

## SYNOD 2021 – 2023: PARISH LISTENING SESSIONS SYNOD SUMMARY REPORT

**Name of Parish and Deanery:** English Martyrs, Tuffley, Gloucester, GL4 ONX; Gloucester Deanery.

**Name of Parish Priest:** Father Gerry Walsh.

**Names of Parish Delegates filling out this form:** Mrs. Felicity (Flit) Rogers and Mrs. Janet (Jan) Ashton.

**Contact details of Parish Delegates:**

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When starting our Synod process in December 2021, our Synod Team arranged for people in the Parish to add comments to gift tags on a Christmas tree in the Church Hall; then, in January 2022, a simpler questionnaire for young people (Attachment A), a one-off meeting questionnaire for the Christian Churches in Tuffley area (Attachment B), and 3 sessions involving 2 groups of people - one on Saturday mornings, and one on weekday evenings. Delegates, Facilitators, Note-takers and the Parish Priest took their turns at sharing their views.

The responses by all were amazing. We had 100 plus people participate. All involved said how much they enjoyed being asked and having the chance to express their opinions and share others' views.

As Delegates we have been surprised at what was not commented on as we thought there might be something said about other emotive topics such as abortion, contraception, and euthanasia. Maybe that was because we had few inputs by young couples.

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## WEEK ONE - LISTENING

### Here are some of the joys of the community:

- All responses mentioned how welcoming, supportive, and friendly the parish is; with a sense of belonging, sharing, and supporting each other through life's trials, including our supportive priest. Feeling invited into God's house. Lifts to Church.
- Receiving the Sacraments. The rhythm of the Church seasons. Learning more about God's laws, love, Jesus' teachings in the Mass and on courses run at Church. Very well spiritually led by the Priest. The Zion Mission in both our Parishes and the Carlo Acutis exhibition.
- Clear Bible teaching.
- Participation in Church life supports mental health.
- Children being altar servers, joining the choir, playing instruments, being in the Nativity play, participating in Children's Liturgy at Mass.
- Social gatherings and evenings where friends, family and strangers meet and share from different backgrounds.
- Conversations with Tea, coffee, and biscuits after Sunday Mass.
- Shared ideas from other parishes and other Christian Churches. Sharing reaching out to our local community e.g., litter picking with Hi-Viz tabards with Churches in Tuffley printed on the back.
- Children's Liturgy, Choir/music are uplifting and inspiring, including singing the Our Father.
- Online Mass during covid continuing, being able to participate, plus Sycamore course on Zoom very nourishing.
- Visits to housebound with the Holy Eucharist.

### Here are some of the difficulties that people feel need improving or changing:

- Some people had no difficulties within the Parish.
- So much bureaucracy hampers reaching out to people and helping them feel welcomed and supported through the many problems in life e.g., marriage break ups, loneliness. Not enough activities to interest the youth e.g., running youth groups, getting teenagers involved in managing activities, helping at foodbanks, visiting the disabled and elderly etc. Governance of Church activities are managed by the priest, parish council, committees, deaneries' letters, and guidance, but not often shared, especially since covid issues.
- Few priests and Deacons mean they are overwhelmed with administration and visiting the sick and elderly as DBS restrictions limit what others might do to help. People can't be contacted if they have not given permission.
- One priest stretched over 2 parishes. Parish priest's ministry can be more difficult when they are always expected to be available 24/7.
- Half those who attended group sessions were in favour of women being Deacons, and priests being allowed to marry. Also, some felt female priests should be considered.
- Divorce and remarriage make it difficult to receive Holy Communion and help children with their faith. Change is needed to prevent the Church dying.
- Perspective that the Cardinals and Archbishops are reluctant to consider changes. This makes it very difficult for the Pope to help those with issues.

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- Sunday Mass too early for some such as the elderly or very young but can suit others wanting to go off to sports or recreational activities afterwards.
- Not enough times for Reconciliation. No Reconciliation liturgies and services in our 2 Parishes.
- Need more interaction between local Catholic parishes.
- At Sunday Mass the sacred can be lost.
- Mass can be boring or not understood. No time to discuss the Bible readings at Mass.
- There can be language issues where attendees' first language is not English
- No opportunities to give personal testimonies.
- Few opportunities for children to participate at Church, particularly for teenagers. No follow-on activities after the First Holy Communion programme.
- No religious and social opportunities for youth, baby and toddler, elderly (though coffee and tea mornings particularly for the elderly have just restarted). Not enough opportunities for people to get to know each other. Would like some discussion groups.
- Lack of volunteers especially younger people, and existing volunteers needing back up. Lack of awareness about what is needed to be a volunteer. No methodology to get youngsters to stay and contribute. Older adults especially those retired carrying much of the volunteering. There is a need for younger adults to do more volunteering for Church activities.
- Not allowed to receive Holy Communion if couples are unmarried, divorced, separated or same sex. Such people feel publicly shown to be sinners and feel rejected. Falling numbers in congregations due to strict protocol of church rules. Hierarchy unresponsive to change so most of society are unable to become full members of the Church.
- No outreach such as SVP. Visiting the housebound and sick difficult through covid issues but could now be improved.
- Mass outdated and not fit for purpose. Old Testament readings are difficult to understand. Some adults must work all weekend so are unable to attend a Sunday Mass. Something should be arranged to support people in such situations, and weekday Mass times only suit retired people – no early weekday Masses and no later evening Masses.
- Anxieties around covid still prevent some from returning to Church. Need to find ways of reconnecting with and reengaging those who are not attending Church. Bad experiences being a Catholic in the past needs ways of helping them to reengage.
- Feeling shame about the scandals in the Church.
- Feeling that we are missing an extra spiritual support by not welcoming the neo catechumenate (and other charisms), and by not allowing them to meet on Church premises. Neo catechumenates provide support and formation to develop adult and young peoples' faith.
- A need for mentoring was mentioned so some guidance about how to access that might be useful. No obvious forum for support.
- Quiet ecumenical groups not attended.
- Few assist with fund raising events and we need strong volunteers.
- Parish not directly involved with the local Catholic schools.
- Lack of good UK Catholic resources.

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- Lack of openness between clergy groups.

### **Here are the promptings of the Holy Spirit:**

- A desire for more recognition of the Holy Spirit and the prayers to the Holy Spirit.
- We feel that the Holy Spirit has given us the courage to speak from the heart.
- Synod activity has enabled a good opportunity to share views in a safe environment.
- A desire for groups that used to exist which engaged young people e.g., Service 9, YWC, Legion of Mary.
- An awareness of the problems with transport to Church; bus services not available for the Church locations.

### **WEEK 2 – SPEAKING OUT**

#### **How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst?**

- Through Prayer.
- Priest is a huge channel of nourishment in the Parishes.
- A greater awareness of people in need makes you realise how blessed we are.
- Voices from family/children/teachers/football coaches/older people/friends/neighbours.
- There are occasions when some can be heard and listened to.
- Parish meetings, socials, refreshments after Mass, Coffee mornings etc.
- Participating in plays at Church.
- Life in the Spirit courses helping to feel more confident.
- Through the media showing the inequalities of the World.
- At Mass.
- Conversations with people in our everyday lives.
- Participating in the First Holy Programme.
- Information on the Church website and newsletters.
- Listening to the sick and journeying with them.

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### **How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore including those on the peripheries?**

- Not acknowledging the needs of the poor and homeless, who have a perception that they will not be welcome or good enough to be acceptable in a Church.
- Tailoring responses to be acceptable to the listener.
- Through the voices of those who don't understand Christianity, or the language used about the Christian faith.

### **What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups/women etc.**

- Can occur during pilgrimages e.g., Lourdes with disabled people.
- Can occur in the workplace.
- Church social events including activities with the ecumenical churches.
- Via the media.

### **What space is there in your Parish for the voice of the people including active and inactive members of the Catholic Faith?**

- First Holy Communion Programme.
- Parish Pastoral Council meetings.
- Fetes and Fairs/social events.
- Church websites.
- Speaking to the Priest on a one-to-one basis when available.
- Would like a 'suggestion box'.
- Some felt there no opportunities.
- Lack of encouragement to speak out.

### **How are the Baptised members of your Parish able to participate in the Mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel?**

- Many felt the use of 'Baptised' in this question made it divisive and ostracised unbaptised people. It was felt that everyone baptised or not should be able to participate in the Mission of the Church and proclaim the Gospel. It was felt that it showed that the Catholic Church was setting barriers to participation.
- Others felt we can promote the mission of the Church using our actions, speech and ways to show people the love of God and neighbour.

### **What hinders you from speaking up courageously and/or being active in your parish?**

- Fear of hurting people's feelings, including the priest.
- Lack of confidence.
- No time; issues with work/life balance.
- No opportunities.
- Perception of futility in doing so/closed shop/won't be heard e.g., no change to the rules on divorce/remarriage/annulment.
- Shyness and embarrassment especially in front of many others.
- Difficult conversations are stonewalled.
- Church is full of bossy and powerful people.
- Priests don't always sing from the same song sheet.
- Fear of losing one's job when relating to the Catholic ethos.
- Not sure of the correct answers.
- Don't know the person.
- Lack of priests giving little time to be able to explore personal thoughts with them.
- Catholics don't always see their role as being evangelical.
- Fear of stepping out of line: being seen as anti-something: the media's portrait of Catholicism.

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- Lack of interest in the Mass.
- Mass times.
- Not being able to become full members due to their lifestyle not fitting the criteria e.g., divorced, remarried, gay.
- Too many rules.
- Don't know what venial sins are.
- Nothing for younger people to get involved with other than altar servers, choir, and Children's Liturgy.
- Negative experiences of Church in childhood.

### **How is authority or governance exercised in your Parish?**

- The lower you are in the pyramid the less you make an impact.
- There are groups covering finance and buildings; information from these meetings is not disseminated to the rest of the Parish.
- Good Parish Priest.

### **How are teamwork and co-responsibility practised in your local Parish?**

- Various parish groups discuss agendas but ultimately the Priest makes all the final decisions.
- Don't know. A comment that it is getting better.

## **WEEK 3 - SHARING ON DISCERNING, DECIDING, AND CELEBRATING**

### **How does the Parish use consultation to make decisions?**

- Parish Pastoral Council meetings but many do not know who is on the Parish Pastoral Council.
- Parish Open meetings (but not since Covid restrictions).
- Informal chats after Mass during coffee and teas in the hall (more inclusive).
- Parish Newsletters, Website, questionnaires, Zoom meetings.
- Property, Social and Finance meetings.

### **How does your Parish promote participation in decision making within the hierarchical structures of the Church?**

- It doesn't very much as everything needs to be checked by the bishop before anything can go ahead.
- Young people have very little involvement or none.
- Open Parish meetings (pre Covid).
- Agendas to meetings and decisions made are not published. Meetings should be more open to all.
- If information is disseminated via the internet, those who don't have access are not enabled to participate.
- People don't always come forward to participate until they want something like a burial service.
- The Parish Pastoral Council does not use a Synodal style.
- Many do not know who the Parish Pastoral Councillors are.
- Letters from the Bishop and literature in the Narthex give information to help with decisions.
- The Synodal process has given clarity of thought, which has been very inspiring.

### **How do prayer, Masses, and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide your Parish?**

- Father Gerry gives a devout celebration. Easter triduum beautiful. Inspirational stories in the homily make you realise you can do things.
- Children's Liturgy is impressive.
- Choir and music lifts you up. Mass is celebrated with reverence.
- Baptism during Mass, but not recently due to time restrictions; some families don't want it to be during Mass.
- Together as a family. People are respectful.
- Sunday Mass is central for us all; it is central for our unity and very inspiring.

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- Some people felt it could be more meaningful.
- Do we forget about confession – we queue for Holy Communion, but not many queue for confession.
- A feeling that without the Mass could not do what we do.
- Prayer life very important; Prayer Groups have been eye openers to be more deeply inspired.
- Need to involve more people in the Mass, more diverse readers.
- Faith and Light group and Pilgrimages to Lourdes with the disabled are very inspiring.
- Meetings with other Christian Churches enrich our understanding of our Faith.
- World days of prayer increase our prayer life for all in the world.
- A Good Friday Catholic service that included other local Christian Churches has been regularly mentioned since as being a wonderful, deeply inspiring service.
- Preparation for Holy Communion helps a feeling of being closer to God.
- Need to find ways of retaining families after First Holy Communion Programmes.

### **How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions, and decisions of your Parish Community?**

- Allows time for thoughts for own personal decisions, keeping an open mind.
- Holy hour with Eucharistic Adoration. It is a privilege to be with the Blessed Sacrament.
- The Holy Spirit inspires me to do things for others, and share views.
- Helps me to live with Christ at the centre of our family.
- Prayer life, Parish life and life with a small neo-catechumenate community has increased the impetus to feed the poor, accept the marginalised, and help others to know God better.
- Catholic upbringing has been a good guide to treating others as you want to be treated.

### **How does the Parish invite all baptised Catholics into the active life of the Parish especially Sunday Mass?**

- AGAIN, everyone felt the use of the word “baptised” in this question made it divisive and ostracised unbaptised people.
- The parish asks for volunteers via the newsletter, website and sometimes at the end of Mass.
- Often people are approached 1/1 and asked to help.
- Inviting people to nativity plays, music and quiz nights draws other people including Christmas and Easter celebrations.
- Some didn't feel worthy enough to be Catholics.
- The music is very welcoming, and children are inspired by it.
- The Life in the Spirit Course and Celebrate meetings reveal the Holy Spirit.
- Need more Prayer and Praise like in Celebrate meetings.
- Difficult to know who the baptised Catholics are who don't attend Church. In the Legion of Mary Parishioners would go door to door and learn who were Catholics and have a chance to invite families and be aware of those with disabilities.
- A group from a care home came to the Church before the covid lockdowns, but now we are not always aware of them and who needs prayers.
- More needs to be done to encourage teenagers and those having difficulty getting to Mass.
- Some Ethnic Communities have their own priest and celebrations so don't often join in with Parish activities.
- Participating in Mass on Zoom during Covid issues has enabled people to feel more involved.
- It is a welcoming Parish, but, for particular requirements, would like to know who to speak to.
- Feel inspired to go to coffee and tea in the Church Hall and listen to others.
- Our Parish community inspires with hope for the future.
- Enjoy being a reader at Mass.
- Enjoy being a welcomer at Church.
- Our Priest and Eucharistic ministers take Holy Communion to those who cannot come to Mass.

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**FINAL Question: from your small group sharing, name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit?**

- Strong agreement that there has been union in our opinions throughout. With participants speaking truthfully, honestly and openly. It is not often that a group can talk about religion without argument and there were no arguments just strong agreements in everything spoken about.
- One table suggested that we belong to an 'obedient' church that does not cater for the masses and whose rules are not fit for purpose in the world we live in.
- We all feel strongly that there is hope. Hope that change will come and one day more people will know and love God,
- We need more priests and if the church is to survive then some felt that it must be open to more than just to single, celibate men, but also those who have a love of Christ and a calling to the vocation.
- One table felt that we live in a world where diversity and equality are key and embedded in the law of the land. So, wondered how could expect anyone to want to belong to a church whose rules categorically go against most of the protected characteristics of the 2010 Equality Act?
- A hope that the Holy Spirit will allow these voices to be heard through this synodal process, especially when the responses challenge the Church.
- We ask the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to walk the path shown to us by Jesus.
- Felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to join the Synod sessions.
- Awareness that being a child of God has implications.
- Awareness that older people in the Parish provide a good witness.
- Feel sustained by the Sacraments.
- Despite insecurities, we should realise that this is normal and shouldn't feel too down as the Holy Spirit feels approachable, uplifting and we have a wonderful world.
- A feeling that the Holy Spirit will help in the work to learn more about Jesus.
- Felt woken up, sad, very humble, searching for God in the mundane parts of life.
- Awareness of the beauty in others.
- After prayer felt a need to speak out and a sadness that that there is this need to beg the Holy Spirit to find a way to reach out, asking God to draw people to Him.
- Nothing is impossible to God.
- Need more Synodal conversations probably over meals as Jesus did.
- Must not lose this impetus and must put in place methods to involve everyone with perhaps sub-groups of ministries which feed into the Parish Pastoral Council meetings.
- Use every day to listen to the Holy Spirit.
- Awareness of the importance of prayer and it being answered.
- Would like a monthly Mass themed to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Attachment A to the Parish Listening Sessions Synod 2021 to 2023 Summary Report:  
Questions and responses from 12 Young People at English Martyrs, Tuffley Parish,  
Gloucester Deanery

**Likes and things enjoyed at Church**

- The community and people are friendly x9
- Seeing my friends. X3
- Helping in children liturgy. X6
- Choir and singing. X7
- Musical instruments
- Socialising and the food. X6
- Meeting new people. x2
- Serving on the Altar x5
- You get bread ( Holy Communion) near the end of mass instead of nothing. X2
- Seeing everyone.
- Praying together and speaking to God. X2
- Weekly commitment
- Christmas Plays x4
- Taking part in church tasks x3
- Learning about God's stories.
- Tea and biscuits after Sunday Mass.

**Dislikes and how to improve Church**

- I don't like to wear masks.
- Waking up early x2
- Length of mass. X2
- Sermon is too long
- Points are good, but too drawn out
- More children taking part in church plays
- Seats uncomfortable. No kneelers for people sat at the front so make sure there are enough pillows for everybody.
- Church Cold temperature
- Mass feels too strict.
- Not understanding things.
- Hearing about people who have died.

**Ideas for the future of the Parish**

- Helping the homeless.
- Help in a children's club.
- Have more volunteers.
- Discussions group on the sermons for older children/ young adults
- Youth group. x2
- Children more involved in Mass. x2
- Better understanding of Mass and service before starting FHC programme.
- No improvement needed.
- Cushion for seating.
- Mass more energetic.

Attachment A to the Parish Listening Sessions Synod 2021 to 2023 Summary Report:  
Questions and responses from 12 Young People at English Martyrs, Tuffley Parish,  
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**What would you like to be more involved in the running of the Church or participating in the Mass? What would you like to do?**

- Youth involvement in parish council.
- Serving/Being on the altar. x2
- Reading and prayers in mass.
- Helping with youth club/ children liturgy.

**How does the Holy Spirit influence you?**

- Listening to parents, siblings, teachers, Coach, friends, and older people.
- Desire to help the Homeless.
- I think that people would listen to me; I would tell my dad my ideas and with his permission tell our priest.

**Attachment B to the Parish Listening Sessions Synod Summary Report 2021 to 2023:  
Questions given to 9 people from the Ecumenical Church in Tuffley, Gloucester at a  
Refresh session on 18 January 2022 ( including Catholics, Church of England, and Baptists)**

**As part of 'The Fundamental Question' from the Synodal Conversations: thinking about 'journeying together' with English Martyrs' Parish ecumenically:**

**What are the good/joyful experiences you have had being involved with English Martyrs Church?**

- Joining in with events including services (Refresh) and social functions., and litter picking!
- Warmth of welcome at all events, good for families and young children.
- Excellent catering and hall facilities, very good facilitator.
- Bringing the churches together on Good Friday for the veneration of the cross.
- Music ministry, friendships, and pilgrimages
- Appreciating the similarities and differences of our traditions but recognising the sincerity of our shared love for Jesus.

**What are the difficulties and what would improve your experience/involvement with English Martyrs' Church? What stops people from joining in the ecumenical Church in Tuffley (CIT) activities? How could we encourage more participation?**

- More youth activities needed.
- More involvement from all church communities.
- Covid restrictions have impacted activities and participation.
- Would like mass to be more accessible to non-Catholics as language and meaning is difficult to understand.
- Time of our service.
- Busy lives/ other commitments/pandemic /complacency.
- Initial anxiety of something new or unfamiliar.
- Share the vision of CIT again with our congregations to encourage new participation post pandemic.
- More joint activities to forge closer relationships.
- Look at new ways to publicise events and activities.
- Invite new people to be actively involved in planning, preparing and running events.
- More events with time for discussion, dialogue and friendship building.

**How should the ecumenical Churches in Tuffley reach out to those on the peripheries in our community/area in particular?**

- More visible witness . Use social media? Photos of events in local library?
- Use church halls more for community groups.
- Advertise events locally.