

SYNOD FOLLOW UP July 2022: St Francis Xavier Parish report

There was a total of 75 responses (44 paper and 31 online) to the Synod Questionnaire which was run by the parish over several weeks in February 2022. In addition, 3 group discussions were conducted. A general synopsis of the responses was submitted to the Archdiocese in March 2022 and a copy is available on the Parish website (www.sfxhereford.org.uk). 4 paper copies were handed in after the closing date for submission and those responses were not included in the general synopsis. This parish report gives a more detailed review of the answers of particular relevance to our parish.

Please note that % figures are only approximate. Some answers were given verbally at a series of group discussions. In addition, some answers overlapped several categories, making it difficult to quantify results accurately.

What gives you joy and strength in belonging to SFX Parish?

Mass and spirituality: Approximately 10% of those answering this question referred to the Mass and sense of prayerfulness at SFX as being a source of joy and strength. One person stated that there is “... always a sense of many years of prayer having soaked SFX.” Mention was made of the “beautiful Sunday Mass”, and the excellent provision of weekday Mass and Morning Prayer.

Our priests: Approximately 30% of those answering this question named the priests who serve the parish as a source of joy and strength, with specific references to the great care taken over Liturgy and the “reverent and unfussy way in which Mass is celebrated”. The high quality of preaching, sense of reverence, tradition and prayerfulness were noted in several responses, along with an appreciation that SFX was the first church in the Archdiocese to reopen following the Covid lockdown restrictions.

The church: Approximately 8% of those answering this question referred to the visual beauty of SFX church as being a source of joy and inspiration.

Community: Approximately 40% of those answering this question named the sense of community/family/belonging as a source of joy and strength. One person said “I belong to SFX and it “belongs” to me. It’s part of me. I feel safe, at home, surrounded by family and people who know me..” while another said “I love everything about SFX parish...” Specific mention was made of the “strong sense of community of all ages”, the peaceful, friendly atmosphere, friendly parishioners and the sense of the belonging to “a community coming together for the celebration of the sacraments and worship of God”.

Range of ages and nationalities: An additional 5% of responses specifically named the wide range of ages and nationalities within the parish as a source of joy and strength. One person noted that “the parish includes people from the UK, Ireland, Eastern Europe and further afield with no fuss or tension ...”

Other: In response to this question, other comments included the following: “SFX is a very special church”, it is a “friendly and God serving parish”, “The people of the parish are an inspiration”, “There are active parishioners and various activities”. A new parishioner

commented that SFX “appears to be a vibrant place”. Two mentions were made in appreciation of the volunteers who help to run the parish.

3% (i.e. two responders) said that that “Nothing” gave them strength or joy in belonging to SFX parish.

To what extent do you feel welcomed, valued and listened to in our parish?

Approximately 85% of those answering this question feel they are always welcomed, valued and listened to in the parish. Individual comments from those within the group included the following:

- “When you step forward you are welcomed and valued”
- “From the first I felt sincerely welcomed and accepted”
- “Welcomers on the door are a definite plus”
- “When you put in the time and effort you get back a sense of value and being part of the community”
- I have “nothing but positive experiences”

Two people commented that they had always received a prompt response from Fr Michael and/or the admin team to any queries raised. Another commented that they were confident that they would always get help/advice/support if needed.

One person said that they felt welcomed, but suggested that new parishioners may benefit from a buddy system whereby they could be matched with a volunteer within the parish.

Approximately 17% of those who answered this question (i.e. six people) felt that were not welcomed, valued or listened to within the parish. Within this group, one felt welcomed “to a small extent”, while another felt “not at all” welcomed. One person explained that “As an elderly single person .. I feel completely unnoticed or welcomed by many in the parish..”

How well do we communicate? Is language a problem for you?

Approximately 70% of those who answered this question felt that communication within the parish is good or very good. Within this group, 6 people commented that the newsletter and website are good or very good. One person commented that both the website and newsletter could be improved. 3 people within this group expressed an appreciation of some Polish translation.

Approximately 14% of those who answered this question felt that communication within the parish is “poor”. One person within this group felt that “we don’t communicate with each other at all (Saturday 6 pm/Sunday 8 am Mass)”.

14% of those who answered this question (i.e. 5 people) commented on the use of Latin in the Mass: Two people expressed a desire for more use of Latin, while two people expressed their difficulty with the use of Latin.

Other individual comments about communication within the parish included the following:

- The hearing loop in the church is not very effective.
- It would be useful if a synopsis of parish activities could be regularly updated.
- There is no communication about how to deal with problems facing the modern world e.g. abortion/gender/family life.
- Provide copies of prayers for those for whom English is a second language (or direct as to where to find them)
- Consider use of a buddy system for parishioners for whom English is a second language.
- Good internal communication but we could improve external communication to share the joy of our faith.

What could we do better for you in the parish?

Approximately 21% of those answering this question stated that they couldn't think of anything that could be done better. Within this group, one person said "I think the question needs reversing – What could I do better?" Another suggested that parishioners should be informed of the needs of the parish and what they can do to help.

Approximately 10% of those answering this question stated that they would like to receive teaching on how to increase our personal relationship with God and the basics of our faith (e.g. the sacraments). It was suggested that this could be achieved through a programme of talks/discussions on a range of topics relevant to our Catholic faith – possibly during Lent?

Approximately 5% (i.e. 2 people) favour the removal of the smaller "temporary" altar in favour of using the High altar.

Approximately 5% (i.e. 2 people) favour the inclusion of plainchant .

Individual comments/suggestions included the following:

- A system of car lifts to and from Mass to encourage attendance and friendship
- Return to the provision of a Sunday evening Mass at one of the 3 Hereford Catholic churches
- More parish social events
- We need more parishioners to engage with activities. How can we encourage more participation?
- Development of the music tradition given the historic connection of SFX with Sir Edward Elgar
- Regular Masses where parishioners could receive a blessing of Holy Oils
- Encourage more children to come to Mass. Reserve the first 4 pews for children and their parents so that they are more involved in the Mass
- Return of evening film showings
- A return to 4 hymns at the 1030 Mass
- Altar servers to be given newsletters and hymn books so that they can participate in responses to the Responsorial psalm and hymns.

- Seek out the elderly and lonely. Provide some afternoon activities (e.g. bingo/ tea and talk) for those who do not like to go out at night
- Welcomers to actively welcome people. Someone on hand in the foyer for half an hour after Mass to chat to anyone who is lonely or needs support.
- Slow down the Liturgy
- Put more effort into caring for the poor and disadvantaged
- Increased use of Latin in the Mass; it reflects the continuity of the Church and multilingual congregations.
- Say the prayer to St Michael after the decade of the Rosary before Mass. Saying it straight after Holy Communion implies that reception of Communion isn't enough to provide protection against evil.

Mission: How would you like to see our mission extending beyond the parish? Please note that in this context, the word “mission” means the way we live out our Catholic beliefs in the Community/the world.

A very wide range of comments were made on the topic of “Mission” and are very difficult to quantify. Unless otherwise stated, the comments were made by individuals. The comments referred to here are chosen to give a flavour of the wide range of responses.

Approximately 21% of responses suggest that the best way we can extend our Catholic mission is by setting a good example for others. We should “live a Catholic life and own it”. Through the example we set, others should be able to see the certainty and hope our faith brings. One person suggested that we should “be brave in living our lives as Catholics” and not worry about the clashes that may occur over a different viewpoint.

Approximately 11% of responses suggest that our mission could be extended through increased participation in Churches Together.

Approximately 9% of comments about how to extend our mission were concerned with helping the old/infirm/housebound within the parish. One person felt that we are not always aware of the needs of others and suggested that messages could be left on a noticeboard asking for, or offering help.

Approximately 6% of comments were concerned about creating more opportunities for social gatherings with the other Catholic communities of Hereford/Herefordshire.

Approximately 4% of comments were concerned with promoting more understanding of other faiths to encourage understanding, respect and peace e.g. through some interfaith activities.

Two comments were made that the church is already concerned with wider issues and there are many national/international initiatives which should be supported as part of the Dioceses.

One person commented that we need to do much more to extend our mission but the initiative needs to come from laity not just from the priest.

Individual suggestions for ways in which we can extend our mission include the following:

- Start by really welcoming and getting to know our own parish community and maintaining/developing faith of existing church members.
- Getting more involved in initiatives to support those who are disadvantaged/homeless/hungry/less able e.g. through the Food Bank
- Attending Parish social events e.g. film evenings/coffee after Mass
- Link to good Catholic organisations e.g. Youth 2000 and SPUC. Advertise their events
- Discuss moral questions within the family (e.g. abortion) to promote intellectual and ethical thoughts
- Evangelisation of local community through processions, social gatherings, Night Fever events
- Greater links with the Cathedral
- Attending spiritual retreats
- Foster very strong links with parish Primary School
- Promote Catholic social teaching
- Having a target to support a local charity e.g. fundraising to send a child to Lourdes, as we have done in the past
- Having a positive social media presence
- Draw more young people into the parish by Mass being said in Latin

SB and DK July 2022