sunday was similar across all the locations we studied and was slightly higher than the first quartile (26.9% for Oxford, 26.5% for London, and 25.8% for Swindon). Irregular attendance (once or twice a month) was usually reported by Oxford residents (21.8%), slightly less often by Londoners (16.4%), and half as often (compared to the university city) by residents of Swindon (10.3%). Attendance only during major holidays was usually reported by Swindon residents (17.6%), and much less frequently by Londoners (13.2%) or people living in Oxford (5.6%). Slightly more people from Swindon than those from London went to church occasionally, i.e., for weddings or funerals (4.3% vs. 3.2%). The number of people who said they never went to church was four times higher for Londoners than for Oxford residents (6.3% vs. 1.5%). This answer was provided by four percent of Swindon residents. Missing answers for this question were recorded for people from Swindon (5.2%) and Oxford (0.5%) ( $\chi^2 = 38.682$ ;  $df = 10$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.245$ ).

Age proved to produce significant differences between respondents' answers. Weekly attendance was reported by more than half Catholics over fifty years of age (29.4% of people below 30, 32.6% of 30–39-year-olds, 42.4% of 40–49-year-olds, and 59.1% of those aged 50 or more). Attendance on almost every Sunday was reported by twice as many people in their forties as by the oldest respondents (30.9% for 40–49-year olds vs. 16.7% for people aged 50 or more). This answer was also given by one in four youngest respondents and people in their thirties (26.5% of people under 30, and 36.1% of those aged 30–39). Sunday church attendance only during major holidays decreased with age (14.7% of people under 30, 14.0% of 30–39-year-olds, 10.5% of 40–49-year-olds, and 7.6% of those aged 50 or more). Compared to other age groups, the youngest participants in our study proved to be three times (10.3%) more likely to not attend the Sunday Mass at all (3.1% for 40–49-year-olds, 3.0% for those aged 50 or less, 2.7% for 30–39-year-olds). Occasional churchgoing was declared by 3.8% of people in their thirties, 2.9% of those under 30, and 1.6% of people in their forties ( $\chi^2 = 37.828$ ;  $df = 15$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ;  $C = 0.246$ ).

The length of stay abroad also produced considerable statistical differences between respondents' answers. The longer they stayed in the UK, the stronger was their need to attend the Sunday services every week (below 10 years 35.5%, 10–20 years 37.7%, more than 20 years 61.9%). Fairly regular churchgoing (almost every Sunday) was reported by every third respondent (30.0%) who had been living abroad for 10–20 years, by every fifth respondent who had been there the shortest (22.0%), and a similar number of those who had been there the longest (19.0%). Irregular Sunday Mass attendance (once or twice a month) was observed to grow as the length of stay abroad decreased (more than 20 years 4.8%, 10–20 years 15.6%, less than 10 years 18.0%). Occasional attendance decreased as the length of stay in the UK increased (less than 10 years 18.5%, 10–20 years 14.1%, more than 20 years 9.5%). Compared to people who had stayed abroad for different lengths of time, those who had been living in the UK for 10–20 years were the least likely (2.7%) to never go to church (more than 20 years 4.8%, less than 10 years 5.5%) ( $\chi^2 = 38.682$ ;  $df = 10$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.245$ ). Of course, those remarks do not prove that religiosity is a function of the length of the stay abroad and not, for example, a function of age. It should be mentioned here that positive correlation between age and frequency of religious practice is well documented in sociology of religion (Mariański 2014). It is clearly possible that migrants with longer time of stay in the UK happen to be simply older than those who migrated more recently. It is also possible that different waves of migration involved groups with different religious, cultural or patriotic attitudes, like more political or even ideological migration during communism, and more economic migration recently. Some form of further analysis, e.g., regression analysis, could be valuable at this point.

### 3. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings described above show that Polish Catholic parishes are among important organisations bringing together Polish Catholics in the UK. As already mentioned, this sociological study was conducted in late September/early October 2019 on a purposive sample of 620 Polish Catholics living in London, Oxford or Swindon. The sample does not pretend to be proved to be

representative. Our sampling is intentionally purposive and all the findings, as well as the conclusions we are about to present concern the sample, not necessarily the whole population.

Polish migrants in the groups we examined usually join religious institutions, i.e., Polish parishes operating as part of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales. This is also confirmed by a qualitative study by Szymczak, as cited in the article, which shows that most Polish respondents from the UK are involved with local parishes and their institutions, and are more likely than others to spend more time and emotional effort on such activities (Szymczak 2018). These institutions are the focal points for the religious, social, and cultural lives of Poles.

Our study was limited to Polish Catholics affiliated with Polish Catholic parishes in London, Oxford and Swindon. This is a specific group of Catholic migrants who have not decided to assimilate fully. Those people care for the Polish language and culture, teach their children both languages (English and Polish), receive sacraments in their native tongue, and maintain a number of interactions with their fellow countrymen. As a result, our findings are representative only for this specific group of Polish migrants. There are a few interesting conclusions that can be drawn from these results.

Our findings show that as many as six in ten respondents consider themselves religious, and one in four think they are deeply religious. Only one in eleven describes their attitude towards faith as undecided. The proportion of deeply religious Polish Catholics grows along with their involvement with Polish community organisations, including their parishes. This supports a common claim that there is a clear, strong positive correlation between individual religiosity and engagement in social and charitable projects. The study also shows that regular Sunday Mass attendance increases as people become more involved with Polish community organisations operating in the UK.

Membership of Polish parishes is much more often declared by people involved with other Polish community organisations abroad. Such people represent a type of social activist, who feels the need to contribute to their religious community. Active membership of Polish parishes grows along with the length of stay abroad, but is found more often in people who do not speak English. This can be explained by the fact that the language barrier makes it impossible for such people to join English-language-speaking communities. Polish-language organisations provide a natural space for them. Knowledge of English allows migrants to practise their religion in English parishes and to become involved with social and charitable projects in other non-Polish organisations.

The primary indicator of individual religiosity in our study was the frequency of church attendance, especially for Sunday Mass. Older migrants are more likely than those from other age groups to fulfil their obligation to attend Mass on Sundays. We also observed a correlation between respondents' education and the index known as *dominicanes* (people regularly attending Sunday Mass). The higher the education, the less frequent the regular attendance.

Religion and religiosity continue to play an important role in the personal and family lives of Polish migrants in our purposive sample who have settled in the UK in recent years. However, the new environment in which they found themselves provides many opportunities for satisfying their economic and spiritual needs. Religiosity becomes a private matter, and its expression in the form of religious practices is now longer forced through social control as it used to be back in Poland. Consequently, religious practices among Polish Catholics abroad are often a matter of conscious choice and stem from their spiritual and identity-related needs. The scale of spatial migration and the associated cultural diffusion require that people become open to a new religious reality, but also help people to look at themselves from a broader perspective of distinctive cultures and to appreciate their own religiosity anew. Whatever the changes in the religiosity of Poles abroad, there is a strong likelihood that the very experience of migration itself can act as a catalyst for some profound changes in their religious life and religious practices.

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