



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of ...ST FRANCIS XAVIER'S CHURCH..... Town/CityHEREFORD...UK.....

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

SFX – Synod Parish Report

Introduction – Special Characteristics of the Parish

St Francis Xavier, Hereford is a city-centre church situated near the Cathedral. It was built 175 years ago and been restored some twenty years ago in two stages, at a combined cost of more than £1M. The restoration was necessary as the building had fallen into disrepair. Plans to sell the church by the Archdiocese were thwarted by the Parish and Friends of SFX who mounted a campaign to save the church and raised a significant proportion of the funds to achieve it. It seats around 260 downstairs, has a Choir and Organ loft at the rear and an Annexe on the side – restored five years ago. Masses are 6pm Saturday and 8am & 10am Sunday catering for some 300 parishioners (pre Covid) from up to twenty different birth countries. Daily public Masses are also celebrated. The Sacrament of Reconciliation attracts parishioners and non-parishioners alike to this County Town.

Methodology

Nov 2021 Early	Action Synodality on agenda of PAC	Comment No communication from the Archdiocese?
Mid	Dorothy Kennedy & Stephen Booth appointed Reps	
Mid / late	On-line Training Sessions from Arch	
Dec 2021 Early	Action Ordered ‘Logo’ Banners and Pope’s letter announced from lectern by Reps	Comment Five for SFX, one for Our Lady’s & one for Belmont Objective to make everyone aware of the Synod & parishioners’ part in it

Mid	Banners erected outside church Began to compile our 'Survey'	'Survey' proposals announced to PAC Trawled other websites for good information we could use.
Jan 2022 Early / Mid Late	Action Began to compile & distribute 'Survey' questions for comments Launched the 'Survey'	Comment Got as many opinions as possible, including PP Decided to have both paper copies and on-line – accessible via our SFX website Lectern and Newsletter announcement of our 'Listening Project – Journeying Forward Together' - for completion by the end of February
Feb 2022 Early & Mid Late	Action Newsletter reminders of Survey Synod Day	Comment Two 'live' Listening' sessions announced Belmont hosted a talk by Austin Ivereigh for Herefordshire – well attended
Mar 2022 Early Early / Mid Late	Action Held 'Live' Listening sessions in day / evening Report Preparation Report	Comment Parishioners keen to take part – a dozen at each session (a regular event?) Circulated to PP & PAC – sent to Archdiocese Circulate to the Parish
April 2022 Ongoing	Action	Comment We intend to use the Survey comments to review all our activities and provide more opportunities for parishioners to be more active in the Churches' Community and Mission

May2022 Early / Mid	Action Produce SFX Parish Plan to include co- operation and joint events with the Deanery	Comment Approved for implementation by PAC

Survey Details

There were 70 responses, 31 online and 39 paper copies. The majority of responders were British or Irish but the following nationalities were also represented: Indian, Indonesian, Polish, French, Portuguese, South African, Rhodesian/Zimbabwean, Filipino and Bahraini.

Where people answered the relevant question, 22 were committed to faith and participating in parish life, 38 were committed to faith, 3 said faith and church have some relevance, and 2 were culturally Catholic but church has little relevance.

There were 21 males and 34 females identified.

As far as age goes:

Under20 =2

20-29 = 4

30-49 = 12

50-69 = 31

70+ = 19

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

When asked "What gives you joy and strength in belonging to SFX Parish?" the vast majority responded very positively. Amongst the very positive comments, one person explained that "I feel that I belong to SFX and it belongs to me" while another described it as "A very special church". The following were mentioned specifically -

Being part of the Church family in Christ and being able to receive the sacraments.

Fr Michael's leadership and sermons. "The sense of reverence and prayerfulness and the unfussy dignity of the Liturgy." There were many appreciative references to the fact that SFX was the first church in the Archdiocese to reopen during the pandemic.

A strong sense of belonging to a caring community

Friendship with other parishioners/Some inspirational parishioners

Provision of weekday Masses with morning prayer

Parishioners of all ages/walks of life/different nationalities

The volunteers who help to run the church: readers/altar servers/welcomers/stewards who helped to keep the church open for private prayer during lockdown/choir/organist were all mentioned.

A beautiful church

Two people said that "Nothing" or "Very little" gave them joy or strength in belonging to SFX parish.

The majority of people feel welcomed in the parish, with many people saying they felt "very welcomed and listened to". One or two made the point that it might be difficult for new parishioners or occasional attendees to feel part of an established parish. Perhaps more could be done to enable conversation and greetings? Or to link new parishioners to a willing volunteer living nearby? A few also commented that being involved in parish activities means that you get to know people and feel welcomed. Several people mentioned that any concerns raised have been promptly dealt with.

Two people felt that they were not made to feel welcome, valued or listened to in the parish.

When asked **"How well do we communicate? Is language a problem for you?"** the majority responded positively, feeling that we communicate well or very well through the Newsletter and website. Several people commented that they appreciated being able to download the

newsletter. There were a number of comments that it is good to see a Polish version of the Newsletter. One person for whom English is a second language would like copies of prayers in English. One person commented that it is important to retain ways of communicating with those who do not have computers or smartphones. A minority of people would like to see more Latin used in the Mass, while a similar size minority would like to see less. Two people picked up on the use of the phrase "embracing diversity" in the survey, with one person pointing out that "Our Church is defined by the terms catholic / universal which are synonymous, and tell us that everyone of whatever nationality, colour, race, social class or culture is welcomed. "One person commented that while we communicate internally quite well, we could improve how we communicate the joy of faith externally. One felt that we don't communicate "at all" with each other and would appreciate someone being available to chat in the Narthex for 30 minutes after Mass for anyone who feels lonely or needs support.

The question **"What could we do better for you in the parish?"** was asked. The responses were too many and too varied to be included in this report for the Archdiocese and will be itemised in a separate, more detailed parish report. One person felt that the question needed reversing i.e. "What could I do better for the parish?" Some of the ideas that were mentioned most frequently were an increase in social events (including afternoon events for the those who do not want to go out at night), having specific fundraising targets, a programme of talks/discussion groups each year (maybe during Lent) on a range of different topics relevant to our Catholic faith, more communication about how to deal with questions such as abortion, gender, family life, increased links with SFX and St Mary's schools, more opportunities to engage with young people, seeking out those who are lonely or isolated and making sure they are welcomed and making sure the elderly feel important members of the parish.

Our survey and group discussions addressed the response of the church to the pandemic. The following question was asked: "What strengths did you find in your faith and faith community?"

Those who responded gained strength during the pandemic in the following ways:

Participation in live streamed online Masses. The vast majority saw this as very positive and "a lifeline". Masses from SFX gave a feeling of continuity and that the parish was still together. There was comfort in seeing "our own priest in our own beautiful church" while being able to access Masses from all over the world strengthened the feeling of belonging to a Universal church.

Live streaming of funerals seen as positive when congregation numbers were very restricted

Participation in online prayer groups/talks/zoom meetings organised via Diocesan groups and CAFOD

Increased time for private prayer/reflection/ reading

Making parishioners even more aware of the value of parish community

Personal faith was an anchor that held panic and fear at bay. Faith strengthened, especially once the church reopened. Putting trust in God and having faith that all would be well.

The reopening of the church as soon as possible for Exposition of The Blessed Sacrament and private prayer. The church provided a place of solace and sanctuary. Many expressed an appreciation for Fr Michael's leadership in reopening as soon as possible.

Saying the Rosary at 8pm knowing that other parishioners were doing the same.

When asked if we had learnt anything positive from the way in which we responded to the pandemic, the vast majority felt access to Mass online was very positive. Other comments included observations that the parish "rose to the occasion" and worked together.

A small minority said that they felt "abandoned" during the pandemic, especially at the beginning of the first lockdown. A very few people said that they felt isolated by not being online and one person was "irritated" by being told to "go online". One older parishioner explained that she was "fearful" of modern technology.

A very small minority expressed very clearly their disappointment with lack of leadership of Church hierarchy during the pandemic. They felt strongly that there was a failure to offer a strong Christian perspective. and that this was a missed opportunity to reach out to a fearful population. The following specific criticisms were made:

Compliance with government guidelines to close churches, cancel marriages, baptisms and denying the Sacrament of the sick to the dying.

Remaining silent on the prohibition of visits to the sick and elderly, the threat of compulsory vaccination and the ethical development of vaccines.

When asked if there was anything that would be useful to carry on post-pandemic

the vast majority were in favour of continuing with streaming Sunday Mass online for the benefit of anyone unable to attend in person. A minority mentioned a need to return to Sunday obligation.

Several people said that we need strong leadership from the Catholic bishops and a resolve never again to close down public worship.

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

1. St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP)

The following information was gained from talking to a member of the **SFX SVP**

The SVP is part of an international Christian voluntary network dedicated to tackling poverty in all its forms by providing practical assistance to people in need. It is inspired by Christ's message to love our neighbour as ourselves. (www.svp.org.uk) In SFX parish there is a small but very active SVP group who work to support all comers, of all faiths and none. They are financed by the parish through annual collections and private donations. Their work includes the following:

Weekly provision of food parcels which are available to anyone in need who calls at the Presbytery.

Dealing with direct requests for financial help or referrals from the SVP National office. For example, the SFX SVP group has arranged financial support to help clear debts, buy special spectacles, help with transport problems and buying bags of groceries. They also handle requests for specific items such as furniture through appeals in the SFX Newsletter.

Supporting vulnerable people with referrals to Hereford Council and the homeless night shelter.

Attendance at the regular Homeless Forum meetings, which are held in the Bishop's Palace and attended by representatives from the Vennture team (www.vennture.org.uk), Hereford Council and other Churches e.g. the Salvation Army, the Baptist Church and the Cathedral. This provides an important link between the network of those supporting the homeless and vulnerable and the Council. SFX SVP is well known in Hereford amongst the homeless and those working to support them.

2. Hereford Open Door

Hereford Open Door is an independent charity working with Herefordshire Council to provide food, drink and other essentials for the homeless. The breakfast service operating from St Peter's Church Hall, has been suspended since the pandemic. When this was operating, SFX supported the Friday breakfasts by paying the £60 monthly rent for one day a week and by providing volunteers to cook and serve breakfasts. While this service is suspended, our monthly donation of £60 has been transferred to the Hereford Food Bank. The £60 is provided out of weekly collections at Sunday Mass.

3. The Food Bank

When the Food Bank was based in nearby Aubrey Street, SFX was a pick-up point for donated food items. When the Food Bank relocated to Monkmoor Street, SFX is no longer a pick-up point.

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

Locally, SFX has demonstrated a Catholic presence through Corpus Christi processions through town. During the first lockdown, Fr Michael brought the Blessed Sacrament to the streets of Hereford as he was driven around in an open top car, holding the Monstrance for parishioners to honour. One person described this as "one of the most holy, comforting and emotional experiences of my life...."

Churches Together: This organisation is not very active locally at the moment, but SFX has traditionally taken part in events such as the Good Friday Walk of Witness (when participants walk through town with a cross being carried and stopping at strategic points for Gospel readings, prayers and hymns), Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and The Night of the Churches (when a number of local churches were open for several hours one evening and passers-by were welcomed in).

For many years, SFX has joined with the Cathedral congregation for the Palm Sunday Donkey Procession and Children's Liturgy and for the first part of the Easter Vigil.

SFX occupies a city-centre location and the Foyer is always open. If the church is locked, there is a full view through the glass screen. There is a good supply of Catholic Truth Society booklets and other literature always available in the foyer.

The city-centre location also enables the Sacrament of Reconciliation to attract parishioner and non-parishioners alike – particularly on Saturday mornings

When asked "**How would you like to see our Mission extending?**" answers included the following:

Promote the concept of discipleship, love and service. More needs to be done but initiative needs to come from the laity.

Strengthening our own parish/school community first then extending to the local community. Phone calls/visits to parishioners who are missing from church for several weeks.

Need to do more within our own parish to help with housebound/infirm/elderly. Maybe a befriending service eg. a message board asking for / offering help?

Advertise events for Catholic organisations eg. SPUC conference, March for Life etc.

Personal example. As individuals we should live a Catholic life and be happy to own it

More provision for families and young people. Involve young people in discussion about issues such as abortion. Latin Mass would draw young people into the parish.

More involvement with Churches Together and Deanery events, especially involving young people

Social events with other Herefordshire Catholic communities.

Interdenominational projects/social events to promote understanding and respect.

Adopt some of the great Catholic charities eg. Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) or Survive-Miva (two people feel that CAFOD is too political)

Other matters

1. The Church

When asked **"What gives you joy and strength in belonging to the Roman Catholic church"**, the most common responses were: being part of a global faith community comprising one fifth of humanity, the Roman Catholic church is Christ's one true Church, Holy Mass and the sacraments, the joy of following our Saviour and realisation that his Spirit is with us today, belief in eternal life, a feeling of belonging to a family, giving a sense of purpose to life. Other comments included -: the courage of the persecuted church, monastic orders, the process of canonization, the rich cultural heritage of the Church (art, music and architecture), the fellowship and communion of the saints, the philosophical roots provided by St Thomas Aquinas, coherence of Catholic thought and practice, fidelity to the Apostolic tradition, teaching of the General Councils (especially Vatican II). One person answered that "not a lot" gave them joy and strength in belonging to the Roman Catholic Church as it is very quiet with regard to what it stands for in the world.

When asked to consider **which - if any - of the Church's views you may have a problem** with exactly half of those who responded to our survey said "none" or did not answer this question. The half who did respond commented on finding a problem with the following views:

The church is not a democracy and it is essential that it stays strong on its teachings. The Church is not outspoken enough about what it stands for in our present world. We need very strong leadership and guidance.

"Too many elephants in the room"; Homosexuality, treatment of divorcees, contraception were all mentioned several times.

Women not being represented in decision making within the Church was mentioned.

The Church "jumping on secular bandwagons", with too much involvement in climate change and the green agenda. Two people feel very strongly that the green agenda goes "well beyond our God given duty to be responsible stewards of the Earth" and that the church should stay out of the argument. Another person feels very strongly that the standpoint taken by Pope Francis in 'Laudato Si' (that "the Earth is close to a catastrophic tipping point") does not bear close examination.

Priestly celibacy -some feel that priests should be allowed to marry as in the Orthodox Church.

One person finds a problem with the priest facing the people, "silly speeches by parishioners at the end of Mass" and "trite childish hymns"

When asked **"What do we need to do to make everyone feel welcome - e.g. embracing diversity?"** answers included the following viewpoints:

Christ is the embodiment of embracing diversity. The church has always been diverse. "Catholics should treat with contempt any suggestion that they are not inclusive enough" Be open about our own beliefs but treat everyone with love. Respect each other's views without compromising our Catholic values. Lots of smiling faces but no "rainbow flags". No more "woke nonsense". These issues were brought up by a good handful of people.

When asked **what problems do you consider the Church faces in the next 10 or 20 years?** the most common answers were:

Falling attendance, fewer and fewer young people and families going to Church, falling numbers of priests, teachings of the Church are seen by many as counter cultural in the increasingly secular society - the Church needs to stand firm in offering an important alternative, loneliness of priests living alone, groups pushing for change in Church teaching, division between the Old Rite and the New, yet more effort required to atone for the shame of child abuse and other scandals linked to the Church, speaking out on the world stage against war, cruelty, oppression, corruption etc. the present system for appointing bishops with no pastoral experience. We must avoid "the perils of becoming like the Anglican Church and trying to please everybody",

People's dreams for the Church include: divisions within the Church to be healed, a renewal of faith through parental example and teaching, that the members of the RC Church will be so filled with the love and joy of Christ that all will want to join, all members of the church reaching out to each other, continuing to provide daily Mass and spiritual support, to reach out to more people showing them that there is another way to live, ordination of women, to go back to Pre Vatican II days when everyone went to church, strong faith being passed down through families, to have Christian teaching at the centre of public and private life, to be set free from the dreadful legacy of the recent past, "post career" married men as priests, confident and prepared to preach the faith authentically, for the Pope, bishops and priests to give a very clear message regarding what is right and what is wrong - not to be vague and fudge the message of Christ, a Pope "not stuck in the past of the 1970s", more celebrations of the Tridentine Mass, return of lapsed Catholics. The church fighting to protect the right "to educate children as they see fit and not allow them to be indoctrinated in school from their earliest years with notions such as gender fluidity, sexual deviation, white guilt, equity, diversity and inclusion".

2. The notion of Synodality

A minority of people argued strongly against the notion of "Synodality", stating that the Church of Jesus Christ is not some kind of democracy. Other comments are as follows: Authority is in the tradition handed down. The Church has one reason: to save lost sinners; it has no other mandate. There appears to be no definition as to who can take part in the present consultation, making it no different from a secular referendum. Those most likely to respond are issue driven, with grudges. The majority who do not crave change are probably unlikely to respond. A Synodal church is bound to break into factions, as the Anglican church has done. In the light of serious concerns within the church (financial scandals, sexual abuse scandals, the Sino-Vatican agreement 2018, weak leadership in the pandemic) the whole synodal idea is a massive distraction and diversion, wasting time money and effort...

People who expressed these concerns clearly love the Church and wish to belong to a Universal Church with strong clear leadership.

3. Latin Mass

Responses to the survey and comments made in group discussions reveal very different attitudes to the use of Latin in the Mass. A minority speak out very strongly in favour of a return to the Latin Mass, believing that this is what the young want. On the other hand, a similar sized minority would like to see all Latin being removed from the Mass. One person feels strongly that 'Traditiones Custodes' should be revoked immediately, stating that "much pain and confusion would be relieved and much unity would be restored" One person pointed out that the popularity of the Old Rite in some parishes is producing a division in the Church and suggests that more availability of the New Rite Latin Mass could bridge the gap.

SignedFr. Michael Evans O.S.B. (Parish Priest).....

Parish representatives....Dorothy Kennedy (Mrs.).....Stephen Booth.....