



Parish Listening Sessions Synod Summary Report's

of

**STROUD** - **STONEHOUSE** - **WOODCHESTER**

## **STROUD (with Painswick and Bisley) REPORT**

We chose to invite parishioners along to three consecutive Sunday meetings after the Mass where we split up into smaller groups with a facilitator in each group following the guidelines on Synodal Conversations and effective Listening.

We found through this process that:

Our parish is very welcoming, warm and friendly.

There is a great network of support for one another and for the wider community.

Music within our Mass is a great joy and very much helps the prayer life of our parish.

We are a wounded parish from the effects of COVID lockdowns and a quick change of priest just prior to COVID. The community feels divided by this. Being able to access Mass on-line brought solace to many - some sharing this with neighbours who don't have access to the internet. There is concern that people will not come back to Mass, preferring to watch on-line instead.

Many of the existing groups and teams were broken up due to COVID and there is concern about re-starting these. A good thing was no-one was ever turned away from coming to Mass after lockdown was lifted. Everyone was made welcome – even people who were not Catholic came – as their churches were not open.

There are concerns over fewer priests caring for several parishes, so the priest is not always available on demand as was the case years ago. We need to be kind and caring to one another and to our priests. People were worried about the future for parishes with fewer priests. Lack of vocations for priesthood and religious life are of concern

Could/should our Deacons do more to assist Priest and Parishioners - get involved in the governance of the parish more? What about Married priests, or Deacons who are married becoming priests (some married C of E priests have been allowed to say Mass in the Catholic Church). Could women do more in the church – women deacons?

Concerns about the lack of young people in church, they come for Sacraments Baptism, FHC, Confirmation, and Marriage but are seldom seen again. We have lost connections with at least two generations regarding attending Mass it seems. There is much work to be done. Much prayer is required. We can begin by always being friendly, smiling (at the sign of peace – a smile may be the only kind thing someone else receives that week). Be thankful for what we have and strive to do better - it is not just the priest's job, we are all part of the team.

**Further copies of these reports are available online from  
: [www.stroudatholicchurch.com](http://www.stroudatholicchurch.com)**

**OR**

**from your individual Parish Offices on request.**

## **Core Question 1 – Listening**

How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst? How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries? What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalisation, or social exclusion?

God speaks through acts of kindness, being thoughtful, caring, showing tolerance and consideration to others. Through these acts of kindness, we share our belief, our faith.

We see Christ in those we meet, rich or poor, homeless, needy. As a parish we collect and distribute for Foodbank and support CAFOD and MISSIO very well. These Conversations have provided parishioners with a chance to speak and be heard. There is a general wish to continue this process of 'Conversations' for the future life of our parish which we are keen to arrange.

There is an awareness of many living within our parish that no longer practice their faith. Perhaps this could be a mission for us, to reach out to them.

The Priest is the lynch pin for communication and participation within the parish - but we should be working with him, not expecting him to do everything, especially as many priests now care for several parishes.

Newcomers to the faith do not know the names of people - perhaps we should revisit the use of name badges to help break down barriers.

COVID and the difficulties using hand outs in the early pandemic have resulted in many in the parish no longer knowing who is doing what - this can be rectified now that we are moving towards endemic rather than pandemic.

We felt that disabled parishioners are made to feel most welcome and cared for.

We are proud to be a parish with a large diversity of nationalities represented in our weekly Masses. Something we celebrate especially during Pentecost.

## **Core Question 2 – Speaking Out:**

What enables or hinders you from speaking courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish and society. What space is there in your parish for the voice of people, including active and inactive members of our faith?

We plan to continue the 'conversations' started with this synod process as it is an excellent platform for people to have their say and be listened to.

Our parish has suffered problems with the quick change of priests in recent years followed quickly by COVID which has damaged our previous good systems of communication. It is hoped that this pain will heal in time.

New members to the parish/faith would like some continuation of learning on scripture, liturgy and rites of the catholic faith.

A suggestion box at the back of church may be one way for those too shy to speak out, could get their voice heard,

We have a vibrant Friendship Circle in our parish which enables catholic and other faiths to meet and they have interesting speakers giving advice about practical help and other subjects.

### **Core Question 3 – Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and participation**

How are the baptised members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel? What hinders people from being active in your parish? How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?

Normally in the past the priest would ask someone to carry out a new task, this has been broken with changes in priests and COVID.

Why are people afraid to speak to, ask the priest if they could begin a group, help with a group?

Who writes the Bidding Prayers? Could a lay person do this – perhaps a reader?

What do other churches do for young people to make them welcome and want to be part of their faith family?

Some felt there was no governance in the parish but is this a reflection on the effect of COVID and lockdowns

We have a Finance Committee and a Working Team who discusses and plan maintenance of Church Fabric and general running of a parish – again this is smaller than before COVID, but is functional.

Many people are keen to help with jobs within the parish but are waiting to be asked.

It is important to make everyone feel welcomed, wanted and valued through kindness, friendliness, warmth - being non-judgemental

Priests should be accountable especially with the issues of abuse within the church.

We must include schools in weekly Mass attendance, education on faith and parish life.

### **Core Question 4 – Discerning and Deciding**

How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions? How does your parish promote participation in decision making within the hierarchical Church? Does the decision making of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community, including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?

There was a general feeling of lack of consultation on this matter.

Since our quick turnover of priests – one not here for long but stopped most groups from existing, the next hindered by COVID there is not much opportunity to discuss, discern and decide in the parish. We lost our momentum, our energy and enthusiasm. The 'conversations' continuing we hope will correct this now.

Regarding young people, often their sporting engagements are on a Sunday morning (Football practice etc.) - could we have a Mass at a different time to help accommodate this. (We do have a Saturday evening Mass). Perhaps a youth Mass held regularly would encourage them.

The Conversations and Listening process for this Synod have taught us to LISTEN to one another more, and to hear issues that cause stress or pain.

The people attending the 'Conversations' are here because they want to help – which is encouraging.

If priests are allowed to stay a long time in a parish, parishioners have a chance to

get on more familiar terms - this is surely better for both priest and people.  
We need church governance which can support the successful running of the parish.  
What happened to Diocesan Pastoral Councils and Parish Pastoral Councils?  
Some people asked: Do we have an 'inner circle' of helpers and those who are not part of it feel excluded.  
Parishioners need to be confident to speak to the Priest about things they would like to help with in the parish - don't expect the priest to do it all for you. Help him.

### **Core Question 5 – Celebration**

How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish?  
How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community? How does the parish invite all baptised Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?

Personal prayer is most important – it emanates from the Mass.  
Sunday Mass does bring the faith family together – but COVID has broken this somewhat and we need to re-boot and heal as a parish family.  
Newcomers to the faith asked for laminated Order of Mass sheets to be available - we have them, but due to COVID could not use them. This will be reinstated now.  
We must re-establish links with other faiths within our local area.  
There is still a 'brokenness' felt within the parish and it will take time, patience and enthusiasm to mend this. Prayer, both communal and individual is a powerful way to bring about healing  
Encourage one another, be kind, smile, be welcoming. Show you care.  
Develop more prayer time in the parish; laity could help run prayer sessions perhaps, so our priests are not overburdened.  
There is a sense that we are almost starting again (post COVID) but we should see this as an opportunity to grow, as exciting, do not be downcast.  
Start with personal (one to one) invitations to join us for Mass - Jesus said: "Come".

### **Hearing the Holy Spirit:**

Don't take our priests for granted - they need our help not condemnation.  
The ability to Listen to others has been great and to discern the Holy Spirit within what we hear.  
Put your own house in order  
Lead from the parish  
There is strength in community  
We all felt this Synodal Conversations exercise was well worth it and our parish will be richer for it. Thank you.

# **STONEHOUSE REPORT**

## **St Joseph`s Parish Consultation Process**

Questionnaires were distributed by welcomers to parishioners arriving for Mass on three Sundays in February. A box was provided for completed returns. 25 completed questionnaires were returned. The deadline for returns was 13<sup>th</sup> February 2022, subsequently extended to 20<sup>th</sup> February.

Tony Ryan represented St Joseph`s parish at the Assembly Day for the Synod held at St Patrick`s Brockworth on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

In parallel with completion of the parish questionnaire, Tony Ryan (current chairman of the parish forum) composed a response to the diocesan questions in consultation with Father Gary Brassington (parish priest and dean of Stroud). The report was submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> February to Clifton Diocese. This report is referenced under "Diocesan Report" below.

### **Introduction:**

Text accompanying a questionnaire issued to parishioners of St Joseph`s parish in February 2022. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather input from the parish to the ongoing synodal process.

### **Synod 2022-2023**

You may be aware that Pope Francis has started a Synod, an opportunity for the whole Church to journey together to reflect on what the future can hold for us.

He is adamant that every member of the Church, young and old, has a chance to express their thoughts.

As parishioners of Stonehouse you have a voice, and the diocese has invited you to make your contribution, this will be added to the thoughts of church goers in each parish throughout the world.

The final document at parish level will be presented to the Bishops Conference and then ultimately to the Pope in October 2023.

We had hoped to hold discussion groups, but covid restrictions have made it impossible. Therefore this questionnaire will be available to all.

If you would like to be involved, and I hope you will, please read through the following questions. Any thoughts, positive or negative about them please write a few words, your opinion really counts. Your comments will remain anonymous, but will play their part in shaping the future of the church.

Please do not miss this part in shaping the future of the church.

If you have any questions, please talk to Deacon Bogdan or Tony Ryan.

Please do not miss this great opportunity to have your voice heard.

### **Parish Consultation Process**

About 50 questionnaires were distributed by welcomers to parishioners arriving for Mass on three Sundays in February 2022. A box was provided for completed returns. 25 completed questionnaires were returned. The deadline for returns was 13<sup>th</sup> February 2022, subsequently extended to 20<sup>th</sup> February.

Tony Ryan represented St Joseph`s parish at the Assembly day for the Synod held at St Patrick`s Brockworth on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

## **Questions Included**

1. What does the Church mean to you?
2. What has helped you to form these ideas?
3. Which thing might stop you from wanting to be part of the Church?
4. How is the Church perceived by you, your family and friends?
5. What could the Church do to attract more people?
6. In what way can the Church reach out to the wider community, especially those who are marginalised, the poor, the ostracised, prisoners and people of other faiths?

A space was provided for any other comments.

It is to be noted that the parish questions above did not align with the questions in this summary report, responses to which have been composed separately.

## **Analysis of Questionnaire Responses**

The questionnaire responses are captured in a spreadsheet containing a matrix of 6x25 cells (one for each question and response).

Analysis so far available suggests a high degree of loyalty, commitment, devotion and attachment to the Church and its worship; with a great appreciation of the community it provides. Some criticism was found of its perceived (male) sexism, and its neglect of female potential for service. Some responders would welcome married priests. The role of Catholic education and family support was seen as key to the preservation of the faith in later life. A need for more support of youth was identified.

The Questionnaire responses are being analysed for summary inclusion in a report to St Joseph's parish in early March 2022.

## **Core Question 1 – Listening**

How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst? How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries? What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalisation, or social exclusion?

The parish has a number of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who visit Care homes and housebound people in their own homes on a regular basis for the administration of the sacrament.

In the course of these visits, non-Catholics often ask for prayers or communion. In these cases the Minister, or other parish contact, will pray with the resident and give a blessing. Often, housebound people may need practical support, e.g. shopping, contact with their own minister of religion.

## **Core Question 2 – Speaking Out:**

What enables or hinders you from speaking courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish and society. What space is there in your parish for the voice of people, including active and inactive members of our faith?

Members of the parish have supported inter-denominational youth groups, e.g. Sportify, working for youth evangelisation.

### **Core Question 3 – Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and participation**

How are the baptised members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel? What hinders people from being active in your parish? How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?

#### **Organisation**

The parish priest is assisted by a permanent deacon

The parish has a Finance Committee, Pastoral Council, and a periodic, (notionally 6-monthly) Parish General Forum.

#### **Communication**

Individuals in the parish are focal points for various aspects of parish life including Parish Forum; Hall booking, Piety Stall, Cleaning; Social Events; Liturgy and Altar Servers; Grounds and Maintenance; Ecumenical contacts; Safeguarding; 3<sup>rd</sup> World Outreach; Music; Health and Safety. The parish employs a paid Office Administrator.

Photographs of those acting as focal points are being updated for display on the parish notice board.

Prior to a General Forum, reports are produced by the focal points for publication and review at the meeting.

#### **Affect of Covid Pandemic**

All aspects of parish life have been severely impacted by the pandemic. The church itself was closed for a significant period, during which time parishioners could only attend Mass by Zoom link to Clifton Cathedral.

Parish committee functions were severely curtailed, (less so for finance and safeguarding functions). For example, the last Parish Forum was held in November 2019.

As functioning parish, we face a significant period of re-construction and re-energising.

### **Core Question 4 – Discerning and Deciding**

How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions? How does your parish promote participation in decision making within the hierarchical Church? Does the decision making of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community, including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?

The parish is managed, under the leadership of the parish priest, by a pastoral committee; and broader communication and consultation takes place through the Parish General Forum. As indicated above these have been significantly disrupted by the pandemic.

The parish has a deanery representative.

There is a weekly newsletter (shared with the sister parish at Woodchester) with



news, events and notices; including the readings for the Sunday.

Contact with those on the periphery of, or unconnected to the life of the parish takes place on an opportunistic, ad-hoc basis, through neighbours friends or relatives of active parish members.

## Core Question 5 – Celebration

How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish? How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community? How does the parish invite all baptised Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?

Sunday Mass includes an adult-led children`s Liturgy of the Word, conducted in the Parish Hall. At the end of their session, before the offertory, the children return to the church and present their work to the congregation, and are normally applauded by the congregation. Children`s Liturgy leaders are CRB cleared, although more leaders are needed.

Children`s liturgy was suspended after the church re-opened until the majority of covid restrictions ceased.

Special Ministers of Holy Communion assist in the distribution of the Eucharist, and receive the host in pixes to take to the sick and housebound.

A rota of readers participates in the proclamation of the Word.

Before covid restrictions the parish had young altar servers, (boys and girls)..

A healthy first communion class operates jointly with the sister parish of Woodchester.

However, ecumenically constituted Lenten Study Groups have not operated for some years. The parish questionnaire identified a need for house prayer groups and bible study groups to be established.

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## St. Joseph`s Parish questions

The questionnaire included the following six questions, giving 6x25 entries. Tony Ryan has summarised the resulting spreadsheet as follows. The “count” against each summary response represents the number of entries summarised under that heading.

### 1. What does the Church mean to you?

Place of a  
worshipping  
community  
with Christ  
(Count 9)

Union with God  
(Count 6)

Provides  
personal  
guidance and  
comfort (Count  
8)

Institution and  
clergy need to  
reform and  
change (Count  
1) (non-  
response Count  
1)

## 2. What has helped you to form these ideas?

School, educational background, (Count 6)	Personal experience/insight (Count 6)	Family/Community background (Count 10)	Don't know (Count 1) (non-response Count 2)
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## 3. Which thing might stop you from wanting to be part of the Church?

Closed Mentality/Rule based (Count 2)	Dishonesty/ Male sexism/Venality. "Busy bodies" (Count 9)	Scandal. Lack of leadership/parish priest (Count 4)	Nothing, or unimaginable circumstances (Count 6) (non-response Count 4)
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## 4. How is the Church perceived by you, your family and friends?

Closed/ Irrelevant (Count 9)	Male sexist (Count 2)	Supportive/beneficial (Count 10)	Don't know. Lack of support in pandemic (Count 2) (non-response Count 2)
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## 5. What could the Church do to attract more people?

Show Inclusivity/Outreach/Equality/Sexual honesty (Count 7)	Social activities/Media use (Count 4)	Evangelism/Focus on Youth (Count 6)	Don't Know (Count 5) (Non-responses Count 3)
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## 6. In what way can the Church reach out to the wider community, especially those who are marginalised, the poor, the ostracised, prisoners and people of other faiths?

Act on its own social teaching (Count 14)	Use of Assets (Count 2)	More leadership (Count 2)	Uncategorised (Count 4)(non-responses Count 3)
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## General Comments

Respect and Tolerance/ visiting housebound (Count 4)	Male dominance (Count 1)	Little for children (Count 1)	No General comments (Count 14) Other - Poor response to pandemic (Church closed) (Count 4) - No Parish meetings (not prevented by covid) - Appreciate the chance to have individual voice heard (Count 1)
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# WOODCHESTER REPORT

**Communion** - Sacramental life of the church and reaching out to margins

- Be more inclusive
- De-mystify our sacraments- educate people about them. Let them know why we do what we do?
- Open up the communion and include divorced people
- Maybe we are too legalistic
- Provide a pathway to knowledge in faith. Be the access point and make us accessible.

**Message** - Essence of the readings. Something with meaning that we can take away. A lasting thought. Making sure we are connecting/resonating with people. The children's liturgy does this maybe we can too.

**Sermon** - We want a powerful short message. Personal connection to the message making it accessible and relevant to all.

**Saints & Martyrs** - Using the as examples of people who found faith, lived faith and died for their faith. Living inspirations.

**Welcome** - We cannot overstate the need to be welcoming at all times. We must mention this at our masses and make sure they feel welcome in our parish and community. Including them in coffees and chats. We could create a welcome to the parish pack to help people integrate and discover more about the church and the area. Register new members so we can reach out and connect with them asking what support they need.

**Experience** - We need to offer people a good experience, so they want to come back again and again and become part of the parish. A vibrant place alive with music, hymns and other music is a big part of the experience.

**Relevance** - This is what it all boils down to. What relevance is the church in people's lives? How can we increase the relevance? Are there other churches or parishes from whom we can learn? Share best practice even amongst us? Stroud/Woodchester/Stonehouse

\*We all need to monitor attendance. By doing so we can chart COVID recovery but also be mindful of newcomers.

## **Action points for the Church:**

- Update parishioners list
- Place an Open Service notice in local newsletters and papers to invite people to come visit our church.
- Tour of the church - historic and spiritual side
- SNJ - Make sure we send in church notices
- Update the Website regularly and make it user friendly
- Promote the Facebook Page - Woodchester Priory
- Accessibility - consider this more fully
- Welcoming Pack for newcomers.
- Follow the model of the Friendship Circle they have in Stroud.
- Update the Prayer Board in the Porch. Make sure the bulletin is pinned there each week.
- Choir - find good singers from the congregation
- Keep up the good work started by Churches Together