

## **St Edmund of Canterbury Synodal Response**

#### **Executive Summary**

In response to the Synod, the parish of St Edmunds nominated two delegates, Francesca Fear and Liz Jones to organise our listening events and to report to the diocese. Given the size of the task and to bring much needed skills to the process, we were joined by Susie Watchorn and Emma Carlisle. Our parish priest, Fr Steve Wymer gave us full latitude to design the parish Synod approach and although very supportive, has not played an active part in the events or in the writing of this report.

This report is the distillation of responses to a parish wide survey and a number of listening events during December and January.

#### We posed four questions:

- 1. A synodal church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together'. How is this 'journeying together happening today in our local Church? What steps does the spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?
- 2. What is my dream for the church as a whole and our parish that we may become more outward looking?
- **3.** For this dream to be achieved, what do we need to do more of, what do we need to stop doing and what do we need to do differently?
- **4.** What particular issues does the Church need to pay more attention to and how might it engage others to help to do this?

The survey broke these down into more specific questions to obtain more quantitative data. For a large parish, the number of responses was relatively low, around 240; however, the content was thoughtful, prayerful and very rich in detail and suggestions.

This report analyses the responses to both the survey and the listening events across three themes: Communion, Participation and Mission.

The consistency of responses is encouraging, across gender and other demographics. It indicates a clear call for change in organisation, behaviours and attitude at all levels of the Church. However, this is not a litany of complaints; the responses and this report come from a deep love of God, the Roman Catholic church and our parish, a true love that transcends perceived faults and failings. Respondents expressed belief and faith in the possibility for things to improve and a desire to be part of a Church that listens and changes for the better. The warmth and affection of our parishioners is apparent, particularly for the parish clergy and the office staff.

In response to the request for key messages to be communicated to the diocese, we highlight the following:

Messages for the Church (The Pope, Bishops and clergy)

#### Role of women

Firstly, many comments referred to women being able to become priests or deacons. Comments referred to how successful this has been in the Church of England and this is something that would help the Catholic Church to develop in the twenty-first century. It is noteworthy that the calls came from men as well as women.

Secondly, almost every comment regarding the role of women said that women should be able to take on an increased role in the Church whether by occupying senior roles within Church governance in the Vatican or by taking on more lay roles within the Church.

There were many references to lack of appreciation of the importance of women in the Church, to lack of respect and treatment that would not be acceptable in wider society.

#### **Exclusion of minorities**

Comments centred around race, gender, disability, marital status and sexuality. Many respondents wrote that they felt strongly about the inclusivity of the catholic church with respondents referring to groups that they felt were excluded. These are specifically the LGBTQ+ community, Catholics with mental and physical disabilities and divorced Catholics. Many respondents commented on how they thought that given that the bible teaches us to love everyone and treat everyone equally and with compassion, it was strange that the Catholic Church did not follow this in relation to a range of different groups in society.

#### **Engaging with younger Catholics**

Respondents commented that the church needs to increase the engagement of young people in two areas – firstly in increasing actual participation of young people in church life and secondly in increasing the teaching of the faith to young people. Of particularly note was the gap between confirmation in early teens and the 'next' sacrament of marriage. However, this came with a caution to find out what was actually wanted, not assuming that we know best!

#### Governance and decision making

Almost all respondents replied that they knew very little or nothing about the governance of the Church in terms of decision making, finances, governances and management. There were references to recent scandals both fiscal and the shocking cover-ups of child abuse. There is a clear message from the participants that this can not and should not be tolerated. Scandals occur in the shadows where the light of openness and scrutiny is not allowed to penetrate.

#### **Messages for our Parish priests**

#### Governance and decision making

Governance and decision making was a recurrent theme, with many referring to the lack of transparency about where decisions are taken and by whom. The lack of transparency about financial matters was specifically mentioned. Concern was expressed that the parish did not use the talents it had and that if committees existed, the recruitment process was opaque. There was recognition that priests are very busy, but no understanding of what they do. There was a strong suggestion that many parish responsibilities could safely be delegated, freeing the clergy to respond to the spiritual needs of their congregation.

#### Size of parish and our parishioner's sense of being part of the parish community

St Edmund's is a large parish and respondents have commented that this can be both a strength and a weakness. As a point of strength, respondents commented that there are several masses to choose from, allowing them to attend a mass which fitted in around family life and cultural needs. Some respondents also commented that before the pandemic, there were a number of groups which appealed to a range of tastes and interests.

As a point of weakness, respondents commented that it can be unfriendly and unwelcoming for new people, with a perception that established groups did not welcome new members. There are many practical suggestions on how to improve communication, to instil a sense of welcome and to promote a sense of parish cohesion.

A further challenge came from the listening events, where there were a number of comments about a perceived lack of joy in the mass and in how we come together as a community. The lack of heating will not have helped, but there were references to unsmiling priests, a lack of vibrancy in the music, an absence of children and the energy they bring, a lack of social groups and absence of cross parish social occasions.

#### A Sunday-only church?

There was a clear call for St Edmund's to open its doors more to those in the local community so that the community feels that the Catholic Church is a welcoming place. It also needed to 'shout more' about what it is doing to support the local community as this is not widely known. It was recommended that we should look at what many other churches are doing; using the church and hall as community spaces to draw people in. Many examples were given of churches that are at the heart of their communities, welcoming people in for coffee, hosting art events, holding concerts, in use every day of the week.

#### Finally, for Diocese and Parish

In the course of this process, it was apparent that there is a deep sense of cynicism that nothing will change as a result of the Synod. Our plea is that clear and sustained effort is put into addressing issues raised, otherwise the cynics will be proved right and the Synod will have done more harm than good, perhaps by being the final straw for those who feel less connection and

involvement with the parish than in the past and for those questioning their faith and wavering about their relationship with the Church.

We would like to thank all who participated in this process, our hope is that they found it as enriching as we did and that those charged with listening will hear the messages in this report.

Francesca, Liz, Emma and Susie

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## The Catholic Church in Beckenham and The Parish of St Edmund's

Beckenham, as a settlement, dates from 862 and it is generally accepted that there was a church in Beckenham from before 1070. It appears in the Domesday book as BACHEHAM, and in the *Textus Roffensis*, as BECCEHAM, the name being derived from its location on the river Ravensborne or *Becc*, in Saxon, signifying a river, and *ham*, a village or dwelling.

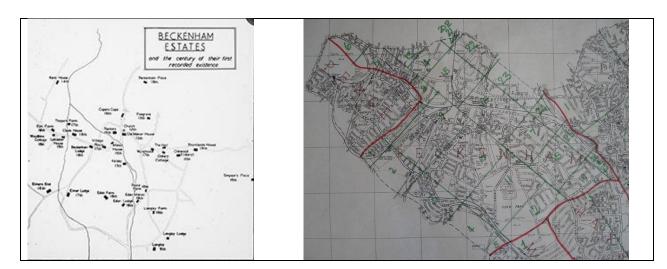
The arrival of the Normans meant that the Manor of Beckenham took on added importance. William the Conqueror granted Beckenham to his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux in Normandy and Earl of Kent. He controlled much of what is modern Beckenham, with other areas covered by the estates of Foxgrove Manor, Kelsey and Langley. Building of the medieval church began in 1340 and the Church was part of the Diocese of Rochester. Initially the church comprised of a chancel and nave with a square tower and was on the site of the current Anglican Church, St



George's. After the reformation, St George's became the Anglican church.

Beckenham remained a small village until the early nineteenth century. As local landowners died, their heirs began to see the potential for development in this small village, located so closely to London. The advent of the railways through Beckenham helped this development. Following various Catholic Relief Acts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the mission in Beckenham was founded in 1891. In 1920, Beckenham became an independent parish. Land was acquired in Village Way, where on 24 April 1927 a new temporary church dedicated to St Edmund of Canterbury was opened. The current church and presbytery were built in the late 1930s.

The Manor of Beckenham and surrounding seats eventually evolved into the twenty-first century town of Beckenham. As can be seen from the two images below, the parish now extends over a large area. The first image shows the 'seats' of the parish and the first official date of their recording and the second map shows more recent boundary lines. St Edmund's serves a parish of approximately two thousand people.



#### **Our Parish Team**

Fr Steve Wymer, parish priest Deacon Sandy Misquitta

Fr Ashley Beck Deacon Ray Williamson

Fr John Olaniran Rosemary Chrumka

Deacon Sean Murphy Barbara Davies



## **Parish Groups**

We have over 60 active groups associated with St Edmund's catering for all ages, tastes and interests. We have a number of church choirs and a very active family mass group.

#### **MUSIC**

9.30 Mass Choir Chorale Folk Choir Rosie's choir

#### **LITURGY**

Family Mass Group Children's Liturgy Group Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion Readers Prayers of the Faithful Altar Servers

#### **PRAYER AND ADORATION**

Mothers' Prayers
Monday Meditation
Contemplative Saturday
Monthly Prayer Group
Rosary Circle
Missionary Sisters of St Peter Claver

#### **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND**

#### **FORMATION**

Saturday Catechism Group Scripture Study Group LANDINGS for returning Catholics The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A) Teams Of Our Lady

#### **OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

CAFOD

Association for the Propagation of the Faith Inter-Faith & Inter-Church
Justice & Peace
Refugee Support
Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP)
Bereavement Support
Knights of St. Columba
Thursday Drop-in for those living with memory loss and their carers
Street Pastors

#### **SOCIAL**

New Parishioners
Catholic Women's League
Fair Committee
Parish Party
Catenians
Parent, Baby and Toddler Group
Gift Aid (Covenant) Scheme
300 Club

Church Shop
Catholic Singles St. Edmund's Walking Group

#### YOUTH

5th Beckenham South Scout — Beaver Group 5th Beckenham South Scout — Cub Group 5th Beckenham South Scout Group 5th Beckenham South Explorer Scout Group

## The Church building

The church was built in 1937-38 from designs by the architect James O'Hanlon Hughes, who also designed all the furnishings and fittings. The church is built on reinforced concrete foundations. The west facade's central section has a large arch below the gable with gable cross. The arch contains the nine-light west window, above three doorways. The plan is roughly rectangular, with a wide three-bay nave with passage aisles.



Internally, the walls were constructed from sand-lime bricks up to a height of 7 feet. The roof of steel trusses is clad in a ceiling of fibrous plaster panels. The sanctuary is top lit by a skylight halfway up the tower. On either side are two pointed arches, with five clerestory windows on each side. The east side has three further pointed blind openings, just below the skylight.



Three panels above the front doors depict (from left to right) the Papal arms, St Edmund with his arms of three suns, and the arms of Bishop Amigo.

Together with the sculpture of the Virgin Mary and Child above, these were carved by Philip Lindsey Clark.



A number of alterations were made for the Millennium during a reordering around 2000. The former draught lobby at the west was turned into a full-width narthex. A door at the northwest of the nave was blocked and turned into an accessible toilet. Several partitions were inserted and doors removed, converting the northeast chapel into a storage space and a cupboard for the sound system. An etched glass screen was inserted around the tabernacle in the arch to the southeast.

## Methodology

#### <u>Introduction</u>

With our aim being to seek the views of as many parishioners as possible in order to ensure our Synod findings truly represented the views of our parish, it was decided that there would be dual approach of a survey and a series of listening events. The survey was available both online and in paper form and a series of face to face and online meetings were held. The aim of this was to allow parishioners to access a range of formats to participate in the synodal process. The survey was designed to facilitate the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data while the listening events, by their nature, were designed to collect qualitative data only.

It was hoped that the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data would provide a rich response to the synodal process.

#### The Format of the Survey

The survey consisted of thirty-five questions. Eleven of the questions were scaled 1-10/radial buttons and the remaining twenty-four questions were free text questions allowing respondents to write their thoughts in as much or as little detail as they wished. The topic areas of the questions were inclusivity, community, the pandemic, mission, communication and governance and demographic.

**Questions on Inclusivity** asked respondents to consider what both the Church and the Parish did well and could improve upon in terms of inclusivity and asked respondents for their thoughts and ideas on what could be improved upon.

**Questions on Community** asked respondents to consider what St Edmund's did well to generate a feeling of parish community and what it could do better to achieve this. It also asked respondents about which groups they were already involved in.

Questions on the pandemic focused on how the pandemic has impacted on the parish, what could have been done better during the pandemic and what could be done now to strengthen participation beyond the pandemic.

**Questions on Mission** asked respondents to answer questions on how St Edmund's helps parishioners of a range of ages (such as young people and young families) to develop their faith along with asking for ideas on what more St Edmund's could do to help parishioners develop their faith.

**Questions on communication and governance** asked parishioners to consider how much they knew about how the parish is governed, the communication of the governance and how well parishioners understood the role of the various committees. Questions also asked how well St Edmund's communicates with parishioners. Questions also asked about these could be improved and asked if there were any improvements that could be made to the newsletter.

#### **The Format of the Listening Events**

There were two face-to-face meetings which took place in the Church Hall and three online Zoom meetings. In each meeting, participants were placed into groups of eight and asked to participate in a listening circle exercise. The aim of this was to allow for everyone's voice to be heard and not for the meeting to turn into a debate or for any voices to dominate the proceedings. The listening circle

exercise was led by a facilitator who had received a briefing beforehand. Facilitators were parish volunteers who had received a briefing from the Synod team on how to run each listening circle group. Each participant could speak for five minutes and at the end of the evening, all participants were invited to make notes and give their thoughts and ideas to the following questions:

**Question 1** A synodal church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together'. How is this 'journeying together happening today in our local Church? What steps does the spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?

**Question 2** What is my dream for the church as a whole and our parish that we may become more outward looking?

**Question 3** For this dream to be achieved, what do we need to do more of, what do we need to stop doing and what do we need to do differently?

**Question 4** What particular issues does the Church need to pay more attention to and how might it engage others to help to do this?

## **The Respondents and Participants**

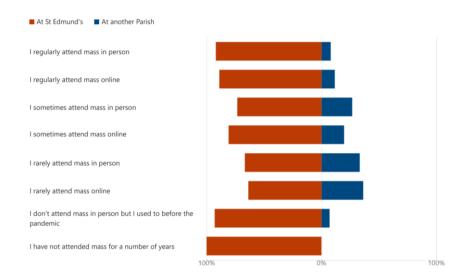
Across all methods of data collection either by survey, face to face listening session or online listening session, there were 300 participants.

In each demographic category, the highest three response returns are presented in the table below.

Category	1st	2nd	3 <sup>rd</sup>	
Age	55-64	65-74	45-54	
Gender	Female	Male	Prefer not to say	
Ethnicity	White British	White Other	Prefer not to say	

The overwhelming majority of the respondents were parishioners of St Edmund's, but there were several respondents who were 'visiting' from other parishes and who declared that they attended mass both in person and online in their parish.

37. Please tell us about your mass attendance



#### **Findings**

The answers from the survey and from the meetings are presented below. The findings have been presented as a series of themes which have been common to all responses. Underneath the heading of each theme, there is a word cloud made up of the words commonly used in the survey responses. Each theme has been structured as summary paragraphs followed by a few quotes for each theme which have been taken directly from response sheets.

We have tried to link our themes to the three categories provided by the Archdiocese by using the three pictures below

#### **COMMUNION**

The Church is Catholic because she is sent to all, in order to gather the entire human family from every nation and culture, under the Lordship of Christ in the unity of his Spirit.



#### **PARTICIPATION**

Participation is based on the fact that all of the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The authority of pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the building up of the entire body.

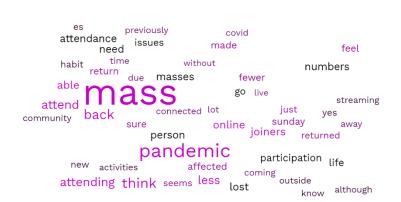


#### **MISSION**

The People of God are on pilgrimage through history towards the heavenly homeland. Each one of the baptised is to be honoured with the same dignity as children of God and appointed to the same mission the proclamation of the Good News and the building of the Kingdom of God.



## Theme 1 - The size of the Parish as both a strength and a weakness





St Edmund's is a large parish and respondents have commented that this can be both a strength and a weakness. As a point of strength, respondents commented that there were several masses to choose from, allowing them to attend a mass which fitted in around family life and cultural needs. Some respondents also commented that before the pandemic, there were a number of groups which appealed to a range of tastes and interests.

As a point of weakness, respondents commented that it can be unfriendly and unwelcoming for new people for years. Some respondents commented that they experience not feeling included and it is a bit difficult to fit in. Several respondents felt that newcomers to the parish need to be welcomed in and made to feel like part of the parish. There was a sense that the parish did not 'reach out' to members, making it difficult to feel part of or belong to the parish. In some responses, there was a feeling that St Edmund's was actually an unfriendly church because it was difficult to meet people. A few respondents recommended that it would be lovely to have welcome get togethers for new parishioners to Church to help them meet some people outside Mass and feel part of the community.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"The stewards during lockdown welcoming parishioners were lovely and made people feel welcome to the church".

"There is a feeling of not feeling included and it's a bit difficult to fit in".

"I love the tradition of the church and am proud to be a part of it. The church almost needs a 'marketing team'"

"This is a large parish and can be unfriendly/unwelcoming for new people for years"

"It would be a good idea to have a welcoming co-ordinator for new families in the parish and have welcome get togethers for new Parishioners".

"Engender a truly welcoming parish/church. We often gather for mass or some other ceremony and then cannot wait to run away. The only people in my parish where I have been for nearly 2 decades who stop to speak with me are those who look like me. I try to do my bit like reading, Eucharistic ministry etc. We need a more vibrant church".

## Theme 2 - Increasing the Engagement of Young People





Respondents commented that the church needs to increase the engagement of young people in two areas – firstly in increasing actual participation of young people in church life and secondly in increasing the teaching of the faith to young people.

Firstly, respondents reported that the church was not appealing enough to young people but felt that it was sometimes unclear if this was due to the Church, to family or to society. There was a strong perception that the church needs to find ways of engaging with young people post-confirmation as this is a perceived point in time of disengagement. There was a desire to see a programme of events for young people. A few respondents commented on how they thought there had been a weakening of the link between the Scouts, Girl Guides and St Edmund's and would welcome a return to a stronger and more visible link. As examples of positive youth groups, several respondents wrote that the new Children's Mass in the church hall was an example of a recent and successful parish initiative, along with the toddler group and the pre-school.

Secondly, respondents also commented that the youth needed to have a better understanding of the teaching of the church so that they continue to be participating Catholics in adulthood. There were several suggestions of a faith course for young adults that was similar to the RCIA which might help inspire them to come back to church.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"Most teenagers lapse after confirmation and return when they get married and then need to get their kids into St Mary's – how can we keep them active and welcomed into the parish".

"We need to find ways of engaging with young people post confirmation or there will be no catholic church in England in the future".

"The youth need a more positive outlook of the church and better understanding of Church teaching so that they can continue to be practising Catholics in the future"

"The church needs to set up a new programme for young people... get more volunteers involved for proper youth projects"

"To bring the young people back we need to use the talents of our community to engage with young people on their level not our (adults) level".

"Create a newsletter/list of groups for young people about the issues that they are interested in".

"My sons are no longer engaged, sadly. They did not hear a positive and uplifting tone in the sermons they heard but considered them critical. Perhaps that was their age but it's a reminder of the challenge that we need to communicate in a way that has wider appeal and always remember the message of love and to keep it centric to everything we do and say".

Theme 3 - Engagement in the Parish in general/Parish groups/Parish events





Responses related to this theme had both positive and negative aspects in three main areas – provision, support of the elderly and use of the Church Hall.

Firstly, some respondents felt that St Edmund's provided a wide range of facilities for all ages before the pandemic and look forward to activities resuming. Other respondents felt that the range of activities needed to be widened and publicised more to increase engagement. There were several suggestions about new clubs such as a book club and a knitting club and having clubs that could run both online as well as face to face so that parishioners who are housebound/shielding can also participate and continue to feel as though they belong to the parish. Also, some respondents commented that other churches hold coffee mornings, exhibitions and concerts.

Secondly, some respondents expressed concern that some parishioners who have not been able to attend due to health reasons may now not come back. Some respondents felt that the church fails to support for those who have spent decades supporting it but then stop due to age. Such groups of people have subsequently felt lonely and abandoned by a parish where they were previously such an integral part.

Thirdly, an overwhelming majority of comments related to the use of the Church Hall saying that it needs to be more central to parish life once again as it was before the pandemic through holding various events from informal coffee mornings to more formal fundraising events. Respondents' comments suggested a strong desire for a programme of social events to bring people in the Parish together again.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"St Edmund's provides facilities for mothers and toddlers to meet, scout movement, drop-in afternoons for the elderly and frail. SVP lunches etc."

"We need to increase the involvement – have better representation of the congregation of our church. Need more laity leadership – use people who have the skills to help the parish to grow".

"There is also the danger that the church might be a Sundays-only venue for many people. It was felt important to make the church more of a living "hub" in the community, e.g., with coffee mornings for elderly parishioners (or locals), groups for people with different interests etc. Obviously, the pandemic has put a stop to many activities, but it is something to bear in mind for the future when things return to normal".

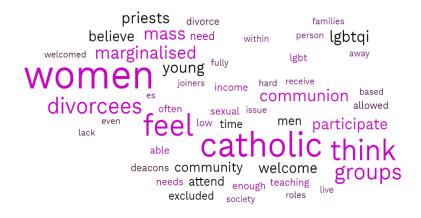
"Engage more people by facilitating help groups for different people. Journeying tends to happen when parishioners can socialise together – friendships form through being involved in joint projects"

"Find out if old groups want to restart, start some new groups and create some online groups to support people who are housebound. E.g., an online book club, knitting club or coffee club".

"My daughter came to mass with me recently and as she said to me afterwards it was so dreary. It lacked vibrancy and I totally agreed with her. This is how people leave the church – when there is nothing to inspire them.

"Many of the sermons in the Catholic Churches, are mostly said in a solemn and sombre way, so even if it is a good sermon, many people just turn off and do not really listen. If you have a look round you will see many close their eyes during the sermon with the droning of the sermon in the background!"

## Theme 4 - The role of women in the Church







Many respondents had comments to make regarding the role of women in the Church in two areas – the introduction of female clergy and the role of women in the Church.

Firstly, many comments referred to the option of women being able to become priests or deacons. Comments referred to how successful this has been in the Church of England and this is something that would help the Catholic Church to develop in the twenty-first century.

Secondly, almost every comment regarding the role of women said that women should be able to take on an increased role in the Church whether by occupying senior roles within Church governance in the Vatican or by taking on more lay roles within the Church.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"Women are heavily involved in the day to day running of the Church and are pivotal for the good functioning of the everyday church life".

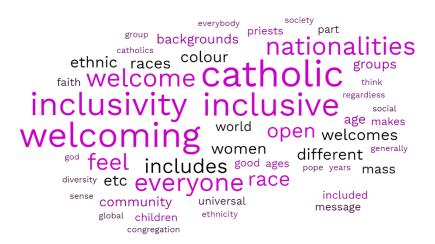
"Most people attending the Synod meeting this evening are women, yet this is a group which still have an unequal role. How half of the potential workforce can simply be ignored is ridiculous and a waste of potential resource".

"I dream of a church where women can be priests though I think the small step is to have women deacons. Women are pivotal to the good functioning of the church".

"50% of our community is female – we need women priests and deacons".

"As the mass is normally conducted by male priests there needs to be more of a presence of women around the church as well...We need role models in the church and this should represent both male and female".

## Theme 5 – Excluded groups in society

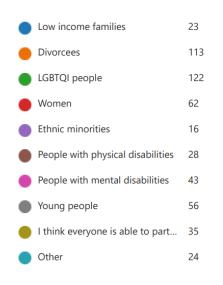


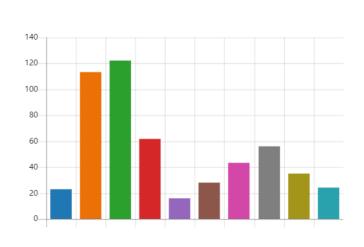




Respondents had many comments to make about the topic of inclusivity.

The categories of groups which respondents considered are unable to participate fully or are marginalised by the Catholic Church are presented in the table below.





Comments centred around race, gender, disability, marital status and sexuality. Many respondents wrote that they felt strongly about the inclusivity of the catholic church with respondents referring to groups that they felt were excluded. These are specifically the LGBTQ+ community, Catholics with mental and physical disabilities and divorced Catholics.

Many respondents commented on how they thought that given that the bible teaches us to love everyone and treat everyone equally and with compassion, it was strange that the Catholic Church did not follow this in relation to a range of different groups in society. This was a thread of commenting that featured frequently.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"LGBT issues to be more opening discussed"

"We still lag behind societal norms in marriage, LGBT+ and relationships"

"Welcome same sex couples fully and non-judgementally into the church".

"I think it needs to be better on issues around sexuality and gender, and more welcoming/understanding of the needs of divorced people".

"Accept married priests and female clergy. The continued requirement for celibate priests discriminates against married men, who will generally have a more rounded appreciation of their parishioners - and families. The child abuse scandal - and the prevalence of sexual misconduct by catholic clergy is a further compelling argument in favour of married priests"

"Respect people of all types of sexuality and welcome them into the church. There is a place for everyone".

"Change its stance on homosexual relationships and allowing women priests; and soften its stance on abortion, euthanasia, children born out of wedlock and divorce. Try to attract more people into or back to the faith, as we become more dynamic and inclusive in approach".

"The Catholic Church's attitude to homosexuality, to people who have gone through a marriage breakdown even if through no fault of their own, and at times the attitude to women, can lead people to a feeling of not being included or as welcome as they might be".

## Theme 6 - Outreach in the local community





Respondents' comments were consolidated in two areas, namely increasing the amount of outreach and promoting more about what is being done to raise awareness in the parish.

Firstly, many respondents also commented that more local outreach is required. They said that St Edmund's needed to open its doors more to those in the local community so that the community feels that the Catholic Church is a welcoming place. It also needed to 'shout more' about what it is doing to support the local community as this is not widely known. There were some suggestions about looking at what other churches are doing as a guide.

Secondly, respondents commented that more is required to do this well. In several responses, respondents said that increased communication was key and the removal of anonymity would also support this. There needs to be a sense of *invitation* to participate in parish activities to encourage people more and a more overt invitation from the clergy to 'get involved' would be welcomed by parishioners.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

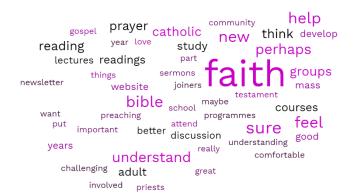
"The church should work more closely with other faiths and other denominations".

"Maybe looking at what other churches in Beckenham are doing to get some ideas of how we could do this better and develop what we are already doing. Some churches in Beckenham are open on a Saturday morning for people to drop off items for food banks and then the collections are dropped off that afternoon".

"The parish should do more to get to know the Jewish and Muslim communities in our locality. The annual walk by the Churches Together (Catholic, Anglican and Methodist) on Good Friday and occasional pulpit sharing were not enough".

"We respond generously to appeals whatever the nature of the work that the particular group or charity is doing but could do more within Beckenham's community to raise our profile".

## Theme 7 - Opportunities to learn about our faith







Respondents wrote about their awareness of different sacramental programmes such as Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and the RCIA. Many had positive comments to make about these groups, but some respondents had negative comments. Positive comments focused on gratitude that there were volunteers who gave up their time to run these groups and negative comments focused on how the groups were run by retired people.

Many respondents felt that it would be beneficial to have more opportunities to learn about the faith. While many commented on current provision and several wrote about the aspects they enjoyed, many said that a more 'basic' faith education is required post-confirmation to maintain engagement in spiritual learning.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"talks/instruction in the faith and faith-related topics especially for cradle Catholics".

"It would be great to have additional sessions or Programmes to help Strengthen our faith. Start a series of lectures on Christianity or perhaps start a book club?"

"Record the excellent lectures during Lent so that they are available at other times of the year".

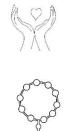
"The parish do coordinate Sacramental preparation very well, but there is little else after or in between. It is particularly difficult for children who do not attend Catholic schools. Not all families have strong links to Catholic teaching and traditions and so find it hard to persevere in faith development. There is no support or mentoring for them".

"Many 'cradle' Catholics don't develop their understanding of the faith past Confirmation or having left school so more help needed to make sure we all have the same knowledge. Maybe we could have a course for young adults/adults?".

"Sr Edmund's is good at converting non-Catholics to the faith, but it is not so good at retaining people who are brought up in the faith".

Theme 8 - The role of communication in the Parish

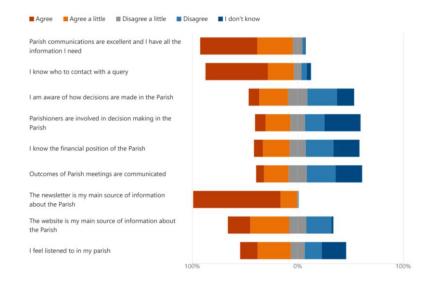




Comments about the role of communication in the parish were in two broad areas – the forms of communication being the newsletter, Facebook page and website and communications about what is happening in the parish.

Firstly, respondents had many ideas about the three forms of communication currently being used in the parish. The majority of comments about the newsletter were positive with many people using it as their main source of information and many expressed that they enjoyed in the 'newsy' content. Constructive criticism was given regarding updating the graphics/font/style if possible. Many respondents requested that the front-page article be either split into two shorter articles or be about more practical everyday matters for Catholics. Some respondents asked why the parish Facebook page does not contain information about the parish but usually has links to articles which cannot always be accessed. Suggestions were made about using the Facebook page to promote events/activities/groups in the parish which might help to increase engagement. Many respondents commented that the website needs to be updated to include more photos of people who work/conduct activities in the parish so that it is not faceless.

Secondly, respondents felt that there is lack of information about what is happening in the parish. There were several comments that the Parish needs to become a community and not just a Mass centre. There should be a concerted effort to tell the community about what we are doing. This would also link in with themes of engagement and outreach.



#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"The parish needs to clearly communicate the issues it faces"

"What happens at the meetings of various groups. It would be nice to know what SVP spend their money on. CWL support good causes it would be nice to know what they do. Maybe have a section on what different groups are doing every so often".

"The website needs to be updated regularly so that it is kept up to date".

"For many years it has always seemed to be on a need to know with some parishioners being favoured. A core group. I do not know who is on core group now".

"Arrivals/departures of clergy, deacons, sisters. Handbook of Parish and description of parish groups and contacts (hard copy and online) – perhaps a parish 'Facebook' - both online and as a wall display - with photos of our religious and lay leaders to help 'put a name to a face'. Don't ask for volunteers and then let a project go dead"

"We should let people know about help that is available to them through our parish groups - like bereavement support or loneliness. More information about the programme supporting baptism, first communion and confirmation".

"Change the look, feel and content of the front page of the newsletter. It is often way too dense or academic and can be hard to digest. A little lighter tone would be good as would articles on practical Catholic matters".

"The newsletter is my main form of communication and I love the 'newsy' of the inside pages. They are a mix of spiritual stimulus and practical information. I would make sure that every item has a contact name and number attached so people can find out more. It is sometimes the only way that I feel that we have a sense of parish community"

"Include short reports on parish groups. Personal ads e.g., asking if there is anybody interested in e.g., learning Italian, Latin, 3rd Age Uni locally. Shouldn't we be welcoming people outside into the Church".

"The extra newsletter created during the pandemic was very much appreciated".

## Theme 9 - The role of the clergy





Respondents' comments about the clergy were both positive and negative. Positive comments were made in three main areas. Firstly, there were many positive comments about the diversity of our clergy team and how they represented the various ethnicities of members of the parish. It was written several times that this was considered to be a strong positive feature of St Edmund's. Secondly, many respondents commented that they felt that they had received a significant amount of support and appreciated the work that the parish team had done during the pandemic. Thirdly, the ease with which Mass was accessible online was commented on by many as a positive piece of work especially during the pandemic.

Negative comments were made in three areas. Firstly, many respondents wrote that they did not know how the work of the clergy team was divided up and also knew little or nothing about the work of the nuns or other organisations who were linked to St Edmund's. Secondly, several respondents wrote that decisions about worship and adoration made during the pandemic meant that there was a perceived reduction in and limiting of access to the clergy and this had made them feel very disconnected and lonely. Thirdly, many respondents commented on how they did not know about the role of the clergy in parish governance and they require more information on this in order to understand what each member of the clergy team does in the parish.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"I believe that the Clergy team and the volunteers have worked extremely hard and done a very good job in keeping the Church open and services running as smoothly as possible".

"What roles individuals hold and the responsibilities they have. For example, what may we expect from our Deacons? What do the parish sisters do for the Parish?".

"what do the priests do all week? "

"They seem very busy, but what is the unique contribution of a priest?"

## Theme 10 - Parish governance





Comments relating to governance related to three areas – parish governance, Church governance and a desire to see changes in the future.

Firstly, almost all respondents replied that they knew very little or nothing about the governance of the parish or the Church in terms of decision making, finances, governances and parish management. There is a clear perception from the participants that this is an area for development in the parish. Respondents commented that they received little or no information about what committees currently exist, committee meetings that take place, the accounts and development plan for spending or growth ideas in the parish or the Church.

Secondly, the overwhelming majority of respondents requested more clarity and transparency about parish governance. Many parishioners suggested that a lay leadership team or Parish Council is required to co-ordinate the different aspects of parish life. Many parishioners also suggested having a published list of committees and post-holders so that there was clarity and transparency and several suggested using online surveys to find out the thoughts of the parishioners on particular topics. Several respondents suggested holding an AGM to update parishioners on what is happening in the parish.

#### Quotes from the survey and listening groups

"More information should be shared generally...how are people voted on to the committees?"

"There is little or no communication about governance to the general laity – very weak".

"Annual accounts should be reported and parishioners should have access to the minutes of meetings. Everything can be done by online meetings if not face to face".

"Structures and procedures should be subjected to a 'what if we started from scratch?' scrutiny to eliminate unjustified complications. Many issues are, of course, complicated and simplicity does not mean 'over-simplification', but an over-elaborate approach is not the way to deal with them".

"Improve the structure of support/management of the church at parish level to specifically support the priest and encourage the growth of parish life".

"Perhaps a more open approach will be beneficial. More information about the decision-making processes might help. Awareness of the structure and composition of the various groups would help to make them somewhat more visible - not to say more accountable"

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This has been a rewarding and enlightening journey and we feel privileged to have played a part in launching the Synod locally. We have been surprised at the consistency of messages. The respondents display great warmth and affection for the Church and the Parish, but also impatience that change is long overdue and that there is a deep sense of cynicism that nothing will change as a result of the Synod.

Our plea is that clear and sustained effort is put into addressing issues raised, otherwise the cynics will be proved right and the Synod will have done more harm than good, perhaps by being the final straw for those who feel less connection and involvement with the parish than in the past and for those questioning their faith and wavering about their relationship with the Church.

The parish delegates will share this report with the diocese and the clergy. We will also share the findings at the diocesan listening events. The next steps are with the parish clergy team. We consider that our results show that a clear and cohesive approach to next steps is required and would be welcomed.

The Synod process so far has been about listening, the next stage must be about action.

Liz Jones, Fran Fear, Susie Watchorn, Emma Carlisle 14 February 2022

#### **APPENDICES**

#### The questionnaire can be found at

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=9JKa3g4HSkOYwRaMdLJsHtkF9vo6aEhFvpOMct3zljpUMEFWMjk4SU1IVkRVUIBQVIFWUDdPRExWVy4u

# St Edmund's Parish Synod 2021 Spiritual Discernment conversations Outline process

Time	Session	Process and detailed timing	Roles	Materials
19.00- 19.25 (25 mins)	Registration - Pre arrival  Facilitator briefing plus Room set up	<ul> <li>Parishioners receive confirmation of their place         <ul> <li>Asked to arrive 5 mins early for prompt start</li> <li>Asked to reflect on questions before they arrive</li> <li>Request bring paper and pen</li> </ul> </li> <li>Prior to start, lead facilitator works out no of conversation groups for event, 6-8 per group, stickers ready to use as people arrive</li> <li>Facilitator briefing</li> <li>Run through of process</li> <li>Guidance on role of facilitator – do's and don'ts</li> <li>Quick chat about Handling difficulties</li> <li>Room set up</li> <li>Jugs of water and glasses</li> <li>5 groups of 8 chairs arranged in mini crescents facing front</li> <li>Couple of tables at front for laptop?</li> <li>Screen for projection?</li> </ul>	Lead 1 facilitator briefing lead 2- room set up etc	Handout of process outline and visuals for all facilitators paper and pens available
19.25	Parishioners arrive	<ul> <li>Room set up by 19.20</li> <li>Visuals ready on laptop         <ul> <li>Prayers</li> <li>Questions</li> <li>our time together</li> <li>sharing circles process</li> </ul> </li> <li>Facilitators greet and welcome people as they arrive</li> <li>Colour dot stickers given out as people arrive (prior to start, lead facilitator works out groups)</li> <li>Attendees each receive colour sticker</li> <li>Asked to take a seat</li> </ul>		stickers for group allocation?

Time	Session	Process and detailed timing	Roles	Materials
<b>19.30</b> (15 mins)	Start	<ol> <li>Lead facilitator welcomes everyone and thanks for attending, explains who is in the room</li> <li>Prayer for successful time together or</li> </ol>	Lead facilitator  Priest/deacon	Laptop presentation
		synod prayer  Why are we here  Short explanation of the 2021 synod and our part in it  St Edmunds approach  Survey  Purpose of these conversations — synodal question and your dream questions  Borrow Fr John's family analogy to explain outward looking  Explanation of the 'sharing circles' process — group facilitators can go through this again once people in groups if further explanation needed  Ask people to move to their groups, turn their chairs inwards to create a small circle and be ready to start the conversation	Lead facilitators	<ul> <li>Synod prayer</li> <li>Discernmen t prayer</li> <li>'Our time together' guidelines</li> <li>Questions for refection</li> <li>Sharing circle process</li> </ul>
19.45 – 20.30 (45 mins max time if 8 in group 8 x 5 plus 5)	Sharing circles	Circle facilitator <b>v quickly</b> introduces him/herself and invites all in group to do same – name, how long a parishioner, regular mass?  Circle facilitator then reminds group of the questions they have been asked to consider and reflect on  Asks the group to take 2 or 3 minutes to quietly collect their thoughts after which each of them will be invited to speak for up to 5 minutes  Ensure that each person speaking is allowed to talk without interruption for up to 5 mins. If they speak for less than 5 mins, ask the group if they have questions	circle facilitator	pad and pen for note taking handout of synod and dream questions
		Ensure questions are <b>discovery questions</b> and not people putting forward a different view <b>Each person's 5 minutes is their 5 minutes</b> – the time to put your views to the group is in your 5 minutes, not during questioning. Circle facilitators add questions as necessary until it is the next person's time to speak.		

Time	Session	Process and detailed timing	Roles	Materials
		After each person has spoken the group may need to take a brief (30 second pause), facilitators choice		
20.30		Facilitator asks each of the group to now take 10 minutes to note down their personal response to the questions that have been discussed in the group – these will be collated and reviewed by our parish delegates and contribute to developing our parish synod submission for the diocese  Encourage everyone to  oreflect on what they said when they spoke together with owhat they have heard this evening How would they now like to respond to the questions		
		nb notes, bullet points are fine, no need to have perfect format  Facilitator collects responses		
20.40 (10 mins)	Our circle's principle themes – big messages	<ul> <li>Circle facilitator now encourages group to see if it can come up with three words that convey important messages and themes from the group's conversation this evening</li> <li>Reassure the group that everything that has been said will be included in all the feedback—this final session isn't about reducing what has been said previously, it is about trying to discern where unity and strength of feeling have been most present</li> <li>Useful questions         <ul> <li>Is there a common thread in what was shared earlier?</li> <li>What were we especially touched by or affected by in what was said earlier?</li> <li>Where were we all nodding?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Outcomes noted by facilitator</li> </ul>	circle facilitator	
<b>20.50</b> (10 mins)	Wrap up and close	Bring everyone back to face the front  Lead facilitator thanks everyone for their very fulsome involvement in the circles, shows appreciation of peoples time so late in their evening  Asks if any circles wish to or are prepared to share their three words?	Lead facilitator	

Time	Session	Process and detailed timing	Roles	Materials
		Brief explanation of what happens next – explain that a number of these events happening, lots of work to be done analysing survey results and the notes of these conversations to build our parish synod response		
		Let people know that if they feel they haven't had the opportunity to say everything they wanted to or have other contributions to make they can send these in to the parish synod team or directly to the diocese		
		Ask priest/deacon to say a prayer of thanks to close the session	Priest/Deacon	
21.00	CLOSE			



#### Synod prayer

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of you,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever.
Amen.

### **Prayer for Communal Discernment**

Good and loving God, our source of love and light Thank you for bringing us together today
in a spirit of generosity.

May we honour one another
by keeping an open mind.
May we voice our truth
and listen with an open heart.
May we discern your will
to unite in fruitful outcome.
We ask for your wisdom and grace,
to contribute for the betterment of others and The Church.
With gratitude, we offer this prayer in your name.

#### Our time together today

✓	X
We ask you to be open, ready to listen and share	We ask you not to have a goal in mind or an agenda to bring to the group
Speaking to and Listening to each other (nb signs of active listening)	Not a debate
Listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit	Not simply about putting forward what you want to see happen
Equal voices	Dominant voices Unheard voices
A positive experience, a chance for us to	Just negative and critical – about positive
respond to the invitation to join the Synodal process	change for the good of The Church

#### The fundamental synod question

A synodal church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together'. How is this 'journeying together' happening today in our local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?

#### Our questions to you

What is my dream for the church as a whole and our parish that we may become more outward looking?

For this dream to be achieved what do we need to do more of, what do we need to stop doing and what do we need to do differently?

What particular issues does the Church need to pay more attention to and how might it engage others to help it do this?

Please reflect and be prepared to share your thoughts within a small group of fellow parishioners

#### **Sharing Circles**

A few minutes personal reflection on the questions

Each person in the group speaks for up to five minutes to share their thoughts

Others in the group actively listen, probe and question to understand as much as possible of others perspective

Everyone takes a turn

## Group conversation to discover points of harmony and unity



## Circle facilitators role today

✓	Х
Focus on the process – ensure contribution from	Join in as a participant
all in the group but do not join in with your own	
content	
Manage time – don't be afraid to intervene if	Disagree or question the sense of any
individuals talking for too long	contributions
Encourage contribution from all	Steer or lead the conversation
Ask follow up questions which help participants	Avoid questions which might in any way feel
explain their thoughts more fully (discovery	to people in your group as if you are
questions)	interrogating or taking issue with their views
eg	eg why do you say that?
Could you tell us more about that?	I don't understand, say that again?
That's interesting; could you explain more about	
that?	
Carefully remind anyone who is dominating the	Agree to deal with anything that comes up
conversation of our time constraints and the need	(unless it happens to be something you are
to allow others to contribute	responsible for)
If conversation goes off at a tangent onto matters	
not for this forum ask whoever is speaking to park	
this for now and let them know where they can	
take it (if you know)	
Where necessary, suggest participants speak with	
the priest or Deacon during the event (eg personal	
or sensitive issues)	