



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of St Joseph's and St Mary's Penarth and Dinas Powys

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

Introduction – Special Characteristics of the Parish

St Joseph's Penarth and St Mary's Dinas Powys is a large Parish in the Eastern part of the Vale of Glamorgan

Until some twenty years ago, there were two separate Parishes in Penarth and Dinas Powys, and the communities still have different characteristics, some of which can be traced back to how the different communities developed.

Penarth is a seaside town which expanded greatly in the mid to late nineteenth century with the building of the dock and expansion of tourism. St Joseph's Church was completed shortly after the First World War is a Grade II listed very traditional building with a large sanctuary and formal aspect.

Dinas Powys was a small village until huge expansion from the late 1960s onwards to become the largest village in the Vale of Glamorgan. St Mary's Church was built in 1922 and was more than doubled in size in 1971 to meet the huge increase in population. The Church is an L shape modern design which means that the congregation is close to the altar on a quite small sanctuary.

This history is still reflected in the two church communities. Penarth is more traditional and conservative in its outlook. Dinas Powys in contrast has always been less conventional in its approach.

There is Mass in St Joseph's at 5.00 pm on Saturday and 9.30 on Sunday in St Mary's at 11.15 each Sunday.

St Mary's Church was flooded during a period of sustained rainfall on 23rd December 2020, in common with more than 150 other properties in the village. It has been fully refurbished over a period of six months at a cost of more than £60,000, which was covered by insurance.

The Parish is served by two Catholic Schools. St Joseph's Primary in Penarth and St Richard Gwyn High School which, although it has a Barry address is geographically in Dinas Powys Council Ward.

The Parish is financially solvent, even during the pandemic, with income keeping up because many parishioners contribute using Standing Orders and are registered with Gift Aid. Giving by cash was declining and is slowly recovering after the Covid restrictions. The Parish has large deposits held in the Diocese for the benefit of other Parishes in the Diocese.

Methodology

The two Parish representatives agreed a plan of campaign with Monsignor Joseph Boardman.

In December 2021, The Parish representatives spoke at each Mass, explaining what a synodal process is and in outline how it would operate in the Parish.

Given Covid regulations, it was decided to hold a mixture of online and public meetings so people could listen to each other and to encourage written submissions.

A special Gmail account was set up to receive individual submissions and boxes for paper submissions were placed in each church. Nine responses were received.

The following meetings were held -

7.30 Wednesday 26th January	Parish Council Zoom meeting – 14 people
7.30 Wednesday 2nd February	Open Parish Meeting St Joseph's Hall -22 people
7.30 Thursday 3rd February	Open Parish Meeting St Mary's Hall – 14 people
7.30 Wednesday 16th February	Open Parish Zoom Meeting – 11 people

The format of each meeting was:

- Synod Prayer
- Reading from Scripture
- A brief PowerPoint explain the synod procedure at global, Diocese and Parish level
- Discussions on two of the questions suggested by the Diocese in small groups or breakout rooms
- Report back to the whole group, which was recorded in a Word document
- A plenary discussion on what the Church should look like in ten years' time?

Ten questions were selected and two each were featured in the Parish Newsletter for 5 weeks

Parish Groups were encouraged to discuss the synodal questions and responses were received from the Justice and Peace Group and the Union of Catholic Mothers.

The themes have been gathered into a Document which in the format requested by the Diocese.

For each theme, responses have been ordered under the following headings:

- Global
- Diocese
- Parish
- Actions:

Communion

WELCOMING

- Stewards have been welcoming people as they take their details for Track and Trace and then showing them to their seats. This should be continued in future.
- The number of people who responded to requests for volunteer stewards was seen as very positive.
- The Parish needs to be more aware of new people. Several felt that this would be a good task for welcomers/ stewards in the future
- Cards at the back of church for new parishioners and a mechanism – group of volunteers to contact them.
- The WhatsApp group at St Mary's was seen as being a good way to keep people in contact with and support each other.
- Several people suggested that people should be encouraged to speak to those around them before Mass so that people could get to know each other. However, there were others who preferred a more reverent silence before Mass begins to put them in the right frame of mind.
- Several commented that teenagers do not come to Mass. Some felt that the Mass did not speak to them at that time in their lives.
- The Parish Newsletter and website was commended by one contributor, who felt it was up to date and relevant, but others felt it needed updating.
- One person noted that there were some challenges in that people saw themselves as from St Joseph's 5 pm Mass or St Mary's 11.15 rather than as members of the Parish as a whole. These are effectively separate "communities" who have little interaction with each other.
- One parishioner commented on poor provision for people with disabilities, which is largely down to having ramps for the physically disabled.
 - There is a lack of provision for visually impaired parishioners. No large Print hymn books in either church. The Hymn numbers in St Joseph's are only at the front of church with no repeaters. This is not an issue at St Mary's because the two wings of the Church have their own Hymn Boards with large numbers.
 - Could there be cushions/ chairs for those with back problems?
 - Simple Bidding prayers in non-liturgical language so all can understand their meaning.

Participation

COMMUNICATION

- There were practical suggestions to improve Parish communications – a suggestion box in each church – That the Parish Council could be more visible and set up ways of listening to Parishioners – that the Parish Council should be more active and initiate events and activities.
- Several people stated that the Diocese does not listen to them. They had raised concerns and not received replies. One described it as “a sponge which absorbs comments but does not respond to them.”
- The Justice and Peace Group said they had written several times and not received a response.

LIVESTREAMING

- Live streaming of Mass is seen as a very positive and should be continued. It is particularly useful for older, sick and disabled parishioners. It provides a way to keep people connected to their local parish.
- Several people talked of friends and family who had been drawn back to the church by participating in live streams
- Some people thought this could be looked on this as a negative light in that it allowed people to “go to Mass “ without partaking of communion and not joining in the life of the Parish.
- Occasionally joining a live stream for churches elsewhere in the UK or wider world was seen as a good thing in enriching one’s faith and joining the wider global church. Some talked of the danger that this replaced actually interacting on a local level and participating in the Sacraments.
- Overwhelmingly the feeling was that live streaming should stay.

KEEPING IN CONTACT

- Some people complained that the Parish had not done enough to keep contact with people during the pandemic. It is not quite clear what they felt could have been done differently, when physical visiting was banned.
- Some felt that the Parish neglected those who are not online / digital savvy. These people could not access the newsletter online.
- It emerged that people had taken the initiative to print newsletters and deliver them to older residents without internet access. They felt that this should have been more organised than being ad hoc.
- Several people commented that they had little sense of belonging to the diocese. They belonged to their Parish and a wider Catholic Church, but not the structures in between. There seemed to be very little activity to join as a Diocese.

SOMEBODY SHOULD DO SOMETHING

- Many people talked about things that should happen in the Parish and the wider church. However, they seemed to be suggesting that others should do it rather than offering themselves or actually taking action themselves.

- There seemed to be sense that one needed permission to do things, presumably from the Parish Priest, rather than acting on their own initiative. On the other hand, people are willing to do things if asked. It is not clear whether this barrier is real or assumed.
- There was the observation that attending Mass is a passive activity, and that people are not encouraged to get together to listen and pray together.
- There were some practical suggestions for creating more sense of community: These were about encouraging people to talk to each other before and after Mass and arranging events - Quizzes, Bingo, Cheese and wine events- picnics.

PRAYER LIFE

- A number of people highlighted the importance of prayer. “We must develop a deep and constant prayer life.”
- Several people talked about their need for prayer groups to join. But no-one felt inspired to set one up.
- One person suggested that at a time when many cannot meet up that a set time, say only ten minutes be agreed during the week, when people could pray together but apart on a set theme suggested in the weekly newsletter.
- To increase the parish spiritual life, could there be talks from invited speakers? Streaming would make them more widely available.
- One person commented that Mass is very structured with no opportunity for private prayer.
- One person suggested spontaneous bidding prayers from the congregation.

Mission

- One person said: "As we are the Body of Christ on earth our mission is to continue on earth the work that He started and to follow the example He set in life as closely as possible."
- We need better ways of getting people involved
- There are tiers of involvement and these change with time. Young families have little time to offer, but older retired people can be a great resource
- Some people suggested that young people would be better engaged if they were asked to do jobs – as altar servers, readers, welcomers etc.
- Several people thought the Parish was insular. There is a lack of opportunity to interact with other Parishes, other Christian groups or with people of other faiths.
- Some people highlighted that there are several different communities in the Parish, which do not interact much with each other. For example, Welsh, Keralan Indian and Filipino.
- Ordinary parishioners do not communicate well with either the primary or secondary schools, except for the odd school Mass.
- Some felt that parts of the Parish were reaching out, for example the Justice and Peace Group were promoting awareness of climate change and the poor in the developing world. Others felt that there are poor people in the UK who get less focus from the Parish.
- One suggestion was for an audit of skills and ideas for how people could contribute to Parish life.
- Several people spoke about a need to work more formally with other organisations in the community which are working to alleviate poverty like foodbanks, improving the environment
- On a Diocesan level, there is no diocesan retreat centre which could be a resource for all.
- Diocesan Initiates, such as those on encouraging young people are patchy and inadequate

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

CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

- There was pessimism over the lack of priests and dropping congregations
- There was a need for generating or rekindling a sense of community as in the early church. How can that be done using the new technology that younger people base their community on.
- Providing coffee after Mass is a good way of making going to church more of a communal event. This works well at St Mary's because church and hall door are adjacent. It works less well at St Joseph's because it requires an effort to walk round the back of then church. Some people suggested the use of tables and a gazebo on the lawn in front of the presbytery. It was pointed out that many people stand around talking there in any case.
- Some people wanted to continue with the remote streaming of Mass, but still felt there was a need to connect and meet physically. A blended, hybrid approach is what is required. In general, it was felt that the Church should be embracing technology and finding new ways to organise itself with fewer priests.
- Better use of social media was highlighted. For example, the WhatsApp Group in St Mary's which has worked well throughout Covid.
- Better use of the laity was suggested, perhaps having a paid administrator or volunteer coordinator.
- A general view that there is not one solution to issues, but several will have to be tried and not all will work for everybody.

PRIESTLY FORMATION

- Several people were critical of the way priest are trained:
 - A focus purely on the religious side of the work
 - Little on how to manage a parish, how to work with volunteers, how to delegate, how to manage buildings.
 - Seminaries build a group camaraderie, but then priests are left to cope on their own in parishes.

COMPASSION

- Several people were critical of the lack of compassion shown to those who have a troubled relationship with the Church and cannot receive communion:
 - Divorced people, particularly those who have remarried.
 - Those married outside the church
 - Those married to those of non-Christian faiths

MARRIED PRIEST AND FEMALE PRIESTS

- Many people talked about the shortage of priest locally in the diocese, the UK and Western Europe. Their proposed solutions were to allow for married priests and for women priests.
- Some people looked at the problem in a wider global context and pointed out that there is no shortage of priest in Africa and Asia. There are also alternative models of parish organisation where the priest may be in charge of large areas, visiting monthly or less frequently and trained lay people run local Parishes and undertake catechesis.
- One comment was that perhaps the church locally had had too many priests in the past and had therefore built a system with small churches and small parishes based around that. In future a new model would be required.
- Several people commented on not understanding the role of the permanent deacon. Are they half-priests? There was a feeling that they are not being used well, at least locally.
- A smaller number of people were adamantly against the idea of married or women priests and suggested that encouraging more men to become priests was the way forward.
- There was a further minority who saw the lack of women priests as an equality and fairness issue. They felt that not having women priests was reflective of active discrimination by the church against women, excluding them from the leadership of a Church in which only men are important.
- Several people pointed out that there are many leadership roles for women in the Church, even if they cannot be priests. They talked of School and Hospital chaplains, for example and the many women in important administrative posts with the church at Diocese, UK and at the highest Global level. Not being priests has not stopped them having considerable influence in the Church.
- One written response stated – “How can you explain to a child, let alone a young woman that they should limit themselves to other callings within the Catholic Church? Worthy as they are, they are secondary to the main functions of the Church.”
- There was a consensus that we cannot go on as we are, but no clear sense of what should be done or how they could contribute towards what the Church might look like in the future.

Sign Off

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

St Joseph's and St Mary's Penarth and Dinas Powys

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

The views in this document reflect the responses received. They are not necessarily the views of the Parish Advisory Council.

Signed..... Parish Priest (Msgr Joseph Boardman)

Signed..... Parish Representative (Dr Martin Price)

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