



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of St Mary of the Angels Canton Cardiff

14.3.2022

Introduction

St Mary of the Angels Church Canton is an inner-city church supporting a multicultural congregation of longstanding parishioners and those worshipping with us transiently. Pre-pandemic there were on average 500 people attending Sunday Mass. Since the pandemic the congregation now averages 300 each Sunday across 3 Masses.

Along with its sister church, the Holy Family Church in Fairwater, it supports an extensive outreach programme of weekly food distribution to some 60-70 families each week. It has also (pre-pandemic) supported a Night Shelter for the homeless. There is also a well-established SVP Group and other Groups supporting the work of the Parish to a lesser or greater extent.

Currently both churches are supported by one Parish Priest (and another retired Priest in residence) along with 3 Deacons (one to be ordained in the summer of 2022). The Synodal Team has enjoyed the support of the Parish Priest and the other Clergy throughout the Synodal Process. As we begin this process of 'walking together' it is important to remember that in calling for a 'different Church', the Pope urged all to invoke the Holy Spirit with greater fervour and frequency and humbly listen to Him as we address these issues.

Methodology

The Synodal Team was established, ultimately comprising 9 lay members and supported by the Clergy. Formal meetings were planned, and supported with an agenda and note taking, to establish a way forward for the Process. Four Open Listening Meetings were offered (including one specifically for young people aged 18-35 and the other for the Synodal Team). A portal for electronic submission through the website was developed as well as a paper-based means to support the listening process. A Parish Prayer was written and Prayer Card was produced to support the process.

Invitations to participate in the Synodal Process were offered to all Mass-attenders, other known resting Catholics (through family contacts) and the Clergy. We approached the Groups of the Parish to participate on a Group basis inviting them to comment as a Group how they might support further Communion, Participation and Mission within the Parish.

Telephone communication with the Head Teacher of St Mary's Junior School facilitated the sharing of subsequent reports and an acknowledgement of the potential to work together on future initiatives that emerge from the process.

In total 56 people attended the Listening Meetings and another 41 paper and portal submissions were received. Some of the paper and portal submissions represented more than one person's thoughts and considerations. Submissions represent a cross

section of the people of the Parish with approximately one third of the people currently attending Mass contributing. Of the 41 paper and portal submissions 37 identified themselves as attendees (1 non-Catholic), 3 acknowledged they didn't attend (though 1 watched online) and 1 person left no information. Although resting Catholics were invited to contribute (through family contacts) only 2 replies were received that acknowledged non-attendance. 25% of the Groups replied.

Presentation of Responses

Generally, the Synod on Synodality and the opportunity to discuss, engage and promote connectedness has been **positively received**. There are some **concerns about the process**: people have expressed the need for their ideas to be acknowledged in an atmosphere of mutual respect so as to understand the genuine concerns of people. There is a perceived **need for transparency and accountability** in the process. One respondent asked, 'what is the point if the Synod at parish level has so little power and only a small section of lay people will contribute?' Another suggested we invite the Archbishop, as he lives in our Parish, to hear his perspective on this process.

Conflicting ideas emerged, there are tensions around the 'feel of' the Mass, many demand changes to promote inclusivity, though one person suggested Vatican II was the worst thing that had happened to the Catholic Church. A number of respondents are dismayed at the prospect of 'losing' the Latin Mass. Tensions between traditionalist versus progressive approaches became evident. Arguably there is a place for both.

While there is a great deal of love and respect for the Church, the Mass and the dedication of the great many Priests and Bishops serving within it, there is undoubtedly a voice that **calls for change**. The Listening Exercises have illuminated a majority view of the need to **address the 'Big Issues'**: that is;

(a) **historic clerical sexual abuse** and the failure of the Church to acknowledge its existence, to deal with it effectively and manage the perceived ongoing damage caused.

(b) **a desire to see a more progressive and inclusive** Church that is more reflective of the issues of the world today. A view exists that the Church is 200-300 years out of date. There were 45 separate calls for the need to consider the following:

1. Allow Priests to marry.
2. Greater roles (including those of Deacon and Priest) and equality for women to provide a balance and address male dominance in all levels of the Church.
3. Inclusivity by addressing the teaching of, and the alienating language used in, the Church in regard to, the LGBT+ Community, divorced people who are denied the Sacrament of Holy Communion, some advocating perhaps a

blessing for these people and for those who are unable to attend Mass. Finally, the teachings of the Church e.g. on contraception, sex before marriage and sexuality.

Though it could be argued that a considerable number of respondents did not identify such issues as a cause for concern, we ignore the issues at our peril as **they are identified as concerns for many who don't come to Church.**

There is a perception that **the teachings of the Church and the language used are focused upon guilt and sin rather than love and compassion.** This, it is suggested, is not consistent with the more inclusive, loving messages found in the Gospels and the teachings of Christ.

There is a suggestion people live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the Church in so far as they can. Then in those areas in which they 'fail' e.g. contraception, sexuality they either leave the Church or manage the issues through their conscience.

There is an identified **need to look at the management structures of the Church** at all levels to promote, openness, understanding, greater transparency and less autocracy.

Poor communication is an issue within the Parish and at Diocesan level. Respondents have asked 'what's going on behind the scenes? How are decisions being made? The PAC and Parish Groups need a bigger profile and to act as a conduit between the laity and the Clergy.

There is a view that the Church focus on, and champion, **environmental issues** as we are tasked to care for creation.

The remainder of the issues identified within the headings of Communion, Participation and Mission can be addressed at Parish level.

Communion

It was acknowledged that:

The Synodal process itself was seen to be a positive step to achieving greater Communion.

Effective Communion is the basis of effective Participation and Mission.

Good communication promotes a sense of community, keeping people together and offering support, it is therefore important.

Communion is all about faith, we need to share and enhance our experience of coming to Mass. Concerns have been raised about Homilies and the Newsletter sometimes being overlong and overly intellectual, 'sometimes less is more' was stated. One respondent stated, 'services were boring' and therefore people are less

likely to engage. People need to see that the Church is actively involved in the lives of others.

A large number of respondents mentioned the need for warm, open and very welcoming Greeters who should take the initiative in identifying newcomers and so promote a sense welcoming and inclusivity for all.

We are a welcoming community. One idea was to engage those people who did not speak English as a first language to act as Greeters, with a special role in welcoming others in their shared first language. Similarly, one respondent felt that we should promote the numbers of people of ethnic minorities taking part in the ministries of the Church. It was acknowledged that because we are a Universal Church such diversity is a strength that the Church should celebrate. We need to 'grab' those who come through the door, considering them as 'as precious jewels' said one respondent.

A more structured welcome and induction for newcomers was highlighted to promote inclusion and reduce feelings of isolation.

We need to speak with and engage with people after Mass.

One respondent mentioned that Christians of other denominations are pleased to receive a blessing at Mass, another suggested that they be allowed to receive Holy Communion.

A number of people thought Catholics too insular, generally don't mix and there is a need to avoid cliques as those new to the Church can find it difficult to integrate. It was seen to be important to promote inclusivity and communion by supporting and welcoming people to join groups. Some people felt that waving to all at Mass while offering the sign of Peace, taking more time, as opposed to shaking the hand of their immediate neighbour was a better way 'to commune'.

To further promote communion the importance of tea and coffee after all Masses and building groups that engage all ages was highlighted. The sense of Communion is promoted through activities outside of the Mass and a need to re-establish certain groups and create new ones is essential.

Significantly the majority of respondents spoke of the need to establish prayer groups, bible study groups and spiritual reading and discussion fora. These groups would be lay led and supported by the Clergy. The potential for an ecumenical forum and the guest speakers was identified. The value of multi-faith groups was acknowledged.

There is an appetite to promote knowledge of our faith in order to grow in faith and in our capacity to share it. This is important as there was a view expressed for the need for teaching and explanation of Church teaching so people better understand the doctrine of the Church, the liturgy and the sacraments.

The majority of respondents thought that the pandemic had resulted in a negative effect while others thought it brought people together.

Online Masses are appreciated (elderly and housebound) however they can be a barrier to re-engagement with Mass and the Sacraments and greater communion. Importantly one respondent noted that some people didn't understand that spiritual communion is not the same as actually receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass. Reasons for non-attendance cited as busy lives, and family time taking precedence.

One respondent stated that with 3 Sunday Masses it is hard to promote Communion as a whole parish.

The Music Ministry is essential to promote engagement with the Liturgy. 6pm Mass especially appreciated by younger people who liked the Music Group.

Need to develop new communication strategies to engage with all Catholics (including resting Catholics).

Participation

Considered under sub-headings of Community, Children and Youth and Social

It was acknowledged that the Community needs to:

Support Parish Priests more; this was the majority view. Priests and Laity need to come together to co-manage the work of the Parish. Appoint admin roles (potentially at Diocesan level) to free up the Clergy to allow them to focus on issues related to liturgical, educational and pastoral support. One respondent asked 'Do we need the equivalent of a House of Laity as in the Anglican Church'?

Address the tension that exists between private faith and attending Mass (Catholics think Mass is enough) and the call for more participation in the activities of the Church. More volunteers are needed and the volunteer community should reflect the demographics (ethnicity and age) of the Congregation.

Educate people that Church isn't just for a Sunday. Greater participation is needed at other times through engagement in Groups to support the work of the Church.

Consider how we might engage the wider local community in some activities (Social Outreach and Night Shelter not just those in the Church).

Be more joyful, celebrate what we do and replenish our Community.

Counter the effects of COVID 19 and Secularisation. Target those people who 'have got out of the habit' of coming to Church during the pandemic, or are anxious, to facilitate their return. Make immediate moves where possible to implement suggested actions emerging from the Synodal Process.

Address the need to help the Church to be a Church for the times, sensitive to the situations of today's Catholics and equipped institutionally (good communications practice, outreach, engagement) to serve.

Counter the negative image of the Church (Historic Clerical Child Abuse) promote the positives, the good that the Church does locally and nationally.

Present a much more positive profile in the media, address social issues and provide positive role models for all. There is a view that there is much prejudicial misinformation presented about Catholicism which needs to be countered with positive information and presentation of positive role models. This is considered to be especially important for the young of the Church and it is suggested a communications and PR initiative is required. Promote greater participation through use of multimedia – video and podcast.

Develop a Skills and Expertise Directory to promote focused effective participation.

Facilitate young married couples who need to see relevance and meaning in the Church and support them.

The debates surrounding science and religion need to be explored to support understanding that they are not mutually exclusive.

Promote a more positive image of the Church in terms of making explicit what can be gained through an active faith.

Participation: Children and Youth

There is a need to:

Focus on children and young people to make them feel more included.

Promote greater relationships between Parish and School including regular Children's Masses (in Church or School).

Encourage greater inclusivity through involvement of the Ministries of the Church: Altar Servers, Readers, the Music Ministry and older children/young people as Eucharistic Ministers. One respondent identified that young gay people feel very isolated because of their sexual identity.

Child-friendly Children's Liturgy, Bible Study with Certificates of Attendance including help from Religious Education teachers in the Church.

Make Services less boring, more relevant and meaningful. 10am Mass should focus on Families

Address the needs of 12 to 16 year olds and school leavers to reduce risk of them leaving the Church. Promote parish-based social networks and friendship groups to maintain a cohesion to the Church.

Promote faith development in the young, bring back the previous year's Confirmandi to engage with the forthcoming Group. One respondent stated that the Sacrament of Reconciliation was introduced at too early an age.

Address the views that some young people though spiritual beings are against organised religion as the Church 'doesn't speak to them'. Therefore, it is suggested that the Church needs to address and focus on those issues that children care about. These cares include gender, environmental issues, social justice, race and reproductive rights. There is a need to 'Rebrand the Church'.

Undertake a critical review of Catholic Education and how it promotes Faith.

Need to develop a Mums and Dads Group, Toddlers Group and Youth Group.

Promote the role of mentors for young people (families no longer necessarily fulfil this role).

Accommodate single mothers with children, especially teenage children.

Participation: Social

Significantly, a great number of respondents suggested that there is a need to:

Make better use of the resources at our disposal. Open up Bar, create a Coffee House, hire out the Hall.

More Social Events and Organised Trips (some free) of a Spiritual and Social nature promoted widely, not just in the Newsletter, to encourage greater attendance.

Mission

A significant number of people have acknowledged their love of the Mass, their Faith being of central importance to them as is their 'connection' with Christ through the continuity of the Mass since the Last Supper. However, there are questions on how we best share those appreciations so that others may come to know the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many people felt that the image of the Church prevented positive appreciation of what it has to offer and therefore inhibits any potential evangelisation activities.

Some felt that Mission begins within the Church, a good connection between Priest and Parish is essential where both are reciprocally supportive of one another.

While the majority of respondents recognised the need to evangelise there was a significant minority that felt Faith was a personal thing and had no intention or desire 'to evangelise'.

It was suggested that we need to:

Restore our personal faith and organise ourselves in the Parish before we engage with others in evangelisation activities. Need to promote conversations with people who cannot see, and understand, how the love of God can be applied to their lives. That is what makes us different one respondent said, this is what makes us Catholics.

Consider Retreats and a Mission Week: An invitation to a charismatic Priest or Religious to address the congregation on a range of topics was suggested.

Consider Evangelisation through Social Media: Thought for Today.

Make non-Catholics feel welcome. Introduce a 'Bring Someone to Church Week' or 'A Welcome Week.' Need to specifically consider teenagers in these activities.

Do what we used to do (well): support the sick, the bereaved, the lonely, the homeless and the poor. The work of the SVP 'at the coal face' is a great example for us all (and one that should be highlighted). One respondent suggested a 'Hub' be created to allow 'drop in' for company, advice and support. Other suggestions are a monthly lunch or afternoon tea for people, postcard communications and follow up phone calls/visit for those not attending. A census would need to be undertaken to facilitate this.

Maintain and expand an effective outreach programme and we could learn from other Churches regarding this.

Many believe that Evangelisation is facilitated through 'Good Works' and Mission equates to action. They cite the Night Shelter and the Outreach work of the Food Bank. Good works however great or small are seen as a means to show our faith in action and it is suggested that local works encourage others to join us as this work 'fits' with their own moral compass and personal sense of social justice.

Promote the evidence of Mission. So much good work is done and is unheralded.

Conclusion

The Synodal Team has demonstrated effective communion and participation to support the mission of the Synodal Process in producing this Report.

There have been very considered and insightful comments received and we, as a Synodal Team, have written two Reports, this and the second covering detail that will usefully inform further Parish discussions can be found in the Appendix (app 7).

The Report is full of complexity with similar and opposing views. There is a subtle understanding of the many and complex issues facing us while some comments suggest the need for learning to promote a better understanding of our Faith.

This Report is, in effect, the start of the continuing work of the Parish. In the Open Meetings there were calls for further discussions within the Parish and the work already prompted by this process will continue. There is an appetite in the Parish to

come together, to discuss and reinvigorate the Groups supporting the work of the Parish.

It is imperative that people feel that they are being listened too as this process has raised expectations. 'Being listened to' must be demonstrated at a Universal worldwide level and at local Parish level through good communications and visible outcomes that reflect identified unmet needs and the calls for change. These outcomes should also address the issues that concern people who are no longer active attenders at Mass.

Today, as a Church we need to open the windows and the doors, to let in the fresh air of the Spirit. The Holy Father said 'we need the ever new breath of God, the Spirit, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles, and spreads joy'. 'There is no need to create another Church, but to create a different Church' the Pope said citing Dominican priest Father Yves Marie-Joseph Congar. 'For a 'different Church', the Pope urged all to invoke the Holy Spirit with greater fervour and frequency and humbly listen to Him (<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-10/pope-francis-discourse-moment-reflection-eve-inauguration-synod.html>).

That said, there are ongoing concerns about the transparency of the process and how the subsequent communications through the hierarchy of the Church will be managed.

The Report suggests that there is work to be done to raise the level of communion between committed Catholics, and so promote participation within the Parish. In doing so we create a more cohesive and attractive community that can offer those currently not attending something that they currently do not see. The second part of this Report (app 7) provides detail that will be useful in bringing about changes needed at Parish level.

Finally, there are shortfalls in this Report that need to be acknowledged. Essentially we have the views of committed Catholics who come to Mass. We have failed to engage with resting Catholics or those outside of the Church. This may be part of the consideration for future work as we walk together.

Ways Forward

Following a Meeting with the Parish Advisory Council on Sunday 13th March 2022 the following 2 Projects were identified. They reflect the identified needs of the Parish, and in addressing them, we can further promote communion and participation and better support the Church in its mission activities.

1 A critical review of the structures and processes of communication that support the work of the Parish with the aim of improving communication across the breadth and depth of Parish life. The Project will:

Develop a new Constitution for the Parish Advisory Council (PAC) outlining its role and responsibilities there by increasing its profile, representation of, and accountability to, the Parish Community.

Review the other Groups of the Parish and consider the potential need to develop new structures to meet the ongoing demands of the work of the Parish.

Communication processes and mechanisms will be reviewed and developed to promote clear and effective channels of communication.

Explore the potential of engaging paid administrative support for the Parish Priest

2 To deliver a 'Parish Fresher's Event' promote awareness and understanding of the work of the Church throughout the Parish and Local Community. This will be facilitated through a day of engagement and participation and through this event we hope to increase participation and grow the body of volunteers that support the work of the Parish Groups.

This Report is submitted to the Diocesan Synodal Team on behalf of the Parish Community of St Marys of the Angels Canton Cardiff.

It is an honest reflection of the views expressed through the Listening Process and has been reviewed by the Parish Advisory Council of behalf of the Parishioners of St Mary of the Angels.

Signed: Rev Canon Peter G Collins

Parish Priest

Signed: Kath Elley

Parish Synod Co-ordinator

14 March 2022