



ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

SYNOD 2021-23

PARISH REPORT

The Parish of: Our Lady & St Illtyd with St Cadoc
Town/City: Llantwit Major and Cowbridge

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

Introduction

Parishes are invited to submit a Report based on discussions. The maximum size for the Report is 10 pages. You may be able to record your views in much less space.

Please use the structure suggested within this Template so that the Diocesan Synod Team [DST] are best-able to synthesise Reports from across the archdiocese.

This Report will contribute to the Diocesan Report that + George Stack will submit on behalf of the diocese.

Introduction: In this part of the Report, you might wish to record some of the special characteristics of your parish – urban or rural, special features [hospital/ school /prison /care homes in your parish boundaries]. Some reflection on the demographics of your parish. You might want to include details of any special ministry /service/project.

Methodology: In this section give a brief overview of the different ways in which you have engaged with parish members and those beyond the worshipping community. It might be useful to present this as a Timeline with a short comment for each month between the Training of Parish Representatives to the finalising of the Parish Report. Some reflection on the numbers of people attending / contributing to discussion would be helpful. Comments on special circumstances [e.g., telephone conversations with the housebound/ meetings with distinct groups / outreach activity] would be valuable.

Key Issues Raised: This will be the main part of your Report. You will be presenting a summary of the issues raised and the points made in your discussions/ interviews / submissions. We will be reporting across the three headings of Communion, Participation and Mission and suggest you might do likewise. Some issues may be recorded under more than one heading. There may be material to record that does not fit into these categories and space is provided for that. You may choose to summarise these in bullet points or in a few paragraphs. It is important that your summary reflects not only the responses of the majority but also some minority views.

Example: “Most respondents were of the opinion that XYZ. A minority, however, felt that ABC was more important “

Sign Off: The Report needs to be signed by the Parish Priest and the lead Parish Representative. Any Report submitted should have been made available to the community parish as a draft and should be formally considered by the Parish Advisory Council prior to submission.

Introduction – Special Characteristics of the Parish

The unique aspect of Our Lady & St. Illtyd in Llantwit Major and St. Cadoc in Cowbridge is that we are two churches in one Parish. Llantwit Major and Cowbridge are rural towns located in the Western Vale. The Parish boundary is extensive with parishioners residing in Llantwit Major, St. Athan, Cowbridge and many of the smaller outlying villages that surround both towns.

There are no Catholic schools attached to the parish, but it is a feeder to Richard Gwyn R.C. Secondary school in Barry. Also, United World College (UWC) for 16-18 year-olds is located at St Donat's castle and is within our parish boundary. Approx. 30 years ago, there were strong links between the College and Parish, but with changes in the college faculty over time this has diminished.

The parish belongs to Bridgend Deanery; our PP is part-time Chaplain to Archbishop McGrath Catholic Secondary School.

This is an ageing parish with parishioners average age being 70+. There has been a decline in young families with children/teenagers over the past eight years. At present there are very few young families attending Mass or registering in the Parish. The majority of parishioners are of white ethnicity.

A former PP appointed a Parish Secretary ten years ago to undertake all parish administration duties; also, a Finance Council as decreed in Canon Law.

The parish has a provision for children's catechesis together with Sacramental Preparation.

Prior to the pandemic, the parish had the following ministries:- Altar Servers, Readers, Extra Ordinary Ministers of the Eucharist for Mass and visiting the sick with Holy Communion. There were established parish groups:- Ladies Guild, SVP, Liturgy Group, Prayer Group, Flower Arrangers and Cleaning Teams. The associated challenges of an ageing parish are realised by these ministries/groups with dwindling numbers and very few 'younger' parishioners wanting the commitment with the prayer/ pastoral/ social/ fundraising life of the parish.

According to the Town Council website for Llantwit Major the current population is approx. 14,500; Cowbridge is estimated at 6,329 and St Athan approx. 4,748 (both taken from 2018 <https://vinsights.co.uk/CensusWard>). However, in the last two years there have been new, large housing estates erected, resulting in an increase in population in all areas. To date there have been no enquiries nor an impact on Mass attendance.

According to the 2011 UK Census, these areas had the following statistics:
(Please note that the 2021 census isn't available until June 2022)

	Christians	No Religion	Other (incl. not declared)
Llantwit Major	59.97 %	31.27 %	8.76 %
Cowbridge	67.51 %	24.63 %	7.86 %
St Athan	55.24 %	37.73 %	7.03 %

However, it should be noted that there has been a trend in declining church attendance and the pandemic has made this worse:

Parish attendance	Parish Pastoral Statistics 2019	Last 4 weeks average (as at 15.03.2022)
Our Lady & St. Illtyd	65	44
St. Cadoc	<u>55</u>	<u>38</u>
TOTALS	120	82

Methodology

<u>The period</u> <u>up to</u> <u>Christmas</u> <u>2021</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Comment</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . A5 Prayer Cards . Prep meetings 	<p>Cards for every parishioner with parish prayer and reverse side synod prayer. Prayed at all weekend Masses and prayer group.</p> <p>Several preparation meetings with synod reps and pp to agree the synod process and programme.</p>
<u>Jan 2022</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Commission synod reps . Posters . PP information . Prep meetings . Provide Synod response boxes . Handout 'Communion' Qu's 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>Synod reps commissioned at weekend Masses (8th – 9th Jan).</p> <p>A3 synod posters for display in both churches.</p> <p>PP explained the synod process to parishioners and provided details in the parish newsletter/website/pp Facebook.</p> <p>Ongoing meetings with synod reps and pp to agree synod questions for the parish to pray, reflect and discuss.</p> <p>In both churches: provided synod response boxes for those unable to attend the discussion sessions.</p> <p>Week before discussion: handout 'Communion' questions to parishioners to spend time to pray, reflect and prepare for.</p>
<u>Feb 2022</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Session.1 'Communion' . Handout 'Participation' Qu's . Session.2 'Participation' . Handout 'Mission' Qu's . Questionnaire sheet for non-attending parishioners . Arrange meeting with UWC 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>'Communion' questions discussed with parishioners after weekend Masses in both churches (5th – 6th Feb) with 10 mins Adoration / Scripture / Synod Prayer to start.</p> <p>Week before discussion: handout 'Participation' questions.</p> <p>'Participation' questions discussion (19th – 20th Feb).</p> <p>Week before discussion: handout 'Mission' questions.</p> <p>Encourage parishioners to take an amalgamated themed topics questionnaire sheet to non-attending parishioners.</p> <p>PP organized a meeting at United World College to discuss topics with pp, synod reps and Atlantic College students. Sent questions out the week before meeting.</p>
<u>Mar 2022</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Session.3 'Mission' . Session with UWC students . Synod report prep 	<p><u>Comment</u></p> <p>'Mission' questions discussion (5th – 6th Mar).</p> <p>Meeting to discuss the 3 synod topics with Atlantic College students (6th Mar).</p> <p>Meetings to prepare/produce synod report.</p>

Communion – 32 parishioners attended the discussion.

1. In journeying together, what ways can help build up communion in our parish?

2. What steps may the Holy Spirit be calling our parish to take to journey together effectively?

- Many were confused over what 'Communion' meant (i.e. not the Holy Eucharist, but the parish community worshipping together).
- New parish logo idea: Two Churches = One Parish (*need for both church communities to work more closely together*).
- Ask parish community what they need from the parish, need from the Catholic Church and what they can give. Need to pray, work, socialise and worship more closely together.
- Expressed feelings of disconnection and isolation (not just as a result of the pandemic).
- Get to know parishioners better with social events, spiritual events and be more welcoming to new parishioners e.g. idea of name badges. Car lift sharing.
- Many participants strongly felt that the rural nature and average age of the parish impedes successful social and spiritual interaction.
- Make better use and appreciation of church buildings to enhance joyful and spiritual devotion.
- Ministry groups from both churches should have the opportunity to meet, socialise and pray together regularly.
- A strong desire for shared adult catechesis events organised by the PP or trained facilitators.
- Re-instate the Parish Advisory Council or similar body with reps from both churches, who might be able to free-up the PP and to enable him to make more pastoral visits – an increasing need in our parish.
- Imperative to develop more effective channels of communication, including updating the parish website (e.g. creating and sharing ministry group forums) and updating the parish database.
- Major concerns of virtually no youngsters attending Mass. A young person's concern was expressed that many parents do not understand their faith and are unable to pass it on.
- Many wished to have a review to address the needs of the ageing parish community e.g. review Mass times. Need to continue to reach out and include the housebound.
- Make more use of Cowbridge church extension for social gatherings, especially in the warmer months.
- Alternate Mass times 6 monthly in Cowbridge and Llantwit to encourage people to attend both churches and get to know each other better.

Participation – 31 parishioners attended the discussion.

- 1. Reflecting on two years of the pandemic, how has participation been affected? Were these issues there before? How can participation post pandemic now be strengthened?**
- 2. How do you currently participate in the life of the parish? How much responsibility do you have as an individual?**

- No participation in parish life was possible thus leading to a profound sense of isolation, disconnection and alienation.
- Those who had access to IT were able to ‘travel,’ around the world and take part in livestream Masses, which all acknowledged was a rewarding and vital connection to the Universal Church. It kept their faith alive in seriously challenging times.
- Deep disappointment was expressed by some parishioners that no Masses were live streamed from Wales, not even from the Cathedral.
- A minority again expressed disappointment at the perceived lack of leadership and support at Archdiocesan and better communication at parish level.
- Mass was regularly available on the PP’s Facebook page but again this could only be accessed by a minority of the parish who had appropriate IT access.
- For many older and more vulnerable members of the parishioners, not being able to access Mass, compounded their feelings of isolation and alienation. However, telephone calls from members of the SVP, the PP, fellow parishioners and in addition shopping, provided a vital and much appreciated thread of connection.
- A minority used this ‘desert experience,’ of lockdown and lack of access to IT as an opportunity for deepening their spiritual life, rather than undermining it.
- As restriction began to be lifted only one church was able to be opened with limited numbers, which was deeply upsetting for some parishioners.
- For the small numbers that were able to go to Mass again, the plethora of rules and regulations i.e. (age restrictions on stewarding, booking Mass appointments) tended to undermine the joy of ‘coming home’. However, a minority were grateful that the rules were being rigorously adhered to.
- Pre-pandemic parish numbers were dwindling, and this continues to be the case. Few young families and young people are joining the parish. Many of our more vulnerable parishioners are still fearful of exposing themselves to the virus.
- A substantial number of older parishioners expressed a strong desire for the 9.00 am Sunday Mass to be moved to a later time. They could then, not only fulfill their Sunday obligation, but be able to re-connect with the parish.
- Send a ‘welcome back home’ letter from the PP to all parishioners, organise small scale social events in the Parish Hall, return of the music ministry, adult and youth catechesis, and a willingness for all parishioners to take a far more active part in supporting both spiritual and social initiatives, are but a few of the ideas suggested to re-vitalise and re-energise our parish family, post pandemic.

Mission: 26 parishioners attended the discussion (+ 20 written replies on the 3 topics).

1. How is our parish set up for evangelisation?

How can we reach out better to the broader community with the Good News?

2. Where is the Holy Spirit calling you personally to mission and service today?

- There was a need to explain what evangelisation meant – examples were given.
- Parishioners unaware of any evangelisation initiatives in the parish (e.g. Alpha course).
- Some are evangelising in their lives without realising it, e.g. SVP; leading by example with good works, talking about our faith in daily life, etc.
- All receive talents and gifts from the Holy Spirit which need to be encouraged and shared.
- Daunting to reach out without preaching. Gently and respectfully share the Good News, e.g. invitation to light a candle, offer prayer, getting people to reflect on eternal life.
- Again, the desire for adult catechesis (*see Communion*) to better understand our faith before we go out into the broader community.
- Need to understand who and why people have drifted away; invite back without judging.
- Many in Cowbridge felt a strong desire to engage with other local Christian Churches, which does energise and strengthen our faith, while still being Catholic.
- Our fellow Christian Churches in both towns feel we are too introspective and insular.
- Idea to send out religious Christmas / Easter cards with a parish newsletter. Include a thought-provoking prayer card.
- Reach out to one other person with your contact details to start a dialogue.
- Be more welcoming and actively seek out newcomers/visiting family/friends – reinstate Mass Service cards; at the entrance have several prayer cards, leaflet with details about the parish including locations, Mass times, etc.
- Idea to reach out to those not attending Mass by becoming a 'Mass partner'.
- Recognise bilingual nature of Wales by including the use of the Welsh language in the Mass e.g. in the welcome, praying the 'Our Father'.
- Share our buildings with the local community and provide a warm emotional environment and listen to them e.g. during coffee mornings.
- Idea: every day pray to the Holy Spirit to show us one thing to do that day and do it.
- It is important to be bold and to defend our faith - political correctness often hinders this. Not be afraid to object to blasphemous, offensive and inappropriate content, tv, etc.
- When sharing your faith talk about how it makes you feel (personal testimonies).
- Idea: quality flyer to be delivered locally with parish details, photos, Mass times etc.
- Take parish newsletters to local libraries, town halls, local venues. Contact local radio.
- The importance for parishioners to support parish initiatives and requirement for more volunteers. Need all parishioners to drive forward future parish plans.

Any other matters: U.W.College - St Donat's Castle Students Discussion

1. Do you see faith as having any relevance in today's world?
2. Do you have links to church activities/services? What would you like to see?
3. How would you like to celebrate your Catholic faith locally? What support do you need?
4. Are you able to reach out to the broader community? How can we promote better dialogue with other faiths and those with none?
5. Would you like a follow-up after this session?

Our meeting with the 4 U.W.C. students and the Christian Pastor tutor, who all came from different Christian faiths including Catholic, was thought provoking, enlightening, perceptive and energizing.

All believed that a faith, Christian or otherwise, was essential in an increasingly secular world. The fact that so many people do celebrate different faiths is evidence of its relevance. In the west, society has evolved from Christian beliefs and values that are still reflected in lives today. It is crucial that this continues, especially in the distracting, chaotic world we live in. This is still true for many who no longer identify with a faith especially at times of crisis.

During the 2-year 'Covid bubble', it was impossible for students to engage with the local community. However, there was a Christian fellowship group on campus and students had access to global livestream services.

Students would like to see Bible camp, Lenten meditations and other activities organized by the local community. The possibility of re-establishing weekend Mass on campus was mooted, as well as attending Catholic Mass with the parishioners, Mass time and transport arrangements allowing.

It was noted that young people can find the Mass repetitive and boring. Suggestion for interactive homilies to engage more with the students.

All wished for more fun social interaction and stronger links with the local community.

The students felt passionately about the issue of social justice and how they could be involved on a local level e.g. Foodbank and Cardiff 'Glass Door' homeless shelter/meal.

The students highlighted the fact that their campus IS their wider community which includes a diversity of students. Although the campus is isolated, the students naturally engage in faith dialogue amongst fellow students of many faiths.

There is a planned campus internal faith conference which includes an invitation to the local community.

A comment was made for Pope Francis: "The Church should apologise for wrongs e.g. colonialism", which everybody agreed was historically wrong. This gesture would be appreciated.

Good suggestion for a 'Welcome to Llantwit/Wales!' event with students and the community.

The students' faith sharing was a delight, and we sincerely thank them.