



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of St Mary's, Bridgend

To be submitted no later than **Monday 21st March 2022**

Introduction

Parishes are invited to submit a Report based on discussions. The maximum size for the Report is 10 pages. You may be able to record your views in much less space.

Please use the structure suggested within this Template so that the Diocesan Synod Team [DST] are best-able to synthesise Reports from across the Archdiocese.

This Report will contribute to the Diocesan Report that + George Stack will submit on behalf of the Archdiocese.

Introduction: In this part of the Report, you might wish to record some of the special characteristics of your parish – urban or rural, special features [hospital/ school /prison /care homes in your parish boundaries]. Some reflection on the demographics of your parish. You might want to include details of any special ministry /service/project.

Methodology: In this section give a brief overview of the different ways in which you have engaged with parish members and those beyond the worshipping community. It might be useful to present this as a Timeline with a short comment for each month between the Training of Parish Representatives to the finalising of the Parish Report. Some reflection on the numbers of people attending / contributing to discussion would be helpful. Comments on special circumstances [e.g., telephone conversations with the housebound/ meetings with distinct groups / outreach activity] would be valuable.

Key Issues Raised: This will be the main part of your Report. You will be presenting a summary of the issues raised and the points made in your discussions/ interviews / submissions. We will be reporting across the three headings of Communion, Participation and Mission and suggest you might do likewise. Some issues may be recorded under more than one heading. There may be material to record that does not fit into these categories and space is provided for that. You may choose to summarise these in bullet points or in a few paragraphs. It is important that your summary reflects not only the responses of the majority but also some minority views.

Example: “Most respondents were of the opinion that XYZ. A minority, however, felt that ABC was more important “

Sign Off: The Report needs to be signed by the Parish Priest and the lead Parish Representative. Any Report submitted should have been made available to the community parish as a draft and should be formally considered by the Parish Advisory Council prior to submission.

Introduction – Special Characteristics of the Parish

St Mary’s Catholic Church, Bridgend, serves the population of the towns of Bridgend and Pencoed, and various villages surrounding the towns (c. 160,000 residents). The parish priest of St Mary’s Bridgend is also the parish priest of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Porthcawl and St Joseph of Arimathea, Pyle (all three parishes together serving the southern half of Bridgend County). (A separate report is being submitted on behalf of those two parishes). In addition to the parish priest, the parish also has a permanent deacon and a fulltime parish secretary. Pre-pandemic, the average Sunday Mass attendance was c. 450 and numbers post-pandemic are returning to pre-pandemic norms. Within the parish boundaries, there is one Catholic Primary School, one Catholic secondary school, a major hospital and a prison.

Methodology

| <u>January- March 2022</u> | <u>Action</u> | <u>Comment</u> |
|---|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘Open’ parish forums following three Sunday Masses. All parishioners invited to remain behind to take part in prayer and discussion.• Meetings with several parish groups, for example, the ‘Tuesday Club’.• Paper submissions using the key questions• A ‘listening table’ for written comments• On-line submissions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Around 60 people in total• Around 10 people• Around 20 paper and post-it submissions• Around 40 online submissions |

Communion- How does our Church function in our local area?

- The tradition of the Church, apostolic succession and the Sacraments were viewed by many as the great strength of the Church in providing a continuity of teaching and worship back to Jesus Christ. Reference was made to important areas of social teaching, for example, Pope John Paul II's 'Theology of the Body' and being socially active.
- Most respondents viewed the celebration of the Sacraments as a strength of the local Church, specifically the Sacraments of Initiation: 'allowing time for reflection on our most important life decisions and events, underpinning the gravitas of those decisions.'
- Together with the Sacraments, the welcome received in/through the Church was viewed as a strength, together with inclusivity, though many noted that many felt excluded. A significant number of respondents raised concern at the impression that members of the LGBTQ+ community were not welcome in the Catholic Church. In addition, many respondents expressed concern at the lack of compassion for the divorced and remarried and their exclusion from the sacramental life of the Church, for example: 'How some Catholics seem to be divorced and get annulments while others do not is something of a mystery'. Prominent national figures, such as the Prime Minister, were referenced as examples, which cause 'a sense of injustice for the 'ordinary Catholic', who do not have access to perceived 'elite channels'. Some referenced the flexibility found in New Testament passages and how the rigid interpretation of marriage and divorce is at odds with this.
- The historical silencing of women and the role of women in today's Church was a key theme of the conversations. Many respondents referenced Jesus' attitudes to women, who he did not silence, and that men and women must be viewed as co-equal children of God. This includes women having an equal say in the life and teaching of the Church, and included, for many, the possibility of women becoming clergy.
- The Liturgy in the local Church was seen as positive by most respondents. It was noted that during these times of the pandemic, online music has proven particularly beneficial: 'to hear the Cantors sing the psalms so beautifully has been uplifting.' The homilies were also seen as a positive

feature of church life, helping people to understand better the Word of God.

- Some expressed concern that the liturgy was not relevant to young people. Reference was made to a wider range of musical styles and more appropriate 'young person-friendly' language and liturgy, though recognition was made that the Church has to serve all peoples in its liturgy, particularly the Mass. It was often linked to more general concerns about the lapsation of young people and the influence of social media. Some respondents also recognised that many young people are put off the Church because of its attitude to women and to people who are LGBTQ+. A small number were concerned about the loss of the Latin Mass and traditional forms of Catholic devotions.
- Opportunities to be in communion with other parishioners were viewed positively, albeit pre-Covid. It was noted, for example, that such opportunities are 'an important part of building community and will support and strengthen the ties of prayer and worship when we gather in a different space. During these times of relaxation, we come to know each other by name, share our stories and enjoy each other's company. The Jesus of the Gospels gives us good examples of doing just that.' Groups such as altar servers, Children's Liturgy etc, were seen as invaluable. In addition, 'Many of the groups within the parish are very good at helping those in need, from the newly bereaved to those in need of material support, providing companionship for older members of the Church'.
- The work of priests, deacons and parish secretary in the local Church was viewed as a great strength and much appreciated by parishioners.
- The Church's promotion of Catholic education was viewed as a great strength, 'in which children and young people, their teachers and families are nourished by a Christ-centred curriculum. Where they are taught and experience the joy on knowing, loving and serving God and each other and that they are loved unconditionally by God'.

Participation – How do we work with others in supporting our local area?

- Many respondents referenced the Church's outreach to the most in need on a local, national and international level through organisations such as the SVP, KSC, Food Banks, CAFOD, etc.
- Many respondents thought that the Church's promotion of the Eucharistic Ministry to the sick and housebound has been a major strength and a source of comfort and inclusion in the sacramental life of the Church: it has 'allowed the vulnerable to know that they are not forgotten and that they continue to play their part in building up the Body of Christ through their prayers, suffering, and often joyful and hopeful resilience.'
- Nearly all respondents noted that we work with others through being witnesses in our daily lives. It was noted that 'we all can witness more fully to a life of joy, love and service in Christ that will attract others', and that this could be a more powerful form of evangelisation. However, many noted that there was a danger of, for example, a 'tribal sense of belonging' and a 'superiority complex [that] must put people off'.
- Many thought that the local Church was welcoming and referenced the example of refugees being housed in Church property in the deanery.
- Some respondents felt that more needed to be done by the parish in terms of working with other local Christian communities and supporting the work of Cytûn – Churches Together in Wales.
- Some respondents noted that the Church's social teachings, and how they can be applied to daily life, is a strength of the Church. It was noted that we should remember the 'true meaning of the Catholic Church as the people rather than buildings.'
- Many respondents noted the value of Catholic schools in the mission of the Church – welcoming, loving, nurturing, whilst providing an excellent standard of education with first class academic outcomes. However, a few were concerned that Catholic schools should focus more on the imparting of doctrine, the lives of the Saints as inspirations of faith and traditional types of prayer, such as the Rosary, in order to provide a strong basis for grounded faith.

Mission: How do we take the Gospel message out from our parish community?

- Many respondents noted the Church's promotion of the Eucharistic Ministry to the sick and housebound, which has 'allowed the vulnerable to know that they are not forgotten and that they continue to play their part in building up the Body of Christ through their prayers, suffering, and often joyful and hopeful resilience' is a strength.
- Most respondents thought that Catholic schools provided opportunities for evangelisation to non-Catholic pupils and revitalising the faith of young Catholics. A few said that schools were a place to provide 'young people a voice' and to encourage them to participate in the life of the Church.
- Many respondents noted that they would like to see wider opportunities for spiritual formation/retreats and a greater variety of prayer/devotions.
- Many felt that the Church's mission would be strengthened if women had a more active role in liturgy, including opening the diaconate and priesthood to women. It was clear that many respondents felt that women's voices and talents were underused throughout the Church: for example, 'Equality for women is really lip service only'; 'The Church is patriarchal'. 'Clericalism is an issue in the wider Church, reflected in its attitude to women'; for example: 'When the beauty and holiness of married life is not understood and proclaimed, and even sometimes ridiculed, usually to the detriment of women'. Another noted 'The culture of deference in the Church, elevating our male clergy, has left some [clergy] feeling above the law. We need to spend less time preaching in a way that leaves anyone feeling unwelcome and more emphasising that we are all imperfect. Giving women a greater role in reforming the Church and bringing culture change would start to rectify this imbalance.'
- Nealy all thought we should build on lessons learned from the pandemic, for example, the use of stewards to welcome people has been a huge success in welcoming new and non-Catholic alike. Many thought the use of on-line Masses were of spiritual benefit to the sick and housebound.
- Some respondents suggested that the teaching emphasis of the Church is too focused on apologetics and its defence, 'rather than the growth in our spiritual lives in God, putting tradition and itself before the person of

Jesus Christ'. Some believe this is one of the potential reasons why Catholics lapse.

- Nearly all expressed concern at the dwindling numbers of vocations. A significant number of responses considered the priesthood to be in peril, suggesting consideration of a married priesthood, the introduction of women to the diaconate/priesthood, expanding the role of the diaconate: by 'widening, deepening, revitalizing and transforming the priesthood, particularly in light of a low rate of ordinations' we may increase vocation to the priesthood.
- Many suggested that, locally, the parish needs to plan for better succession planning in order to replace those who have worked tirelessly, for example, supporting the work of organisations such as the SVP and the KSC; supporting the parish with bureaucratic duties, e.g., health and safety. During this conversation, some referenced the need for all parish organisations to be open to both men and women. However, many also thought that the structure of the Church and clericalism mitigated against greater involvement by the laity, who feel discouraged, contributing to apathy amongst the laity.
- Some thought that the implementation of The Common Good was erratic and that the parish needs to be more proactive: 'The Church also needs to do more to serve and demonstrate its social conscience - across Britain there are churches that run foodbanks, support asylum seekers, run homeless shelters and coordinate volunteers to support the sick, the vulnerable, elderly people, children or young mothers amongst many other things. However, many Catholic parishes are too insular and support their own parishioners but do not do enough outreach in the local community. The Salvation Army preaches 'soup, soap, salvation' - if your approach to spreading the gospel is by feeding someone, and helping them to be clean warm and clothed, they will be more able to understand your message than if you simply hear about yet another scandal or see a clip of Rome on the news.'
- A few considered the practical nature of a deanery/diocesan approach to the management of buildings and suggested a rationalisation could release funding for initiatives such as funding a deanery youth worker to engage with young people and young adults. It was suggested that the Church should actively seek the experience of the laity, establishing

bodies of, for example, business and finance professionals to support the diocese in its bureaucratic management, rather than relying on one or two paid employees, so that there is a wider body of professional advice from laity successful in their field.

- A number of respondents made reference to a greater use of social media to engage young people, as well as the wider community, in order to publicise the good work of the Church and its social teachings.

Any other matters that do not fit under the three thematic headings of Communion, Participation and Mission

The sexual abuse of children; and the scandal of unmarried mothers', and indigenous children's, homes, featured in all discussions and many written submissions:

- All respondents in this area believe that there has not been a satisfactory response to the many sexual abuse scandals in the Church and that not enough has been done historically to fully investigate these issues, 'which is shown by the fact that there are still things coming to light', such as the mass graves of Indigenous children in Canada. Relying on enquiries being set up by different governments shows a failure to acknowledge that this is an institutional issue.
- Some referenced the recent UN report that criticised the Church for continuing to obstruct justice and evade accountability: 'There is no excuse for this, the Church should be exemplary in righting its wrongs and be leading the way in far-reaching reform of practice and culture'. Many felt that the lack of response and tangible reform suggests that the Church is still more concerned with self-preservation and ensuring parishioners see the clergy as infallible rather than examining itself in the light of 'what would Jesus do?' 'When the church is most known for scandal, no-one will come to know Jesus through it'.

As noted earlier, alongside the Church's attitude to women, the rejection of LGBT+ people was a consistent theme throughout:

- Many felt that the question, 'What would Jesus do?' needs to be used to address LGBT+ inclusion in the Church. Examples include: 'There are millions of LGBT+ couples who know that God has brought them together and that their relationship glorifies God and I would love to see them fully accepted into the Church. There is nothing gained by refusing communion or baptism to LGBT+ Catholics, and allowing LGBT+ Catholics to feel included does not threaten 'the family', nor does the concept of 'family' need defending from a 'threat' of same-sex marriage, as the Pope stated in 2015.' And: 'There is no place for lukewarm statements about pastoral care when Catholic leaders in Ghana vocalise their support for 5-10 years prison sentences for those even disseminating information about LGBT+ issues, or Catholic bishops in the US encouraging the dismissal of employees in same-sex relationships. Statements about LGBT+ inclusion made by Pope Francis

are very much welcomed but this is not translating to an improvement in the lived experience of LGBT+’ people.

Sign Off

This Report is submitted to the Diocesan Synodal Team on behalf of the Parish community of: St Mary’s, Bridgend

It is an honest reflection of the work undertaken over the last six months.

Signed: Father Tim McGrath Parish Priest

Signed: Maureen Harris & Philip Manghan Parish Representative

Once complete please forward to:

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The Diocesan Synodal Team wishes to convey its appreciation for all the work undertaken in the preparation of this Report