



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of: **Christ The King**

Town/City: **Cardiff**

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

Introduction Parish Characteristics

The Parish of Christ the King is situated in the north of the city of Cardiff. The parish is relatively affluent. It has a parish primary school within its boundaries. The Parish forms part of 3 Churches Cardiff Group. There are two resident priests, they live in the presbytery in the neighbouring parish, currently both have health and mobility problems. A third priest celebrates Mass on Sundays.

The parish has an ageing congregation. This is a result of a decision made by the Parish Priest to abandon the 10 30 am Family Mass and move the Children's Liturgy to the neighbouring parish, replacing it with a 9 am mass at Christ the King. Initially this was done before the three priests celebrated Mass on the Sunday. This has been unsuccessful and many, many young families have been lost to both parishes.

This has had a significant impact on the age profile of the parish.

Pre-Covid the parish had a Mother and Toddlers group and a Junior Club. The long-standing and successful Junior Club has restarted and is valued by children and parents alike. There is a parish primary school within its boundaries. Class masses are celebrated in the church on a Thursday morning. These are well attended by parishioners. Indeed, weekday masses of very well attended at Christ the King 35+ people

The parish still retains a healthy spirit of lay involvement despite its ageing population as can be evidenced in the number of groups that have taken part in this process.

- The parish of Christ the King has held 11 meetings.
- 110 people attended these meetings
- 52 individuals shared their thoughts with the Synod Representatives. These were a mixture of practising Catholics, lapsed Catholics, people of other faiths and of no faith.
- 17 individuals completed a 2 question pro forma during the Advent Service.
- 14 people completed 2 sides of A 4 Detailed Questionnaire targeted mainly at people who had left the church

This is a selection of quotes from

– What does the Church mean to you?

"A place to come together in community to worship the Lord – a place of the community which provides sustenance, enabling us to go out to others." "Enjoying the prayer with music and reflection."

"Family of people – the body of Christ" "Christians worship in the Roman Catholic tradition"

"I greatly value the church as it is a place that I can worship the Lord and where my faith can grow."

"People joining together to praise God a physical space to come and praise be thankful with others.

"A place to share fellowship and a pilgrim journey to worship, love, sacraments... Into the life of Christ.

"Hopefully it is a guide to my mortal life, so that I might rest in eternity with my God"

What is your dream church look like?

"A place of spirituality – a place of community – a place from which springs social action"

"a Church that attracts and is open to all"

"friendly, working and relevant"

"a place where all feel welcome and know they are loved – a community of joy"

“a place of relevance and inclusion a place of radiance, reflecting God’s love”
“finding a way to connect in these times of change” “a place where everyone goes out together to bring others to know our living God, not just focused on the mass”
“open to all, whoever they are.”

PARTICIPATION

When this topic was introduced a significant number of people commented upon the role of the **parish priest within a parish**. This they stated had a direct bearing on opportunities given/or not given to the People of God in the parish to participate. The Parish culture and ethos are dependent very often upon the personality, work ethic, and ecclesiology of the priest in charge. ' This can be a stumbling block for growth' "it can encourage clericalism." And at its worse can be "an abuse of power"

"Every priest is Pope in his own parish."

Many people felt that this lack of accountability and support for priests was dangerous, immoral and simply not fit for purpose in the 21st-century. Poor leadership at parish diocesan and national levels is having a huge impact on the local and wider church. This was spoken about time and time again.

Leadership was a common thread that ran through all three themes of Participation Communion and Mission

The abandonment of the **Family Mass** and the moving of the **Children's Liturgy** unsuccessfully to a neighbouring church has had a significant impact on the **age profile** of the parish. This appears to make no sense as the parish has the primary school Christ The King within its parish boundaries. For over two years we have had **three priests** celebrate Mass on a Sunday. This needs to be re-evaluated. This was brought up in every parish meeting and parishioners unanimously agreed that the move had been disastrous.

"Who is serving who here?"

However, as evidenced by the time line the Parish of Christ the King still retains a number of **successful and active groups**. There is a Phone Link, Acolytes, Parish Council, Cleaners, Musicians/singers, SV P, Catechists, Scripture/prayer group, Junior club, plus the 3 Churches Liturgy group, 3 Churches Proclaim Group, 3 Churches Bereavement Group.

The parish is always well represented in 3 Churches Groups and planned activities. Yet, as the age profile was growing the future of these groups in 5 or 10 years would remain precarious. Pre-Covid **coffee** after the 9 a.m. mass would be served to at least 60+ people. This has restarted and numbers are building.

The **pandemic has certainly had an impact on mass attendance**, however, numbers were dropping previously as evidenced from above.

On a positive note 20 younger people volunteered as **stewards** and gave magnificent service to the parish community. The Parish Council did a sterling job in the recent **refurbishment of the church** (weeks before lockdown), and in the preparation of a **Covid Safe** worshipping environment. A significant number of people commented favourably about this. The parish contributes financially to, and a number of people from the parish of Christ the King work at the **Food Market** held at St Brigid's Hall. A fact-finding process is in place to replicate this in the Parish Centre of Christ the King. **Prayer cards** are routinely delivered to streets within the parish boundary. Many people thought that these outreach opportunities were of utmost importance, especially the Food Market. Suggestions were made by some people to try to include "volunteering" by young people into the **Welsh Baccalaureate**

The parish is well represented in the 3 Churches **Bereavement Group**. The majority of people commented that this was a valuable opportunity to reach out to people who are

bereaved, many of whom have left the church or lapsed in their practice. Not all parishioners understand what the Bereavement Group actually do and how supportive they are to bereaved families.

Christ The King parish is very well represented on the 3 Churches **Liturgy Group** and contributes greatly with resources, ideas and in organisation to the streamed Lent, Advent and Christmas services held in the neighbouring parish which have taken place during the pandemic and before. Many people appreciated, took part and enjoyed these Para Liturgies. The ordained priests were open, encouraging and welcomed these liturgies. All priests supported these liturgies.

However, it was of great concern to the majority of participants that there was no method or structure within the parish **during the pandemic to support the elderly and people living on their own.**

"Just to write "look after more vulnerable parishioners" in the newsletter is not good enough. We didn't have peoples phone numbers, emails, and there was no way of obtaining them, we were left scrambling around trying to contact a few"

There appears to be no **parish register**. This has to be addressed and is achievable with G D P R rules in place.

A number of people put forward suggestions to put people into "**base groups**" or "**neighbourhood groups**". One other person suggested a "**buddy system**" for new parishioners joining the parish for the first time.

Another lady shared her experience of living in India where very large parishes were divided into **subgroups with lay leadership**. Another person shared her brother's experience of being a priest working in India and a similar venture had proved very successful.

A significant number of people thought that the **priests were not proactive enough in creating or being involved in current church activities.**

A positive initiative that the parish priest set up was a **zoom coffee morning** after the Sunday mass. It was not well attended, however, the six – eight people who attended weekly were very appreciative, especially those who are more confined to the house .A number of people felt that this could have been replicated on a far larger scale and more frequently operated.

A partially sighted lady shared her experience of a **group telephone chat** that was operated by the Society of the Blind. She asked if this could be adopted by the parish as it was a lifeline for many people. There were a number of comments like "The parish priest and parish council did not adapt quickly enough or think of **alternative ways of being parish/community**"

"Take away the Sunday mass and what are you left with?"

Yet, positives did arise during the pandemic. A layperson initiated a **weekly Liturgy of the Word** prepared with instruments, music and song via zoom. This was started the week after the first lockdown and continued for over 18 months. Only laypeople attended.

The majority of people agreed that the **streamed mass** at the neighbouring parish of St Brigid's had been invaluable, especially during Lockdowns. Most elderly and housebound people appreciated this development. This was never more evident than at a Requiem.

"My family in Vancouver could take part and that has made an enormous difference."

Some people commented that they knew of a number of elderly people and people living on their own who **did not receive a telephone call from the priests**. They were disappointed at the lack of interest.

A question that came up in discussions was "how long will the streamed masses go on for?" And were they stopping people from attending mass in person.

MISSION

Many people found this question more difficult to answer. Some people were **not comfortable talking about faith** to people outside the church or indeed within it!

"My faith is personal to me."

Some people took the gospel message out by **practical help in the community**.

A number of people felt that there should be **greater links with the schools**. There is a valuable opportunity to reach the parents of children when they are in the primary school – especially through Sacramental Preparation.

The **class masses** held on Thursday at Christ the King are successful in bringing parents, children and the parish community together. The parish priest is welcoming and relates well to the children and parents. One person commented that they would like to see virtual catechism group created for those interested. A number of people commented that they only see families when there are celebrations of sacraments, eg the First Holy Communion and Confirmation and then the families disappear.

People commented that the parish does **engage with the wider community** via the Food Market, the delivery of Prayer Cards to local streets and the pre-Covid monthly meetings of older parishioners. Mother and Toddler's Group, Junior Club.

A parishioner of Christ the King has started a **Living Faith project** sharing good news stories. This has to be done in the neighbouring church for streaming purposes and to reach a wider audience. Yet, although in its infancy it has proved to be of great value, and is enjoyed by many and is something that strengthens faith..

One other person suggested inviting **guest speakers to replace the homily** at mass on occasions. Employing a dedicated **youth worker** was mentioned by several groups. As was an "anything goes Sunday" – less formality and encouraging young people – use more technology, podcast apps et cetera. However, as previously mentioned some young people prefer a more traditional approach to worship.

Young families are not particularly well catered for within the 3 Churches. The musicians/singers group recognised this and hope to move forward in this area.

The Bereavement Group spoke of people's delight when they are contacted. This is a very important ministry within the parish and highly valued by the people who receive it. They are a very active group – meeting people at their most vulnerable. However, it must be said that they all found difficulty in obtaining information from the ordained priests.

The 3 Churches **Proclaim Group**. Most of the initiatives had come from this group. They met regularly with the parish priest, and from this group had sprung – the Food Market, The Sherry Weddell Discipleship Program which a number of people attended, the prayer cards that are distributed to local streets. The new initiative by a parishioner of Christ the King, Living Faith – sharing good news stories looks to be an exciting initiative. Plans are afoot for Children's Clothing Market to be available for those who need it.

Many people found the **church's teaching on divorce and remarriage**, and the reception of the Eucharist cruel, draconian and hypocritical. It was seen as a major exit point from the

church for a number of people. "It is an example of the church being based on rule and not relationship" Time and time again many people asked "what would Jesus have done in this situation?"

"How dare they say that! I have done nothing wrong." – A divorced lady very active in the parish

Another lady "I desperately wanted to receive communion at my mother's funeral a few months ago – I couldn't go through that annulment – it was nearly 40 years ago and many of the witnesses are dead!"

Yet, a very, very small minority expressed the view that for them the church's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage was right.

An elderly lady commented, "if we share a common baptism with **other Christian churches**. Why can't we share Eucharist?"

Many people felt that the Church's mission would be strengthened if the **role of women was extended to the diaconate and priesthood**.

Almost all people felt that the talents and gifts of women were totally underused throughout the church. The Church is. "Patriarchal, outdated and not fit for the 21st-century." There needs to be a culture balance and change.

"They really don't know what they don't know! (Referring to the **ordained priesthood**). A significant number of people expressed views that the priesthood was imploding and the Church needed an adult, mature discussion, especially as there were a number of married priests within the Archdiocese and one in our own parish!.

Considerable concern was expressed at the number of **younger priests becoming more traditional** and very interested in "dressing up" and the "arrogance in thinking that they were special." Some people thought this was a dangerous trend.

Poor communication on all levels, at parish diocesan and national came up time and time again. Our own **parish newsletter** was not fit for purpose. " It used to be four sides, it's now two sides" considering this is one of the main modes of communication within the parish communities. " It is not fit the purpose, really isn't up to standard "We **must all take responsibility to improve this**". The fact that one of the three churches only wanted to print a two sided newsletter was most certainly not a good enough reason to deprive other churches of a more extended edition. Some people felt that information was not processed quickly enough. "It is sometimes difficult to get **information from the priests** that we need. " The parish priest rarely answers emails" The lack of a **Parish Register** is certainly hampering growth. The construction of a Parish Register that was available to a number of people would drastically improve communication on many levels.

On a diocesan level, the **Catholic People** (the Archdiocesan Newspaper) is "mostly pictures of the Archbishop and a few young priests, altars and relics and the odd school/parish article". "This periodical could be used as a vehicle to "share good practice, share ideas, examine Catechetical programs, share news, contacts et cetera" Communication from the diocese was indolent. "Pastoral letters were unmemorable."

One notable occasion mentioned by a number of people was the number of laypeople 80+ who stood in the cold outside the locked church to welcome a former parish **priest Father Ray O'Shea body**. A parishioner had organised with the visiting celebrant that the parishioners could read the prayers of Commendation and Scripture readings. It was, faith, and participation by laity at its very best.

It was interesting to witness that two groups met at least weekly from the start of the pandemic throughout the lockdowns firstly, the **Women's Group**, which started as a parish group, but then moved out as some members were no longer "practising". They met through Skype for 2 1/2 hours weekly for study and prayer. Another group, which is part of the 3 Churches is **the Circle of Friends** which is primarily for single, divorced, separated,

widowed people. Throughout the pandemic they met virtually for film clubs, "taste and see," and social events when they were unable to meet in person. Some members who contributed to the Synodal Process from these groups highlighted their appreciation but failed to understand why more structures were not put in place whereby other people could **socialise, pray and learn together**.

The **lack of young people** participating in parish life was a common concern. Interestingly, "young people" cannot be lumped together as all wanting or seeking the same experience as evidenced in conversations and meetings. There were some young people who wanted a more interactive, energized liturgy and others who preferred and enjoyed Exposition, Confession, and indeed felt strongly that Catholic High Schools were "losing the true Catholic identity." This proves to illustrate that a one size fits all liturgy/teaching can never achieve its true purpose.

A minority of people commented that **Catholic High Schools** with full of non practising Catholic families. They felt that "The Faith" was being inevitably watered down. A few people thought "the church needs to look at making the rules and criteria a lot stricter"..... "There are parents who had their children baptised for the sake of getting into a catholic school... And they are never seen again in the parish." "Work needs to be done here to find out why?" "Question sent by the diocese to parents of school-age children were ill thought out. They depended upon a certain church literacy, most non-practising parents would never understand the questions. – Defeating the purpose."

Among the "practising Catholics" a number of people reflected on the people who **attended mass every Sunday, some of whom were apathetic** and had no further involvement in parish life and, or were reticent in volunteering to help the community. One person wrote, "perhaps there should be **more challenge by the parish priests**" A similar comment was made and directed towards non practicing parents of children who attend the Catholic Schools to participate more fully in the Catholic community.

A small minority wanted the church to **reinforce its teachings** and doctrines and feared being overrun by the world. A few people thought that the Church should stand up to popular culture.

The majority who took part in the synodal discussions and who completed questionnaires wanted a **more diverse and inclusive church**. A Church in which all could participate in whatever role to which they felt called. All are made in the image and likeness of God. All ministries and positions, including the ordained priesthood should be open to all, male and female, regardless of skin colour or sexual orientation or marital status.

"Sacraments are food for the journey, not a reward for being good."

"Priests are becoming the judiciary and the rule makers"

COMMUNION

Weekday masses are well attended compared to many other churches 30+ people is common. People responded positively upon the availability of the **Sacraments**. The **homilies** given by the priests were welcomed by almost all. A significant number of people commented that the Eucharist should be available to **divorced and remarried** parishioners. Many people also raised concerns that the **LGBTQ + Community** should be welcomed. A significant number of people rejected the words "intrinsically disordered" which is to be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The role of **women** in the church, featured in many discussions.

"If the church ordained women it would give status to women across the world."

It came as a shock to many people that the Roman Catholic Church does not sign up to Human Rights Legislation.

How people function in an **organisation is dependent on the structures** employed and created by the leaders of those in authority. Some people commented that there was no **Diocesan Pastoral Council**, no **Deanery Council** in the city of Cardiff – structures that could and should have made a difference simply weren't there. "This is poor, poor leadership," There was little or no **training offered for Catechists or Children's Liturgy Leaders, Readers or Eucharistic ministers**. No framework exists whereby training or good practice could be shared.

"The priests come and go – the people are there for ever."

A number of people remembered the **Parish Consultor** Model which this parish created a number of years ago with the permission of Archbishop Peter Smith. Despite its enormous success, it was disbanded by and rejected by a local Parish priest who had overall responsibility for the parish – "it was shameful." "clericalism close to home in action" Some people compared leadership and organisational models in the secular world. **Few priests are leaders** and yet they are "in charge" of a parish. There appears to be little or no "accountability" within the Archdiocese as a whole. A number of people talked about "shared authority" would be a way forward.

"**This diocese has not had a decent leader** in 50 years apart from Archbishop Peter Smith"

Some people commented that the **priests in Christ the King were not visible enough**. "The visiting priests come and stand by the door and greet people the resident priests haven't done that the years."

A minority of people questioned the **closing of the 3 Churches** when other churches in the city were open – this had impacted some daily mass goers.

A good number of people questioned why the **elderly and those who live alone** had not been contacted by the priests. However, a group of laypeople met weekly to contact/phone some of the housebound, whose numbers they had.

The lack of a **Parish Register** had impacted on how the community functions and grows, particularly during Covid times. Pre-Covid the many parish groups were always looking for new members to energise and for the future. But despite that they had functioned well. As has been stated, some groups did exceedingly well holding virtual meetings. However, as a parish we lacked "**creative ways of moving forward**." "Take away the Sunday mass and what are you left with?". The **streaming facilities** in the neighbouring parish were very much appreciated by people who could access them. On a positive note. One layperson started a weekly **Liturgy of the Word** with song, music, this went on for 18 months. Some people thought this could have been a model for the priests to work on and make available to more people.

Even though 60+ people pre-Covid attended coffee after 9 am mass a minority of people commented that there was **no community spirit in Christ The King**. However, 20 **stewards** had replaced the welcomers. This gave more opportunity for them to chat to people as they entered the church. A small minority of people felt that the Catholic **community was being diluted** and that the "**bidding prayers** should not be political but rather more religious" some people commented upon the **music at mass** wanting it to be more "upbeat" the musicians/singers group during their synod discussions, shared ideas and discussed ways to make the music to be more inclusive, including chants, songs the children.

"People **disappear from mass and we don't know why**" "we don't seem to have the structure and communication routes."

A significant majority of people commented on the **poor communication with the priests** in the parish. Individuals told of **emails** sent that were not responded to, some individuals needed information in order to proceed with parish work found it difficult “pin them down.” A number of people commented on the once extended **newsletter** being condensed into two sides “considering it’s the main avenue of parish communication for many people, it’s awful.” A number of people were grateful for the parish quarterly magazine **Link**, they found it friendly and informative. The parish **website** needs updating, but people did realise that the Webmaster would need the updated information from the ordained priests/Parish Council.. At diocesan level The “**Catholic People**” newspaper was dull. It was filled with photographs and images of the Archbishop and young priests, with the occasional church building. Occasionally there would be an article on a school or parish

This is a missed opportunity to communicate with the diocese, share ideas, share good practice and to spiritually engage the community.

“**Does your faith matter** to you?” Perhaps this should be asked more often, or How do you handle the burdens of life? – A minority of people discussed this question

“**Our hierarchy has been totally non-existent** with respect to standing up for our faith. I.e., the family (which is our cornerstone) encouraging dialogue, tolerance, et cetera we have been attacked on all sides, including the media,”

Information is in an **academic language** using theological words and speech, and it is hard to understand, therefore, many do not read at all.”

A point made by one parishioner after mass “**other religions** openly show their faith by this symbols and signs, as Catholics we tend to keep quiet about it.”

Some people felt that the **Mass** was not an inspiring place to be, too regimented, not friendly and failed to take anything from it. A small number of people would prefer more uplifting music i.e. “clappy happy hymns”

“get rid of **seminaries** – creating entitled individuals – the would-be priests can take theological courses at run-of-the-mill universities and building far more more placements in parishes.”

One lady wanted to go back to the receiving holy **Communion kneeling** after viewing a priest on the Internet who had a vision where Jesus requested this.

Another man could not **reconcile with the suffering** he saw when he was a young doctor with a loving, compassionate God.

Communion, Participation & Mission

The cover-ups of **Clergy Sexual Abuse** were abhorrent to the majority of responders. Many people thought that it was the ordained priesthoods responsibility and the blame should lie at their feet, – and not to use the word “Church” – which implies the rest of us.

A number of people felt “a **disconnect between laypeople and the ordained priesthood**”

“Until the **Priesthood is heavily reformed**, becomes accountable, then the church’s mission will be thwarted.”

Some people said that the church should be the one organisation in the world that leads the way of **Human Rights Legislation**. Unfortunately for its own ends it has refused to do so. Many people would prefer to see a greater distribution of wealth from the church.

“Vatican treasures **CAN BE SOLD**”. A number of people who had left the Church commented that wealth should be redistributed.

Many people saw that the church is still concerned in **preserving its image** to the world rather than being truthful and honest. “The church has become like the Roman Empire and the priests the Pharisees in the synagogue.”

“The Catholic Church will continue to lose engagement if it doesn’t become more openly and explicitly **accepting of people from diverse backgrounds**”

“I would make it **more modern/left-wing** in views around contraception, sexuality and acceptance of women in the church”

When asked the question what image do you think the world holds of the Catholic church?

“Autocratic, misogynist, self-serving”

People replied, “that we **act out of fear and not love** that we haven’t moved with the times have too many rituals”

“The image of the church is that of a **downward spiral** and it is in the position of possibly becoming **“irrelevant to the world.”**”

“Clergy are isolated from people. Ordination imposes responsibilities to lead not to rule as **AUTOCRATS.**”

“I think there’s enough of us in the world to make it count.”

“I think globally that we should learn and more effort should be made for us to help one another.”

“I would like our **hierarchy**, particularly in the UK to speak out strongly about the treatment of refugees.”

The strengths of the church are “tradition, coupled with deep roots in the Third World and developing nations.” What is the church giving to the world now.

The vast majority of people who took part in meetings, and those who engaged in one-to-one conversation in houses, outside church and in pubs,, and those who responded to questionnaires **DESPERATELY WANTED CHANGE** and to build the church that was **fit for the 21st-century.**

However, a few people wanted **no change at all**, actually wanted a tighter, more rule-bound church that they had experienced in their youth.

- **110+ people took part in 8 face-to-face meetings and 3 virtual meetings via zoom**
- **52 people had. 1 : 1 meetings with Parish Representatives**
- **30+ people recorded their views.**

A very high percentage of the parish community engaged with the Synodal Process

The two themes to be addressed at **PARISH and DIOCESAN** level that ran through

MISSION, PARTICIPATION, COMMUNION, were;

LEADERSHIP and COMMUNICATION

Issues to be addressed in the **WIDER CHURCH** were;

PRIESTHOOD, ACCOUNTABILITY, SHARED AUTHORITY.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

INCLUSIVITY AND RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS FOR ALL

SIGNED PARISH REPRESENTATIVES TANIA WALSH... SIMON BROCKWAY

On behalf of the Parish Advisory Council, I acknowledge receipt of the Synodal Report of Christ the King Parish Cardiff

SIGNED ... CHRISTOPHER STEVENS

DATED ...MARCH 19th 2022.....

P.A.C.Chair

**SIGNED ...CANON MATTHEW JONES...
Parish Priest**