



## **Parish Listening Session Synod Summary Report**

**St Gregory The Great, Cheltenham**

**10 February 2022**

This form is to be completed by the Parish Delegates, drawing on all the group listening sessions and activities that have taken place in the parish. It can be emailed to [Synod@cliftondiocese.com](mailto:Synod@cliftondiocese.com) or completed on-line at [www.cliftondiocese.com/synod](http://www.cliftondiocese.com/synod).

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### Name of Parish and Deanery

St Gregory the Great, Cheltenham

### Name of Parish Delegate filling out this form

Alan Crickmore

### Contact Details of Parish Delegate 1 Telephone number

07884 430699

### email address

[alan.crickmore2017@gmail.com](mailto:alan.crickmore2017@gmail.com)

### Additional Parish Delegates – Name and Email Address

John Stratford	<a href="mailto:johnstratford10@hotmail.com">johnstratford10@hotmail.com</a>
John Andrews	<a href="mailto:john.andrews@cliftondiocese.com">john.andrews@cliftondiocese.com</a>
Jane Andrews	<a href="mailto:jane@stcassians.co.uk">jane@stcassians.co.uk</a>
Elizabeth Maduka	<a href="mailto:elizabeth.maduka@gmail.com">elizabeth.maduka@gmail.com</a>
Ewa Makas	<a href="mailto:makasewa@yahoo.com">makasewa@yahoo.com</a>
Sebastian Olejnik	<a href="mailto:oleseba@googlemail.com">oleseba@googlemail.com</a>
Gosia Verbuyst	<a href="mailto:gosia.verbuyst@gmail.com">gosia.verbuyst@gmail.com</a>

**Please provide a brief summary of your parish's listening session for the Foundational**

**Question:**

A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together". How is this "journeying together" happening today in your parish? How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in "Journeying together"? Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Our Parish is a vibrant one, where Mass is celebrated virtually every day and several times on Sunday. Each Mass has a different character and is attended by a substantial congregation, even on weekdays.

Although a relatively small proportion of the parish elected to take part in the listening process, those who did shared their sincere views and demonstrated their care and concern for the church and the world at large. There were more than 20 meetings in all and an online facility, engaging a good cross section of the parish. There was no sense that the silent majority were simply apathetic, although some comments suggested that the process was thought to be too unwieldy to be effective. There was acknowledgement that, at Parish level, good might come from it. There was a feeling that the silent majority were simply content with their personal experience and had no radical views to share. They are happy to be Catholics in the Catholic Church in its various manifestations. Thus, the Holy Spirit understands the need for a journey which is sympathetic to all voices and feelings and encourages us all to follow that path.

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**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?

We need to be careful not to cause a split in the church because of Western liberal views at odds with other conservative views. Don't want to see a schism. Many people were comfortable with the church being conservative (with a small c) and there was a strong feeling that the fundamental tenets of the faith and its expression should be preserved. There was some criticism of a perceived lack of interest in ecumenical contact but, apart from some comparison between the Mass and evangelical services, and reference to past involvements, there were few detailed suggestions as to how this could be addressed or why. There was a view that we need to connect more with other Christian denominations and some suggestion, without example, that there could be a sharing of facilities between our church and others, but underpinning that was a clear view that we should not compromise our Catholic faith and its expression by accepting teachings and practices that do not correspond with our own.

There were comments that the Bishop fails to respond to direct approaches or even acknowledge them, and so there was perception that there is little interest in listening in the Diocese. There was some comment about the need to seek out the poor and those on the margins of our town's society and help them. Perhaps there should be an outreach team to support people unable to attend Mass.

**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?

There were many affirmative comments about the family and the need for it to be a traditional unit. However, some said that the Church needs to be more inclusive of people in non-traditional relationships. There was strong expression by numerous contributors that there should be a route back into full communion for divorced and/or re-married couples, although others took a more traditional approach. It was said that climate and ecological emergencies are not taking enough of the church's time and are not adequately addressed. On the other hand, it was said that the Church should not become engaged in politics. It was said that Catholics are afraid to admit to being Catholics and we need the Church to empower us. We have lost the courage of our convictions.

There were comments about the Church's attitude to homosexuality and concerns that gay people felt excluded. Whilst a number of contributors had a liberal view others felt strongly that traditional Catholic teaching about the family unit should be upheld and that it was ok to love the person but oppose the sin. Others felt that the Church must retain its fundamental family structure. However, there was a strong thread of feeling that the Church must do more to support couples before marriage, during marriage and particularly when marriages are unhappy or floundering, and thus support the dignity of marriage. There was a mixed view on annulments, some saying they are too easy to obtain, while others thought they are too hard to obtain. There were some who felt that the Church's teaching on contraception should not change and we should uphold *Humanae Vitae*. However, there was a strong view amongst many Catholic parents that contraception should be a matter of conscience for them and that the Church should not express a view. When mentioned, abortion was seen as being fundamentally wrong, although one contributor supported the "morning after" pill in cases of rape.

### **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?

There were a number of adverse comments about the limited formal role of women and a few comments that there should be no bar to women deacons or priests. However, the majority were not in favour of women priests. There was suggestion that nuns are insufficiently used as a resource because they provide a strong female role model. A number of people said that the shortage of priests must be addressed and suggested married priests. Some wondered whether celibate priests were in a strong position to advise married couples and whether they were sufficiently connected to the mood of the youth in church. However, a roughly equal number remain supportive of the status quo. It was also commented that the Oratories appear to have no difficulty in finding priestly vocations and the reasons for the discrepancy between the Oratories' success and the Diocese's apparent lack of vocations needs to be investigated. There was expressed concern that priests are expected to be 'jacks of all trades' and thus have less or little time for their pastoral duties. There

should be more training on lay issues for priests. There were comments that more people should volunteer, but few concrete proposals for what they should be volunteering to do, although food banks and soup kitchens were mentioned as a way of community involvement. However, it was said that our Parish Priest is very enabling. There was some suggestion that we could embrace social media and expand the news bulletin. There was a perceived lack of opportunity for younger people to socialise and a lack of after-Mass mingling, although the pandemic was noted as a possible cause. Several contributors suggested that there should be continual catechismal education beyond preparation for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. There was some concern that Catholic schools are not sufficiently Catholic and concern about sex education including areas which are at odds with the teachings of the Church and the views of many Catholic parents. There was a concern that the Diocese doesn't provide enough support for schools. The refugees involved in the Synod have clearly expressed their appreciation of the help given by the Catholic community, particularly the use of St. Thomas More for English Classes. It is playing a big part in the way they are rebuilding their lives here in Cheltenham. There was some comment that the Church should adapt to a changing society, but there remained a feeling that adaptation should be based on traditional Church values, although the need to recognise the fact of divorce and allow full communion cropped up again and again. The need for a dedicated Youth Worker in the Parish was mentioned as a way to engage young people and keep them in the Church. It was generally recognised that now post pandemic, the laity need to step up and do more to promote the well-being of the Parish, by using the multifactorial skills that exist within all parishes. Several people mentioned a lack of Bible study groups and prayer meetings.

#### **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 encourages engagement through various groups and committees e.g., the Finance Committee, Care For Our Common Home, Parochial Council (which many people thought should be revived), Legion of Mary, SVP, John Henry Newman Society and Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees etc. However, there is no mechanism at present for whole church meetings. The gist of comments was that this Synodal process was a good thing, as long as the people are listened to, and that it should form the basis of more frequent whole parish consultation exercises. There was a strong view that the laity should be supportive of the Parish Priest but should not usurp his role.

**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?

There was reference to the Second Vatican Council and the cherishing of Latin and traditional organ music as part of our celebration of Faith (Arts 36,116 and 121) which is reflected in the 11:15am Sunday Mass. There were a number of positive comments about the use of music, Gregorian chant and sung Latin (Missa de Angelis) in the parish. There was positive comment about the number and style of masses in the parish and the variety of groups, including ethnic minorities, catered for. One comment of particular note was that "one size does not fit all". The principal negative comment was about the Bishop's refusal to allow the Extraordinary Form of Latin Mass which used to be celebrated as an additional Mass at St Gregory's and which is a refusal not reflected in any other Diocese. Some parishioners now worship outside the Diocese as a consequence. There was a comment that the church should move towards celebration of services by young people rather than ordained priests, and there was a comment comparing the Mass with Evangelical worship, suggesting the Mass was too traditional. There were a few comments suggesting that the Anglican Communion made this and the inclusion of non-Catholics possible in a way that that our Church doesn't. Conversely, others commented that the Eucharist is at the heart of the Mass and this should not be watered down. There were a number of supporters of Eucharistic services, and most who mentioned it said that they could be led by a man or a woman. The Church should actively promote traditional devotions such as the Rosary, Marian possessions, the Scapular. There should be more Eucharistic Adoration. There should be more Benediction. We need more reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, including when it is being taken to the sick. Stations of the Cross should be led by clergy and follow the traditional wordings. There was good support for a wider role for Deacons e.g., Anointing the Sick. There was a strong view that there should be more emphasis on transubstantiation and the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, and that there should be more teaching on this.