



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of **St Dyfrig's Town/City Pontypridd**

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

Introduction – Special Characteristics of the Parish

A mission church existed in Treforest in 1853 and was known as St Dubritius. It was the mother church of the valleys stretching from Trehafod to Ynysybwl and Cilfynydd down to Taffs Well and Tongwynlais (8 miles North-South and 3 Miles East-West).

The current St Dyfrig's church building was built in 1927; the large presbytery and Memorial Hall were built around 1923 and all were designated Grade 2 in 2001.

St Dyfrig's parish church in Treforest was built to serve the growing community of Pontypridd. Life in the region was dominated by the local coal industry and heavy industry, for example the chainworks of Brown and Lenox. This turned Pontypridd into a bustling melting pot of people from other parts of Wales, England, Ireland and further afield, such as the Italians who set up their cafes in the area.

The coal mines closed in the 1980's and the heavy industry disappeared and the transition to a post-industrial economy was a painful process. The local population now looks to a much wider range of employment and must travel further afield for work.

The mining school in the town developed and grew becoming the Polytechnic of Wales and later the University of South Wales.

The biggest change that has affected the parish is that the rows of terrace houses that surrounded the church are now multi occupancy, mostly by students, and family occupancy is rare. Most families who attend mass now travel 1-3 miles from the better off areas of detached and semi-detached houses in Tonteg, Church Village and Llantwit Fardre.

The members of the parish come from these backgrounds:

- Elderly members who have spent their lives in Pontypridd.
- A smaller number of families who live a few miles from the church and commute outside the area to work.
- International students who are studying at the university for one to four years. This year approximately fifty percent of attendees at Sunday Mass are students.

Within our parish boundary are two schools St Michael's primary school and Cardinal Newman secondary school.

Presently, both parishes and the University Chaplaincy are without a priest due to the sudden and unexpected retirement of the incumbent in January 2022. Weekend masses are currently being served by the Archbishop of Cardiff, George Stack, when available, or a supply priest.

Methodology

<p><u>The period up to Christmas</u></p>	<p><u>Action</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer and Planning • Training 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>The plan was to hold several face-to-face sessions after Mass on the weekends. Training sessions were scheduled prior to Christmas.</p> <p>With the stricter COVID regulations and the spread of COVID amongst the team the plan changed to use open questionnaires and a listening wall that parishioners could write on and interact with others.</p>
<p><u>January 2022</u></p>	<p><u>Action</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Questionnaires • Listening Wall 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>Our parish priest suddenly announced his retirement at the beginning of January and our PAC closed.</p> <p>Before every Mass the Synod prayer was used and people were encouraged to think about the Synod questions and to complete questionnaires or write on the wall.</p> <p>Questionnaires were anonymous and posted in a box at the back of church. Responses were received from parish members and some parish members encouraged their lapsed family members and friends to complete them too.</p>
<p><u>Feb 2022</u></p>	<p><u>Action</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Questionnaires • Listening Wall • Parish Leadership Meeting 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>The routine continued. At the end of the month the parish ministry leaders came together to discuss how St Dyfrig's can rebuild post pandemic without a parish priest.</p> <p>We used this as an opportunity to hold a listening session.</p>
<p><u>March 2022</u></p>	<p><u>Action</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Write Up Report • Review • Distribution 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>The information captured through the listening wall, questionnaires (18 responses including 2 from people outside of the church), leadership meeting (18 people) and from 3 individuals who emailed us, was collated and organized into the categories: communion, participation, mission and other. This is presented below.</p>

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

What gives you joy?

- Most people commented on belonging to a worshipping community, meeting good friends, familiar faces, feeling welcome and how the church is their extended family. However, a few stated that they didn't feel welcome and felt that when they tried to get involved, they were not helped by the parish priest or other people took over. Making people welcome should be a priority.
- "The parish school of St Michael's having successfully returned to previous standards."
- "Fund raisers to deal with restoration costs."
- "The organist and choir when we're at full compliment."
- "Children's Liturgy, First Reconciliation & Communion programmes."
- "Often just sitting in church I think I can feel the prayers of those who worked for and in St Dyfrig's, especially the women who are now receiving their reward and peace with the Lord."
- "I get immense joy receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and having the opportunity to go to confession and adoration. I like having a cup of tea after Mass."
- "I like the community. I like the open space, the acoustics work well, I don't like the flaking paint. Dislike Catholic Dogma/rules that don't reflect modern life and technology."
- "One of the great joys of attending Mass is the diversity of people. Old and young, male and female, from a very wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. I would suggest that the Catholic Church is the most diverse community within my town. At a weekend Mass a true experience of God's kingdom can be discerned. I believe that this beautiful diversity should be cherished and encouraged and viewed as a sign of God's presence."

During the Pandemic

- All missed an open church during the pandemic and were disappointed that they could not attend Mass in person, and some felt out of touch with others and worried that if needed there would be no spiritual help.
- "Live streaming Mass has been a blessing and a comfort. Both from St Dyfrig's and the opportunity to attend Mass in lots of parishes and communities around the world. Watching live streaming Masses elsewhere was very uplifting and helped us realise we were part of a Universal Church."

- “There was great support from the Parish, plenty of phone calls especially from the SVP. But would like to have received Holy Communion at home sometime during the pandemic.”
- “Phone calls took over from visits but SVP full of “vulnerable” members. Disappointed that our parish didn’t have the organization, or people young enough to become a hub to help those in need.”
- During the pandemic, lots of people felt that their faith strengthened, because they prayed more using a variety of devotions, read the Bible and other spiritual books more and joined in Mass online and some fasted as well.
- “I tried to remember Jesus’ words “I am with you at all times” and I am disappointed that I often forgot that and was at a low ebb. I was often lifted by the way in which other people kept the faith and offered me their love and prayers.”
- “I have so admired Ali and Roland who have done a difficult job with patience and good humour to enable our weekend Masses to be celebrated.”

Emerging after the Pandemic

- An inaugural Parish leadership team meeting was held at the end of February and the following list of groups and ideas was brainstormed for consideration of setting up.
 - Foodbank, Gardening
 - Liturgy including Hymn selection,
 - Catechesis :- Marriage Preparation, Children’s Liturgy, Confirmation, Baptism, 1st Communion and Reconciliation, adult formation, RCIA
 - Lay Leadership Team (Church group council, Parish Advisory Council)
 - Prayer Team
 - Cleaning Team
 - Eucharistic Ministers
- “Are we attractive enough? More Vibrancy, New volunteers, New Groups, Presentation in Parish for volunteers. Bring university into the Parish Life in students’ faith. Getting back to Mass, access to the church in the week – being able to pop in, Groups in different areas out in the community.”
- “SVP Foodbank collection helpful. Former connections: Refugees in valleys, afternoon tea for locals could be re-instated. Could collect for SVP shop in Pontypridd.”

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

Volunteering

- Many people discussed the need for volunteers. We could do with more readers, eucharistic ministers, altar servers and catechists. We could form a liturgy group to plan services to mark the church's seasons creatively! Prayer groups would be welcomed. "Everything is possible with volunteers."
- "However, volunteering and committing time are difficult with work and family commitments."
- "We rely too heavily on those who have carried out ministries over long years. New people need to feel welcome and emboldened to take over."

Small Groups

- "Small groups could meet once a month to really get to know each other, listen to one another. Doing smaller social activities e.g., walks or just having Coffee. We could have prayer / rosary groups, adoration, thoughtful meditation."
- "If small groups take on volunteering responsibilities, then maybe there would be less perceived commitment and more fellowship. They could also encourage active engagement of families, children and young adults in Mass + wider activities."
- "Possible groups: Choir, readers, children's liturgy, catechist, Cafod/SPUC, Parent & Toddler, Youth Club, Students and Over 60s"

Leadership

- There is a feeling of our parish being 'left out on a limb' after the resignation of our parish priest. Leadership needs to be improved at all levels. We need a parish plan: accountability, sharing good practice, training to develop both clergy & lay in leadership skills.
- "We must get used to shortage of priests, rely on laity more. We could setup a parish lay leadership team to plan future together. I think lay people must be included more in the running of the parish. PAC should have stayed in place not disbanded, Archbishop, Dean, Rep could Zoom into meetings."
- "Catholic parishes could be structured in such a way that mission, visions and ideas of individual parishioners can be shared, discussed, discerned and then implemented as parish projects. Perhaps the synodal process within the Catholic Church will assist us to work collectively for God's kingdom by encouraging sharing and listening within parishes."

- “The lay should be able to fulfill their baptismal promises where leadership is lacking, they should feel they can step up and provide it. We need models of lay leadership that we can use and that will be accepted and not undone by clergy as they move from parish to parish.”

Young People

- We have 2 schools in our parish. “Where are the young people in our weekend Masses? Do they feel part of our Church? Can we have greater links with the schools? What can we do for them? What are they looking for in church? What do they want? Call a meeting and ask.”
- “We need youth clubs in our church, music youth group. Teach them about saints. Rosary group for the youth youngsters. Explaining that Jesus is present in the Holy Eucharist.”
- “We should be bringing our young people to Jesus. Developing and sharing our faith with them, involving them in outreach and work for the poor in our community. Young People want to be a part of a vibrant, exciting church that is doing good works. They don’t want to be part of a church that appears lifeless.”

Clergy

- “A charismatic priest with a vision would find a willing audience that would follow their lead.”
- “There is a shortage of priests or is it a shortage of people? The church should be open to more Deacons to help fill the leadership gap.”
- “The clergy need to be more approachable. People are willing to participate but are not given encouragement by some clergy. Clergy need to do less e.g., one priest to cover both parishes and a university is too much.”
- “The Church should face up to the shameful behaviour of certain members and not ignore it – the reporting of abuse in the Catholic Church is a reason for people drifting away.”

Inclusion

- “We need to be more inclusive, e.g., many people feel left out from reading as they can’t climb steps to the pulpit anymore. Bring the microphone down to the floor so they don’t feel left out. The lights are also too dim.”
- “There are people still not ready to come back to Mass some attend live streaming, but others cannot. Work of SVP has been sterling in the pandemic.”
- “The people are the church but must be made to feel welcome.”

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

Prayer

- “Our work starts with prayer – It is God’s parish. We must pray for peace and for the will of God.”

Evangelisation

- “In the 1970s probably 75% of my classmates in my state primary school attended Sunday School held in a chapel or church. It is quite clear that the number of non-Catholics children who receive an introduction to the Gospel narratives etc. through participation in Sunday School has declined greatly over the last 5 decades. The lack of knowledge of the Christian Narratives within the wider community has been compounded by the failure of state schools to adhere to the law in relation to the provision of assemblies of a basic Christian character. Consequently, we are faced with a growing population who are ignorant of the Christian message. There is an obvious need for the good news of Jesus Christ to be proclaimed in the wider area. In my work I must interview people on a regular basis and am expected to collect data regarding religious beliefs. A vast majority of people when asked if they have religious faith will say no, making the confession with an emphasis that they seem proud of. Therefore, not only are we faced with a growing widespread ignorance of the Christian faith but also a negativity towards religion.”
- “We have lost our younger generation who have lived with Mass going Catholics and Catholic schools but now feel the church is irrelevant in their lives. In the same way we’re not touching the lives of the vast majority outside who have no contact with God or His love. Our work to evangelise is urgent.”
- Many of the replies from parishioners dreamt of a full church worshipping in spirit and in faith; “a church that has people queueing down the street to meet the Lord and be strengthened for the coming week”.
- We need to overcome the obstacle of appealing to people who lead very busy lives, especially family lives. “Many people have difficulty organising life for themselves and their families and see no need to have a faith dimension on top of an already busy life.”
- “The missing and those who are lukewarm are not helped by fairly regular instances of abuse highlighted.”
- “How can we overcome apathy and become more joyful and missionary?”

- Some replies discussed evangelization from a personal perspective. “I spread the Good News in my interactions with young children, in children’s liturgy, in day to day dealings with people, friends – who know I value my faith.”
- Most replies mentioned marketing “our Church is not marketing itself”. “Go out to different places as there are no families in Treforest. Young families are moving into Church Village and Tonteg areas – we could advertise our Christmas Masses in local directory that gets delivered to every door. We need to have Mass times by August to submit in time for October issue.”
- And three mentioned reacting to recent cultural changes in society. “Is our church becoming too elitist? Should we be actively inviting and welcoming divorced, LGBTQ+, our young (our future), and people of all abilities and disabilities to be more involved in church life?”
- “Whilst recognizing that particular historical, cultural, social and political contexts can create barriers to Catholic parishes engaging in a mission project in the wider community, I do believe that being the Body of Christ means that Catholic parishes should be focused on mission to the wider community. This focus on mission requires a laity that is inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by the teaching of the church. Each Catholic parish should seek to engage with the wider community and witness to the love of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in words and in actions of love and service. For most Christians the calling to proclaim the Gospel is not through words but through deeds but is vitally important through effective catechisation that the laity develop an understanding of what being a follower of Christ means for the way you live your life.”
- “I would like to see the church use its community to help the community. Use its resources to help and not necessarily preach while it does it. Use its halls for psychological support groups, social clubs for the lonely, and exercise programmes for the frail (this may happen, I don’t know). That may be how you engage with the wider community and if someone asks about attending Mass while they are there, then great.”
- Direct evangelisation was also mentioned through “missions supported by inviting visiting priests and nuns and communities.” “Share and learn with local Christian groups.”. “More Alpha to which we can invite the local community.”

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

Adult Formation

- To live our baptismal promise, we need to develop a faith-based way of life that inspires, from childhood to adulthood. “A realisation that God can work in, can give meaning to, and help us lead fulfilling lives. Faith is seen as an essential part of our existence.”
- “Many of us have been brought up in a faith that leaves us as we develop into adulthood, questioning many Church aspects and the lack of ongoing formation and study lead people away from our basic faith of following Jesus.”
- “There is little spiritual development once one has joined the church. This is possibly OK if you can access materials which will lead you further into your spiritual journey. Ongoing reminders or what would be good (or bad) to pursue would be welcomed. The RCIA course at St Dyfrig’s is excellent and 2nd to none; it could be an excellent model for further spiritual development”
- “I would like to see ongoing catechesis or formation so that it is clearly understood that the development of your understanding of what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ does not end at confirmation or the completion of RCIA. All Christians should have an understanding of why they follow Christ so that they can to give account to non-Christians of the reasons for their faith. It is also important to understand the church’s teachings so that in the power of the Holy Spirit we can engage in the process of sanctification and undertake necessary changes and corrections to our own lifestyle and behavior.”
- “An informed laity will make a vital contribution to the building up of God’s kingdom. We will feel more confident in applying the teaching of the Catholic Church within our own life, family, parish and wider society.”

Teaching Authority

- “Church teaching has developed over 2000 years and been advised by the Gospels, Saints and Doctors of the church. We should keep the church teachings the same, not water it down, and revisit the pressures of 21st century secular relativism. The Holy Spirit may be calling us to listen, to move forward in a way more suitable for 2022. Not that we should regret what was done but the world has moved forward, and we should present the faith in a different way. And keep respect for the Magisterium.”

- “We should bring back having Holy Communion on the tongue, the old doctrine of the Roman Catholic church - keep Jesus at the centre of our lives. I want to see the traditional Latin Mass uncompromised orthodox teaching in the Catholic Church. “
- “Remember the teachings of Jesus and not all the rules and regulations brought about by church leaders. Simplifying our faith, or rather simplifying Church aspects, for example, “Obligation”, and particularly the minefield of marriage. I think the Church needs to recognize that 99% of Catholics regard birth control using the pill is perfectly acceptable and not sinful and that it need not affect or interfere with their faith life or receiving sacraments.”
- “We know of the shortage of priests, are we being called to think about married priests, and more deacons and consider women priests. The early church moved and spread with these.”

Ecumenism

- “There is an opportunity to reach out, educate ourselves on Ecumenism and meet with other local churches. As we Christians are becoming the minority, we should be ecumenical.”

Catholic Social Teaching

- “In my experience, however, Catholic Social Teaching and the preferential option for the poor rooted in the Gospel are not properly emphasized. I hope the Synodal process can change this. The radical, counter-cultural nature of the Catholic Church must not be down-played.”

Other remarks

- “Found lack of statues and reconfiguration of church post Vatican 2 a difficulty.”
- “I would have liked more chances for silent prayer with others. There were opportunities in between. I have kept the piece from the Universe from years ago, as I think it is most important that we keep at least 5 minutes silence after communion to allow the Holy Spirit to touch us as a corporate body.”
- “That the church will be open to Deacons, Married Priests and Women Priests and more inclusive of women in all capacities.”

Sign Off

This Report is submitted to the Diocesan Synodal Team on behalf of the Parish community of:

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It is an honest reflection of the work undertaken over the last six months and has been endorsed by the Parish Advisory Council.

Signed..... Parish Priest

Signed *Alan de Ste Croix* Parish Representative

Once complete please forward to:

madeleine.walters@rcadc.org

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