

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Thursday 21st July 2016

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Acting Chair)

Appointed

- Joanne Brennan
- Chris Clissitt
- Paul Jackson (School)
- Martin Mayhew
- Stephen Walker (Finance)

Elected

- Mick Britton (Liturgy)
- Amanda Kelly (Support)
- Sheila Lund (Interaction)

Secretary: Chris Senior (Note Taker)

Apologies: Charlotte Burrell (Formation), Jeff McGillan (Mission)

1. **Opening Reading** was led by Fr. William

2. **The minutes of the PPC meeting on 21st April 2016**

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved as an accurate record.

3. **Matters Arising from the PPC April 2016 meeting (not itemised in the Agenda)**

3) Matters Arising from PPC February 2016 meeting....

6. a) Church Seating Layout

Amanda Kelly tabled a final church seating plan produced by Vince McGurk. The total numbers of seats is slightly less than in the previous layout, but did allow multiple access points via 'sight lines' and was regarded by all as a major improvement.

Copies of the plan would be provided for key volunteers (e.g. cleaners) and would also be pinned to the Office noticeboard for wider general reference.

3) Matters Arising from PPC February 2016 meeting....

11) Parish Endorsed Charitable Causes

Jeff McGillan's earlier circulated email confirmed the acceptance of Fr Madden's recommendation to select the parish of Ouahigouya Titao in Burkina Faso. The Parish Priest l'Abbé Etienne Nyampa was reportedly delighted at the news of St Mary's approach and future support. JM has already requested some more details of the parish to brief St Mary's parishioners and further assist in the fundraising.

Stephen Walker noted a relaunch to the wider parish of the African fundraising campaign would be helpful.

ACTION: Stephen Walker to submit copy for a bulletin notice to assist in re-launching the Africa Envelope scheme.

Update: Jeff McGillan later clarified the situation (re. the closure of the Justice and Peace account and incorporation of the fund into the parish account) and noted that this task was still outstanding.

ACTION: Stephen Walker and Jeff McGillan to complete financial arrangements for the J&P and Parish accounts.

9.) Advertising the 24th December 4:30pm Mass

Fr William clarified that the Children's 4:30 pm Mass would be advertised in the Bulletin with a short explanation about the rationale for the Mass

It was also confirmed that in 2016 there would be no Vigil Mass as Christmas Day occurred on a Sunday.

4. Matters Arising from the 8th May 2016 Parish AGM (not itemised in the Agenda)

Attendance:

It was observed that only a very small number of parishioners (19) remained after 10:00 Mass to attend the AGM. This was not regarded by some as atypical of attendance rates at other public meetings (e.g. in Schools). However it was thought the use of a 15 minute break after Mass and before the start of the AGM did unfortunately create a further disincentive.

It was suggested that an 'Open Forum' meeting rather than the formal AGM might be an alternative (presumably additional?) option that was likely to result in a higher attendance and greater engagement by parishioners who could be invited to raise their own issues or comments.

5. Approval of AGM Minutes (PPC v AGM)

In response to queries stated elsewhere it was confirmed that the PPC was the appropriate body to approve and discuss the minutes of the Parish AGM. This as noted in Section 8.1 of the '*Parish Constitution and Guidelines*'.

8.1 The PPC shall meet three times each year. There shall be a fourth meeting which shall be an AGM of the Parish in general at which the PPC shall present a report of its work during the previous year.

However it was noted that in recent years the PPC tended to meet four times (not three) p.a. in addition to the Parish AGM.

6. Letter of Valerie Walker to PPC

A number of key issues were raised in a formal letter sent by Valerie Walker for the consideration of the PPC. The letter was warmly welcomed, not least as it helped both the Council and the Parish Priest better understand the many views of all its parishioners.

The matters raised were discussed in some detail (although some are recorded elsewhere in these notes e.g. Item 5). The following summarises the main discussion points:

- The letter raised important concerns over an apparent lack of choice and the imposition of new practices in the Parish, specifically in the celebration of Mass.
- PPC members had some sympathy with the above views, especially in the difficulty experienced when adapting to some developments (including the more active forms of worship), but members also noted that the initiatives introduced by Fr William were directly encouraged by the recommendations of *Vatican II*, in particular that all parishioners should be engaged in a 'full, active and conscious participation' of the Mass.
- The importance of allowing choice was agreed to be important, but the PPC believed that more could and should be done to (repeatedly) explain to all attendees the reasons for the developments introduced at St Marys, and also to renew the invitation.
- It was thought that attempting to cater for some parishioners by providing special forms of worship (specifically a weekly 'quiet' Mass as suggested) could cause problems with other groups of parishioners who held a contrary view and welcomed music. It was however suggested that a monthly or occasional 'quiet' Mass could be usefully considered.

ACTION: Fr William to consider a monthly or occasional 'quiet' Mass.

- It was acknowledged that church attendances had declined in recent years, and that an unknown number of St Mary's parishioners now attended other local churches. However the reasons for the reduced attendances at St Mary's were still unknown and may not (as suggested in the letter) be only due to recent changes in the Mass but might equally represent a wider national disaffection with the Church. Members felt the real reasons could not be authoritatively established without proper research.

ACTION: Fr William to consider surveying the switching of parishes or non-attendance within the next 2017 *Parish Appraisal*.

7. Celebrating the Liturgy

Fr William requested feedback and comments over the progression from a devotional experience to a liturgical experience in the Mass. He outlined the issue with examples from his perspective of the Sign of Peace, the Consecration etc. and his main intention that the liturgy should be enjoyable and uplifting for all.

Martin Mayhew suggested that the reasons for developments should be clearly explained, and also repeatedly explained to parishioners. It was further suggested that describing the journey as 'developmental' rather than one of 'change' was more accurate and positive.

Paul Jackson noted the church should always strive for inclusivity, and allow choice to any minority or individual uncomfortable with the new initiatives.

8. The Welcome

Fr William requested advice on how to improve the general 'welcome' of the Parish especially to new or other shy attendees at Mass; this was not just aimed at the activity of official 'Mass welcomers' but a more widespread approach that should be encouraged by all parishioners.

It was felt by many PPC members that broadly speaking the Parish was already inclusive and welcoming, albeit acknowledging improvements could always be made and that walking up to and engaging with strangers could be challenging to individuals.

It was suggested that giving parishioners a 'role' in the Parish would assist inclusivity and help break down social barriers, it was felt the Parish Priest had a key role to play in this approach in both encouraging and assigning such roles.

9. Risen Christ Figure (Bond End) Sculpture

Fr William sought feedback over the best positioning of a new statue to replace the war memorial cross. In discussion it was felt that:

- A 150% life-sized figure was regarded as too large (130% or less was suggested). Alternative locations on the 'ground' were suggested e.g. on a plinth.
- The PPC agreed the aim must be to give a very clear sign to all passers-by of our Faith, the sculpture must be noticeable, but must also not be disproportionate in scale.
- The 'outline' costs (£24-40K) for a stone sculpture were regarded as too high, not least as Parish funds, even by bequest, would be unable to support the costs in the 2 years before completion i.e. in time for the 2018 centenary of the Armistice.
- It was suggested a wooden sculpture was more likely to be acceptable for budgets and the artist of the wooden sculptures on Abbey Road might be approached for advice. [Update: Abbey Rd. sculptor is Tommy Craggs see: <http://www.treesculpting.co.uk/>]
- Although the Church is Grade II listed, it was believed likely that permission for a large sculpture on the Bond End aspect of St Mary's would be granted.
- The removal of the gates, and a new, better situated notice board should also be considered as part of this work.
- The removal of the existing crucifix (as previously debated) was desirable, but would require careful consideration if no new sculpture was installed given the Great War centenary.

ACTION: Fr William to draft further images of the suggested positioning of a sculpture, and also to investigate the commissioning of a wooden sculpture.

10. Reservation of Seats at First Holy Communion

Fr William sought PPC feedback over the continuation of the current practice of reserved seating for families attending the various Masses where children received First Holy Communion. This debate widened into a discussion about reservations at all masses (including baptisms) and other aspects of First Holy Communion.

Key points in brief:

- It was strongly suggested that the School should adopt a greater hands-on role in organising the families attending these Masses. This need not require advanced reservations but could permit the coordinated allocation of seating on a first-come basis.
- It was felt a reduced limit on the numbers of reserved seats could help to immediate family only (e.g. parents and siblings only).
- There was some support for a strict come-early, no reservations scheme. It was suggested this could be applied to ALL other services, including baptisms.
- Some parents were very critical of the current 'drawn out' process (i.e. many successive Sundays before the final Holy Communion Breakfast party).
- A dedicated single and separate Mass for all First Communion celebrants was not generally supported by the PPC.
- Fr William was eager to allow parents the choice to select the 'best' Sunday, and to defer involvement for a year if they believed their child was not yet ready. However parental involvement was observed to be quite low.
- PPC members were divided over the seeming imbalance of the social 'rite of passage' of First Holy Communion against the spiritual and religious aspects. Some desired a more uplifting experience, others expressed the hopes that a seed would be planted by the event which would allow children in their maturity to turn to the Church.

ACTION: The Reservation of Seats would be re-raised as an Agenda item at the next PPC meeting for further discussion.

11. Questionnaire to Parishioners no longer attending Mass at St Mary's [AGM Minutes Item 4]

A discussion was held over the suggestion to use the Parish Database to survey why some of its members no longer attended Mass at St Marys. It was agreed that a more helpful approach would be to invite (by email) all subscribers to re-attend St Mary's.

Fr William noted that he regularly met some of St Mary's non-attending parishioners and that he would make more direct individual enquiries on this subject.

Fr William hoped that, before issuing any online invitation or new initiative, the experience for those potentially re-attending Mass should first be improved, this including implementing some changes as discussed elsewhere in this meeting (e.g. Item 8: Welcome)

PPC members agreed that the [AGM] proposal to conduct house visits to interview non-attendees on this topic was unlikely to be welcomed or very productive.

12. Outreach to Primary School Parents
[AGM Minutes Item 4]

Fr William noted this matter would be directly explored with the School's 'Catholic Life' committee.

Paul Jackson had drafted '16 Home-School-Parish links' to be explored as part of his formal report to the PPC.

Due to lack of time this matter was not discussed further, but it was requested the '16 links' should be debated at the next PPC meeting.

ACTION: The '16 Home-School-Parish links' to be an Agenda item at the next meeting.

13. Desirability of Financial Presentation During Mass
[AGM Minutes Item 6]

The PPC believed that the delivery of parish financial accounts within the Mass (i.e. before the final Blessing) was extremely effective and helped achieve maximum outreach to the whole Parish instead of the alternative practice of waiting until after Mass ended.

The increased awareness of the financial address had caused a marked increase in the use of Gift Aid, Direct Debit and other more effective forms of fund raising which clearly benefit the Parish and wider charitable causes.

Fr William added he was keen to include other forms of presentations within Mass, which could be potentially supported by the overhead projectors as required.

Stephen Walker suggested that introducing short 'public' house-keeping announcements just before Mass started (e.g. by a parishioner) would be an alternative approach. However it was acknowledged that finances and fundraising matters were almost always best promoted near the end of Mass.

14. Re-establishment of the Parish Library

Frank Gilchrist has suggested the relaunch of the Parish Library, to be based on the donation of unwanted theological texts from all parishioners (supplemented by a few additional texts which might be purchased from parish funds). The intention was to introduce a very simple loans system, relying on 'trust' for book circulation, storage in an open and always accessible area, and with no requirement for an appointed librarian.

There was general PPC support for the library, though it was suggested Fr William should actively assess all book donations for suitability (presumably physical condition as well as intellectual content).

A short discussion was also held on the best location for the Library (SEE Item 18).

15. Finance Report

It was suggested that a bulletin item could be usefully created to inform the parish of progress on the planned repairs and decoration works in the Church.

There were no other comments to the previously circulated paper from Stephen Walker.

ACTION: Stephen Walker to draft copy for the Bulletin on the repairs etc. to the Church.

16. School Report

No comments to the previously circulated paper from Paul Jackson.

However SEE Item 12.

17. Committee Reports (PPC 5.1)

A number of written reports were circulated in advance. The Reports received (and any comments from the PPC meeting not noted elsewhere) were as follows:

a) Fundraising Report (Sheila Lund).

No comments to the previously circulated paper.

b) Formation Report (Charlotte Burrell)

No comments to the previously circulated paper.

18. Use of Front Office

A debate was held to help determine the best use of the current office and the shop. Stephen Walker noted a pressing decision was required to meet planning and building works schedules.

Key points in brief:

- The size of the parish meant it was unlikely to be able to economically support the development of a profit-making larger shop.
- The shop would retain its parish service function and required very modest space (lockable cabinets) so would actually be too small to occupy the current office.
- Rooms might be put to multiple uses.
- The provision of an 'interview' room for the Parish Priest was required.
- There might be a potential conflict in housing the Library (donated materials) alongside the shop items available for sale.
- The Library should be provided with seating – easy chairs - (and ideally AVM viewing facilities e.g. DVD player).
- Fr William noted the founding of a *Catholic Cultural Centre* is also a future possibility, though this would probably be distinct from the Library.

It was agreed that:

- a) The Back Office behind the Shop would be converted to support the administrative functions of the current Office.
- b) The Shop would be retained in its current position (with lockable display cabinets), but would also include the Library and always be unlocked and open to readers.
- c) The current Office would be converted into an 'interview room' for the use of the Parish Priest.

It was noted the above rooms would retain the flexibility to be changed, if future circumstances required new uses within the Parish.

ACTION: Stephen Walker to pursue the conversion of Shop and Office spaces as agreed above.

19. Future Meetings

19:00 – 20:30 Thursday 20th October 2016
19:00 – 20:30 Thursday 23rd February 2017
19:00 – 20:30 Thursday 4th May 2017
19:00 – 20:30 Thursday 20th July 2017

20. Final Prayer

The meeting closed with a prayer.