

# **SYNOD 2021-23 -** **Sacred Heart Catholic Church - Report**

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Brief reflection on Lectio Divina .....	3
<b>THEME 1 - Communion .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Q1 - At present, what does communion look like at Sacred Heart? .....	4
Q2 - How do you think we can grow in communion at Sacred Heart?.....	5
<b>THEME 2 - Participation - .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Q1 - At present, what does participation look like at Sacred Heart? .....	7
Q2 - How do you think we can grow in participation at Sacred Heart?.....	8
<b>THEME 3 - Mission .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Q1 - At present, what does mission look like at Sacred Heart? .....	10
Q2 - How do you think we can grow in mission at Sacred Heart?.....	10
Conclusion .....	12

## Introduction

### Background to Sacred Heart Parish

Sacred Heart, Wimbledon, is one of the largest Catholic parishes in England. Sacred Heart church is a beautiful neo-gothic building and was founded in 1887. The Jesuits ran the parish for 130 years until 2014 when the diocesan clergy took over.

The church was designed to foster a catholic community in an area without a dense catholic population. Nowadays, with a community of approximately 2000 regular church attenders, it maintains close links with several schools in the locality including the Ursuline High School, Wimbledon College, Donhead Preparatory School, and Sacred Heart Primary School.

With two large parish halls and outdoor spaces, community activities have traditionally flourished. Over 60 groups operate in the parish. The community is served by 3 priests, 3 deacons, a dedicated pastoral team, a youth minister, support staff and many volunteers.

### Introduction to delegates & process of the listening events

In October 2021, Daniel Gulliford and Rachel Purvis were appointed as synod delegates for Sacred Heart parish. As Synod delegates, we held many 'listening events' in the parish which commenced in early November 2021. We wanted to be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. We aimed to invite as many parishioners as possible to contribute to the process and share their voices. We did this by offering a range of different listening activities (see below), many of which were guided by prayer.

1. An initial meeting was held with 20 volunteers where we selected a reading from John's Gospel - Chapter 4, verses 34-38. We agreed to focus our listening activities on the 3 themes of Communion, Participation and Mission.
2. A wider parish meeting was convened in early November with over 55 people attending. This meeting initiated with a time of Lectio Divina - using the selected Gospel reading from John - to allow the Holy Spirit to guide the session & the discussions that followed on each of the 3 themes.
3. This event was followed by smaller listening activities which included meetings with the clergy, a local community of nuns, members of the pastoral team, the RCIA group, & the Youth.
4. On Sunday 19th December 2021, we launched three different postcards for the parishioners to complete. These were based on the 3 themes and there were 2 questions per postcard/ theme. These were made available online too. The return date for the postcards was the 9th January 2022.
5. Many parishioners also submitted thoughts/ideas/suggestions to us via email or post throughout the entire listening phase (as individuals or in small groups).
6. The children of Sacred Heart Primary school prepared beautiful paintings and a poem for the large meeting (see 2), which was advertised on Twitter, & we are exploring how we can share these with the parish.
7. Some information about the Synod was also shared on the Parish Facebook page.

**We estimate around 150 people participated in this listening process. We are grateful to everyone who supported us and attended these events.**

## **Brief reflection on Lectio Divina**

**John 4:34-38 -**

*A summary (Spirit-inspired) Words from the Lectio Divina session held on Sat 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021:  
(Collected from post-it notes)*

What is the 'WAGE' I receive? What are these fruits? My faith and the relationship with the Lord is my wage.

'Sent' there is no mission, no reaping without a relationship with the one who sent me and called me to join the other reapers, to enter the labour of others.

The Lord invites me to be attentive, to open my eyes; the first mission is with myself, where another sowed, I can bring to others only what Another put and sowed in me.

Doing the will of God is my food.

To hear the voice of God that is not here!

Pray to the Lord of Harvest. I sent you to reap. You have entered into their labour, Reach out, be BOLD.

Mission there is an urgent mission in today's world/society. We can't wait for a 'harvest' the Mission is 'now'.

Every baptized Christian is called to fulfil their own call to discipleship. The whole church is called to discipleship.

'Sower and reaper' may rejoice together' 'You reap for what you did not labour' 'Others have laboured and you have entered into their labour'.

To do the Will of my Father-to do His work.

We need to lift up our eyes and help others to do likewise. We all need to gather fruit for eternal life so we need to do this now.

My food is to do the will of Him who sent me. It's saying to me the harvest is rich get on and sow.

'Lift up your eyes' the fields are white for the harvest I think it is saying the work of the mission (evangelization) is urgent, get started; the labouring has been done for you first, then we will think about it. There is a sense of urgency about the reading.

## **THEME 1 - Communion**

*Abbreviations - YP = Young people-*

### **Q1 - At present, what does communion look like at Sacred Heart?**

One Parishioner described 'community' as a sign of Communion.

#### **a) Positive feedback**

- Sunday Mass is well-attended. Two daily Masses, daily Confession and regular exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, other sacramental services (e.g. Baptisms, etc..) so lots on offer.
- Many parish groups so plenty of *opportunity* to grow in communion and build community. The Friendship Group has been key for this.
- The church collaborates with local religious communities (of which there are several). These communities help to build communion in the parish community - they live for the charism of communion, i.e. to 'gather together' as one body. For example, the Sisters of Christ community have invited neighbours/the local community into their home for social events incl. street parties & celebrations on special occasions.
- Religious communities have experience in negotiating difference and negotiating space to *live with* others.
- A range of liturgical spiritualities/movements on offer -> applicable/appealing to many.
- Children's Liturgy very good.
- A beautiful church/space. We are blessed with material gifts /wealth.
- The church brings 'peace of mind'. It is a quiet and reflective space which 'offers respite from a frantic/frenetic world'.
- Many community activities (*inc.* outreach) help strengthen parish community/togetherness.

#### **b) Areas/suggestions for improvement:**

- Parishioners would like more support (formation) and *encouragement* on how to bring the faith into their *every-day* lives.
- There are people on the outside of the church ('periphery') who cannot receive The Lord in Holy Communion and may feel they don't belong.
- The chatter after mass in the church disrupts the silence for those wanting to pray.
- Some view Sacred Heart Church as a kind-of "*anonymous-entity*" - until (or *unless!*) you join a group, which might help readjust your perspective.
- There is a concern that if the church continues its traditional way of working, it won't be able to call back the lost (i.e. *lapsed Catholics/Christians or the uninterested in particular*).
- There is spiritual laziness amongst the laity who are overly reliant on others (i.e. priests, bishops, deacons) to lead & initiate new events/activities.
- "Where are the women?" - women have a subordinate role in all offices of the church. The church is 'patriarchal.' There has even been a suppression & oppression of women too. Improvement wanted for the role of women in the church.

## Q2 - How do you think we can grow in communion at Sacred Heart?

### Where does it begin?

- *Remember* - Our Faith is *so much more* than just going to Mass every Sunday.
- It begins with conversion - for every individual.
  - But what does conversion mean?--> ultimately, an encounter with Christ - coupled with catechesis.
- Our faith boils down to a personal relationship with Jesus. This should precede/ permeate everything. From that solid foundation, everything can then follow (*incl.* church teaching).
- Our foundation/strength should be in Christ-And *not* in ideas born out of activism.
- The church must provide a continual offering of formation/catechetical programmes. Parishes must deploy their resources to this effect.
- Understand what people regard as the most important part of their Catholic Faith - this will help us learn how to *grow* in Communion.
- Faith/church is not just about the physical buildings (beautiful as they are). Faith goes much deeper than that.
- Remember that we can do nothing *without* the Holy Spirit who guides us.

### Scripture & Small groups

- Set-up 'religious-listening' sessions which focus on the Word of God.
- Gather in small groups to study & reflect on the Word / be empowered by it.
- Allow *everything* to flow from the Word.
- Small groups are the pinnacle structures by (through) which conversion comes. They provide the best, appropriate settings for ongoing formation/catechesis.
- As groups meet and are nourished by the Word, this will build communion.

### Community/relationship building

- To see a Church where **LOVE** abounds: True and Authentic love! Look at the Beatitudes as a starting place.
- The parish could offer support to families who are home schooling.
- **Remember and Know** that God **loves** you, me and *Everyone*.
- Parish retreats-aimed at specific groups/individuals, e.g. widows/ young mothers, etc.
- Strive For "active inclusiveness" - starting with 'inclusive-language'.
- The Catholic church is "My Family" - 'We are a community of "Like-Minded" People' - the church provides a sense of belonging.
- Work (*more*) in collaboration with religious communities around us.
- Provide more support to housebound -> i.e. the 'true powerhouses' of Prayer in the parish.
- Live 'In-union' with each other - despite our differences. The early Christians/Church **knew** each other and supported each other. They shared *everything* In-common. There *were* differences but the Holy Spirit worked through them. We, today, should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and care for each other. We should notice, appreciate and love Each individual person. We should remember that **every** individual plays a part in building/supporting community. So let us, as different members of Christ's Body, get to know each other more - that the Body of Christ may be united with Christ at its Head. **Only then** will we be more equipped & ready to move as one unit into the world!!
- Meet with families on an individual basis-to support/encourage them/their participation.
- Can we introduce ourselves to someone new at the Sign-of-Peace at Mass?
- Look at the charismatic & Pentecostal churches growing in Africa (e.g. Ghana) and think about what's causing this.
- Maintain a strong, supportive link with the local schools.

### Formation/catechesis

- Catechesismuststart with basic, fundamental questions, e.g.what is prayer?&how do I pray?
- Catechesis needed **before** evangelisation.
- Adult catechesis/formation= Essential.
- An example of a good formation course is the Sycamore Programme -(Fr Stephen Wang).
- Offer programmes for youth which look at the movement/gifts /charisms of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Life in the Spirit) seminars. Also provide YP with Easy-access to Theology of the Body.
- Create a ‘School of Community’ *throughcatechesis*.
- Lookat papal encyclicals/exhortationswhich are relevant to the synod themes, e.g. Fratelli Tutti, Evangelii nuntiandi -these are pointers/guides toevangelisation.
- Look at Pope Francis’ writings for teaching/direction too.
- Look at/Explore Catholic social teaching -which will enable us to be more ‘socially responsible’. It will provide us with a ‘moral framework ‘to live our lives.

### Sacraments + the liturgy & prayer

- Let us share with others the **richness** of the Sacraments and Saints (*Esp.* The Eucharist)
- Make parishioners more aware of the Synod. Have Synod prayer read aloud at every Mass.
- Priests should speak up for purity and the protection of the family.
- **Pray** for our Priests, evangelists & missionaries - *to fulfil God’s Will/His desires*.
- The Eucharist is fundamental to our Faith-to recognising the true presence of Christ among His people and to understand what Mass isreally about.
- Set-up the 1st Saturday and 1st Friday Devotions. ‘The Salvation of souls should be the primary focus of the Church’.
- **More** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. More incense, Gregorian chants??
- Have an organised celebration of our parish feast - I.e. the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
- The homily should resonate with us. It should have a special impact &relevance on/to our lives! Homilies should be more connected/relatable to our everyday lives. We should have homilies which discuss the salvation of the soul and socialising in the modern world.And, finally, sermonsshould build on the homily from theprevious week.*For many people*, the Sunday homily is the only (spiritual-) teaching/input they receive all week- so it’s quite important.
- Introduction of the altar railswhen receiving communion. The Eucharist being our Lord-means surelywe should kneel when receiving him(if we are well and able). It is the ‘greatest honour’. Reclaim back our Catholic identity in tradition and reverence.
- The time slots for Confessionsshould be changed to allow the priests *moretime* to hear confessions. 30 minutes just before Mass is too short and does not allow priests sufficient time which is needed to prepare properly for Mass. Confession *during* Mass??
- **RE-Covid-19:**
  - We (&Priests) shouldpray for the victims of *not just* coronavirusitself but the victims of covid-19 restrictions, e.g. lockdowns. For example, look at all the related suicides brought about by restrictions.
  - And **do not** introduce vaccine mandates/passports for parishioners in Catholic churches in the UK!Do not follow the suit of other (even Catholic/Orthodox) nationsincluding Canada, Australia and Austria.

### Wider church

- Consider how the laity can *better support* the Church! I.e.

- how do they view the Priests/Religious?
  - do they see the crisis of vocations which exists in the Church today?
  - Are these vocations relevant to them?
  - Do they see families as cradles for vocations?
- Improve (increased?) connection between the laity & clergy?
  - More prominent Leadership wanted - More direction/information wanted straight from pulpit. -leaders should take inspiration from Pope Francis' leadership.
  - The woman's role - in all offices of the church - needs to be changed/improved. Women could have a greater say in the church affairs - more influence & power.
  - We should be a little cautious about holding regular Synods (and increasing the influence of the laity) in the church (-like the Anglican church). We must remember that Jesus appointed a 'Head' of the church *in-the-beginning* - i.e. Peter! (the Pope /Hierarchy).
  - The Synod should not be used as a means to introduce anything heretical or against the faith.

## THEME 2 - Participation -

*Abbreviations - YP = Young people*

### Q1 - At present, what does participation look like at Sacred Heart?

#### a) Positive feedback

- Church doors usually open for personal prayer - anyone welcome to pray/sit/reflect.
- Many young families attend Mass each Sunday.
- Youth ministry is very active and engaged with parish life. The parish youth minister is greatly appreciated - a '*real asset*' to the parish.
- Lots of compliments/mentions of the Memory Lane Group - open to carers as well as people with Dementia - as well as the RCIA course.
- Mission/Outreach has been *a means of*-participation - E.g. the local religious communities have worked together with the Salvation Army & the local Ursuline High School to support the homeless.

#### b) Areas/suggestions for improvement:

##### Parish Groups

- Lots of activity/Groups (*including* outreach programmes). This looks good *on-paper* but only a small number of people participate despite it being a **large parish**.
- And of those who do get involved, only a small proportion take on leadership roles within parish groups -> 'harvest is rich but the labourers few.'
- Too many groups -so perhaps too much choice? This can be off-putting.
- Those who are housebound cannot participate in many (*most*) groups.
- We could improve our efforts in inviting/encouraging new people to volunteer & partake.
- Some leaders are not able to handover/relinquish their roles/responsibilities in the parish due to the lack of new people stepping forward/volunteering.
- Volunteers are regarded as 'cliquey,' closed and unwelcoming (to newcomers).

### Other areas/observations

- Some people feel lonely and lack in self-confidence; they feel too shy to step forward and participate in things.
- Some groups, particularly the disabled parishioners, LGBTQ+ community, people who speak other languages &/or people from different cultures, young adults, & people with faltering faith, could be made to feel more welcome and included.
- Sacred Heart seen as quite 'robust & machine like' in its operation/infrastructure. Newcomers, particularly those from smaller (more *intimate*) parishes, can find it difficult to adjust/make the transition into the church.
- There is a genuine desire among many parishioners to recognise & support those 'on the periphery' - to recognise their needs and consider how we can support them + build a more inclusive community.
- Good mixture of liturgical styles, Mass times & choirs - e.g., the Latin, classical, & contemporary music choirs. This is appealing to a wide range of people/ages.
- Young families keen on the children's liturgy but first Holy Communion & confirmation programmes could do more to engage with wider parish life.

## Q2 - How do you think we can grow in participation at Sacred Heart?

### Admin/management

- Greater publicity of activities. Encourage people to look at newsletter.
- Continue live-online streaming of Mass - to support housebound.
- Targeted activities/opportunities for different age ranges/groups.
- More representation from different groups - *incl.* different ethnicities & age groups.
- A more 'bottom up' approach & lines of communication when evaluating the needs of the parish and decision making
- Maintain up-to-date databases - have things rightly organised/in place.

### Community/relationship building

- People expressed their desire to be *involved* more in the church/parish life (*during* synod listening sessions) which is very encouraging.
- Find ways of supporting /engaging all people rather than focusing on reasons for exclusion.
- Invite people through personal-Invitation. This was a **recurring** theme in our listening activities. Personal invitation is vastly underestimated in terms of the impact it has. The importance of recognising the **individual first**, and the gifts/talents that they bring.
- Remember that we all belong to the one Body of Christ - but also remember that people can still feel alone (or isolated) even (or *especially*) in the midst of a v large/intimidating community.
- Build closer links with other churches - join them in shared prayer sessions/intercession for the world.
- More personal contact/dialogue needed with those who are lonely or lacking in confidence. Be intentional - simply ask people how they are doing.
- Take time to get to know the fellow parishioners. Dedicate a specific time & place for socialising & building relationship, e.g. coffee mornings, 'walkn talks,' picnics, etc...

### Ministry, liturgy + prayer

- More home visits- to sick, housebound & those who've lost the faith. Responsibility here not only for Clergy but for the parishioners too.
- Listen purposefully to the poor both within *and* outside of the Church.
- Reflect on Luisa Piccarreta's ' 24Hours of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ' meditation together as a parish.
- Identify support needed (vacancies) within the different ministries e.g. EMs, Rosary group, post-communion reflection, etc., and invite/encourage people to join.
- More encouragement from the pulpit. Priests have influence to encourage the large body of frequent Mass-goers to volunteer when/if need be - bear this in mind.
- Greater connection wanted between the clergy and lay people.
- Priests should be mindful of migrants and newcomers.
- A service for those who are deaf/ hard of hearing?
- Resume the weekly Extraordinary Mass in Latin? Right now it feels like people who are more orthodox and traditionally minded are being left behind.

### Parish groups, activities & Outreach

- Groups should be welcoming & inclusive, organised & well-structured.
- Don't pressurise people into applying for volunteering opportunities just to 'fill a gap' but *rather* allow people the freedom to choose which group (/activity) they'd like to join.
- Think about how we can keep the key parish groups running in a way that is sustainable (long term), e.g. groups could find ways of collaborating with each other &/or with groups/networks outside of the parish community.
- **Get to Know** the local community - identify its current needs & set up neighborhood groups (for parishioners *and* non-parishioners!)
- A new group could be set-up to evaluate how we can better support the young families of the parish.
- As mission can be a means of participation, we should reassess how we facilitate outreach programmes at present (& how we go about inviting people to volunteer).
- Find ways of sharing the life/wealth of the parish with nearby parishes who are less fortunate/well-off.
- Set-up programmes/events that have a 'social and charitable meaning' - e.g. stewards volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Support to Youth & families:

- Provide YP with a 'voice' and a 'presence.' Give them opportunities to participate in church events & explore their faith e.g. WYD?
- Appoint a youth representative on the parish pastoral council?
- Continue to involve and engage (*maintain communication with*) YP *after* they've received the Sacrament of Confirmation (i.e. age 13 & above)
- The Church can be a conduit for "*intergenerational conversation.*" - "build bridges" between the old & young.
- Encourage YP to share their gifts & support outreach (*incl. befriending & IT clinics*).
- Remind YP of their key role/value in building & shaping community.
- Invite families to events that are fun/exciting. E.g. concerts, theatre, quiz-nights, etc.

### Final thoughts/suggestions

- The synod listening sessions themselves have been great signs of participation. We should consider how the Synod itself can ignite greater participation and inclusivity in our community.

As we begin to grow in the areas of communion & participation, this should naturally lead / call us to Mission...

### **THEME 3 - Mission**

**Abbreviations** – YP = Young people-

#### **Q1 - At present, what does mission look like at Sacred Heart?**

##### **a) Positive feedback**

- There are a wide variety of initiatives undertaken in the parish and some of these offer outreach to people in need (although many of these activities were suspended or affected by the pandemic).
- We have many masses and celebrations of the sacraments.

##### **b) Areas/suggestions for improvement:**

- It was expressed that we do not as a parish reach out to the wider community as missionary disciples.
- There was a feeling that many parishioners were not evangelized themselves and without this it was harder to effectively reach out to those around us with the Good News.
- For many parishioners the answer to the question of “when was the last time you shared with someone about Jesus and what He means in your life?” was “I can’t recall ever doing that.”
- “If we were an evangelising parish, we wouldn’t have shrunk over the past ten or fifteen years from 5000 parishioners to just around 2000: we would have grown to seven or ten thousand!”

#### **Q2 - How do you think we can grow in mission at Sacred Heart?**

##### **General observations**

- We can grow in mission by being open, welcoming and non-judgmental, respecting equality and diversity.
- There is a need to recognize that anyone can be on the periphery of our community. There should be no room for discrimination of any kind. We are all equal in the eyes of God.
- Some people may want to attend quietly, and we should be welcoming of this.
- We recognize that the demographic that surrounds our church is a diverse community with extremes of wealth and poverty. Someone gave the provocation of asking how we can: “be poorer and be closer”.
- We can help others understand the benefits of being part of a community.
- It was felt there was a need to aid understanding among our parish community of the word ‘Evangelization’.
- There is a need to include a more diverse representation of people in decision making, taking a less top-down approach.
- Improvements in marketing were identified as necessary, including regular updates to the website and social media and use of inclusive images that fully represent the parish community we have.
- It was observed that Catholicism needed to be rebranded and modernized. When asked about why there are so few priests, scandals in the church were identified as damaging, as well as focus in the media on careers and wealth.

- One respondent said: “Celebrate! Be fun. More joy and rejoicing. More music.”

#### Faith formation and leadership

- Faith formation was seen as playing an important role, with RCIA, adult catechesis, such as Alpha or Sycamore, or Life in the Spirit named specifically.
- Renewed activity in these areas is already taking place, with a Sycamore course planned for Lent.
- Homilies that are relevant to life now were identified as being a way to help the parish grow in mission.
- It was expressed that the parish should employ more paid staff and strengthen leadership.
- The enormous work that our priests, deacons, pastoral team, catechists, youth minister and support staff do was recognized, and we can continue to build on our existing relationships.
- There was an acknowledgement that we have been served by priests from different countries, and perhaps there should be an opportunity to celebrate this.

#### The church building

- We should consider external displays that inspire passers-by.
- There is the opportunity to involve local artisans and architects to help restore the building.

#### The role of parish groups and community outreach

- It is seen as important that we promote an active ministry and welcome all who come into contact with our church and community.
- The numerous groups and activities on offer need to be advertised differently, with information more accessible.
- It was suggested we should have befrienders in the parish.
- Intergenerational activities were identified as important to enable the sharing of expertise between those who have worked on parish activities for many years and young people who may bring skills like IT knowledge.
- Continuing to offer online masses/services/concerts for those who cannot attend in person.
- Greater care of the elderly was identified as a common theme.
- There is a need for us to facilitate an encounter with Christ. The Legion of Mary knocks on people’s doors for instance and this has encouraged families to open up more about what they need from the church.
- There was a desire expressed to engage more with other parishes and churches.
- In an effort to be more inclusive, it was suggested that we should actively reach out to different groups, inviting them to share in the liturgy.
- More community focused events that are open to the public, for example summer Fetes, international food fairs etc.
- Setting up a church café: “Where all are invited in the neighbourhood to share life and faith over a cuppa”
- Suggestions included printing up beer mats to advertise the church in local pubs, welcoming all to come and visit, whether to simply sit quietly or to share in the sacraments and services.
- Active outreach to lapsed members of the parish via personalized communications. This offers the potential to ask people on the periphery what they would like from the church.
- Introduce people to our faith in action, with the suggestion that this could be a particular motivation for young people.

## Conclusion

It was an honour to be delegates for the Synod and to be involved in listening to and sharing the voices of our parish.

The key things that stood out for both of us were:

- The parish is very large and having a friendly face at the door is key to making parishioners feel welcomed. Recognise the importance of personal invitation
- Small groups are key settings to share the gospel and experience conversion
- There should be no discrimination, we are all equal in the eyes of God
- More intergenerational spaces so our young and old can share and learn from one another.
- More visits to the sick, care homes and housebound by clergy & parishioners, particularly now as Covid 19 restrictions continue to lift
- Door to door knocking - to share/discuss the faith with all people and spread the Gospel.
- To get to know our local community more and to (think about how we) support all people 'on the periphery.'
- More joined up work with other faith groups

## Twitter -



Sacred Heart Wimbledon  
@SHWimbledon



Rachel and Daniel, our parish delegates, have prepared a page on our website where every parishioner can share their thoughts as part of the Synod process 🙌  
[ow.ly/Lg5I50HgFJr](https://ow.ly/Lg5I50HgFJr)

We invite you to take part - every voice matters!  
#synod21



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## Facebook -



Sacred Heart Wimbledon

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What one change would make the biggest difference to the parish?  
How can we do more to support families and young people?  
Who is on the periphery of our parish community?

Rachel and Daniel, our parish delegates, have prepared a page on our website where every parishioner can share their thoughts on these questions and more as part of the Synod process. 🙌  
<http://ow.ly/UBIX50HgFJs>

We invite you to take part - every voice matters (and particularly if you don't feel part of parish life right now) #synod21



140

People reached

53

Engagements

-

Distribution score

Boost post



3

1 Share

Like

Comment

Share



Comment as Sacred Heart Wimbledon

