

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Monday 22nd February 2021

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

- Paul Jackson (School)
- Chris Clissitt
- Barbara Watson
- Vince McGurk
- Simon Stockdale

Elected

- Teresa Britton (Liturgy)
- Amanda Kelly (Support)
- Sheila Lund (Interaction)
- Jules Finn (Mission)
- Frances Watson (Formation)

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

- **Apologies:** None

1. Opening Reading and Prayer

Led by Fr. William

2. Apologies

As recorded above

3. Parish Priest introduction

Fr William made the following observations:

- PPC members' extra work in sending comments, suggestions and advice via email was greatly appreciated. It had informed the decision making process;
- The Parish has adapted well in three ways to the conditions imposed by the pandemic. Firstly, in the way we continue to celebrate Mass together. Secondly, through maintenance of income and of charitable giving. Thirdly, through support offered to others during the week;
- Core motivations have been the maintenance of essential aspects of Parish life, keeping everyone safe and ensuring the Parish play its part in containing the virus;
- There are 12 candidates for confirmation this year and preparation session 8 was recently completed. A July date for Confirmation should be set shortly;

- PPC members' views were now welcomed on the issues below:

potential enhancement of the livestreamed Mass experience;

facilitating contributions to income and to charitable giving;

potential means of accelerating implementation of the Second Vatican Council reforms;

the Parish Finance Committee's (PFC) suggestion to deploy a promotional banner on church railings to raise the profile of livestreamed Mass for those not yet engaged or unaware;

next steps to be taken by the Parish as pandemic restrictions are eased in wider society.

4. Approval of PPC 19th October 2020 minutes

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

5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of the PPC 19th Oct 2020 not itemised in the agenda)

Item 7, bullet point 10 at top of p.4

Fr William explained that one element of safeguarding measures relevant to a jointly livestreamed and in-church Mass is in operation. Specifically, notices within church provide information to in-church participants, including an image of the view of the camera angle to help inform their choice of seat. A second safeguarding element concerns securing consent for inclusion within livestream filming from Sanctuary participants e.g. altar servers. A consent form has been prepared for use when Sanctuary participants (other than Fr William) are once again involved in Mass.

Item 7, final bullet point

Fr William reflected that his encouragement of parishioners to make standing order contributions may have continuing relevance following lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. He thought it quite possible that a resumption of church collections via banknotes and coins may raise three issues. Firstly, some parishioners may wish to avoid both using physical money and the risk associated with the handling what others have just touched i.e. the collection plate. Secondly, asking volunteers to act as 'money counters' required to touch the collection plate, banknotes and coins perhaps appears an unreasonable demand. Thirdly, extending take up of donations by standing order would help income from collections more robust and sustainable during both 'normal' times and in the event of re-introduction of pandemic restrictions.

Item 8, final bullet point

Chris Clissitt confirmed that synchronisation of the PFC meeting calendar and the Diocesan financial calendar had taken place. As Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) meetings are most

appropriately scheduled subsequent to PFC meetings, future PPC meeting dates have been altered. PPC meeting dates listed under item 14 of these minutes reflect this.

Item 9, final bullet point

Fr William asked PPC members for views on issues surrounding 'contactless' donations in church, expressing his own concern that the device itself would need to be handled.

The following points were raised;

- Handling of the device may be limited to one person only, as the donor would need only to hold his or her card above the device for transactions below the prevailing contactless threshold;
- Recently emerging scientific analysis indicates that Covid-19 is not transmitted via banknotes;
- 'Spontaneous' donation should be facilitated. In a situation where donation by coins and/or banknotes was not possible at church, busy parishioners may forget to donate online after returning home. A related issue was that it appeared that the current Parish website did not offer a direct link to donate to specific causes / charities. This may prove off-putting even to donors willing and able to donate online;
- Concern was expressed regarding potential negative impact on fund raising activities e.g. raffle ticket / cake sales at end of Masses. There was discussion about the length of time consumed in transaction via contactless machine compared with transaction via coins and/or banknotes, and the potential impact on length of queue. Though the contactless card was held by the donor for a moment only, it was necessary for the device holder to take time to enter each amount to be donated / paid and to await notification of transaction approval;
- It was important to take account of the older parishioners potentially greater familiarity and confidence in using of banknotes and coins.

Item 10

Fr William expressed his appreciation of PPC members' range of viewpoints and helpful suggestions.

6. School Report and governance

Paul Jackson referred PPC members to his written report and highlighted the following points:

- There had been very positive responses from parent governors to the educational provision made through the pandemic, both regarding children continuing to physically attend school and children learning remotely;

- Paul informed the PPC that the Academy Council required additional members from the Parish, ideally drawn from parents of children in the early years of schooling who may offer several years of membership. It was possible for those interested to be initially 'co-opted', formally becoming members of the Academy Council at a later stage. Paul asked PPC members to contact Fr William if they had information that could prove helpful.

Paul invited questions and comments on the written report submitted to the PPC. The following points were made:

- Concern was expressed at the declining number and proportion of Catholic children enrolments at the school. Paul Jackson responded that the issue appeared directly related to the declining number of baptisms, with a fall in number from 8 two years ago to 4 last year. He noted that recruitment to the school remained strong, with St Mary's School a popular choice among the increasing number of new residents to Knaresborough. Historical data indicated that, where new housing brought new residents as potential recruits for a school, approximately 10% of potential new recruits were Catholics. Paul stated that it would be important to raise the profile of the school as society returned towards normality post-Covid-19 restrictions.

PPC members discussed potential initiatives that may increase the number of baptisms and, potentially, the number of Catholic children attending the school. Several issues arose:

- Several PPC members suggested that it may be helpful to contact parents of children who had been baptised to raise awareness of what the school offers. However, one member commented that, though it was undoubtedly legitimate to contact parishioners about parish matters, there was considerable doubt as to whether contact relating to the school specifically could be reasonably interpreted as a parish matter;
- Several PPC members saw value in gathering data of wider trends beyond the Parish regarding the number of baptisms. The possibility of accessing useful data from the Diocese was raised. Paul Jackson informed the PPC that the Academy Trust to which St Mary's School belonged is projected to include additional Catholic schools within the Deanery in future, which may facilitate sharing of useful data;
- Fr William remarked that gathering data on wider trends regarding numbers of baptisms would not explain why numbers were low. There may be merit in focusing upon initiatives that could be undertaken within our Parish to increase the number of baptisms at St Mary's;
- The potential addition of nursery provision at St Mary's School was raised. Paul Jackson responded that this remained a priority for the Trust and a business plan had been developed. However, the need for a substantial injection of capital had been established, which meant the introduction of nursery provision could not currently be the top priority. Paul acknowledged that nursery provision would help safeguard St Mary's School numbers. However, he remarked that it would not necessarily result in recruitment of a higher number or higher proportion of Catholic children;

- The relatively low number (12 of 25) of current St Mary's School Year 6 pupils engaged in preparation for Confirmation generated discussion. There was consideration about how those not engaged in preparation may be followed up. Fr William explained that his approach was to avoid creating any sense of 'pressure' to engage in preparation for Confirmation. Paul Jackson responded that it would be important to ensure any follow up focused upon raising awareness raising, without creating pressure. A PPC member observed that avoidance of pressure would require any follow up to be based on good knowledge of individual families and their circumstances;
- Fr William requested that Paul Jackson relay the gratitude of the PPC to St Mary's School staff for their work and dedication. Paul stated that he was very happy to do so.

ACTION: Paul Jackson to convey to St Mary's School staff the gratitude of the PPC for their dedication.

7. **Finance Report**

Chris Clissitt made the following points:

- The loss of physical offertory collection income from Masses has been substantially offset by the increased amount now donated by standing order, currently £39,000 per year. 'Ordinary income' shortfall is, therefore, only £7,000;
- 'Overall income' is currently £11,000 below budget. However, expenditure is below budget by £22,000-£25,000. The current prediction for the financial year is a surplus of £10,000 (approx.);
- Reduced expenditure reflects much lower costs for matters such as church heating and an absence of spending on church maintenance during the pandemic. Spending within these areas will necessarily have to rise as Covid-19 restrictions ease.

Chris invited questions and comments. The following points were made:

- One PPC member asked what figure remained outstanding on the church loan. Chris stated that £63,000 was the current figure, with an impending repayment instalment set to reduce the figure to £58,000 by the close of the financial year;
- One PPC member noted that the extent of deterioration in the condition the decorating within the church had become noticeable. Chris informed the PPC that the church was last redecorated in 2014 and so we were approaching the point when redecoration may be appropriate;
- Fr William expressed his appreciation for the continuing generosity of parishioners during the pandemic.

8. Ongoing review of church closure

Fr William asked for PPC views regarding a potential restart for in-church Masses. The following points were made:

- Vince McGurk explained that the Parish is currently allowed to re-open legally, subject to continued implementation of required mitigation measures, including admission of limited numbers. Therefore, the issue regarding 're-opening' was not one of legality, but of what timing and process may be deemed appropriate, taking account of the need to minimise risk to Fr William;
- One PPC member commented that the risk of contracting Covid-19 is reducing rapidly due to vaccinations and so we should envisage a return to in-church Mass in the short term;
- It was suggested that, as 15th April was the government target date by which offer of vaccination was due to have been made to those aged over 50 years, it may be appropriate to return to in-church Mass a few weeks after this date, when immunity levels of those vaccinated would have built up in those at most risk of serious illness;
- One PPC member suggested our approach take account of the government's target date of 21st June for the ending of Covid-19 restrictions;
- The possibility was raised of initially re-opening for private prayer only. In discussion, it was suggested that offering private prayer access on a Sunday, rather than a Saturday as previously within the pandemic, may increase take-up because many parishioners associate Sunday with church going. Were this able to happen during Easter week, it may be appreciated by many parishioners;
- It may be worth adopting a gradual approach, to take account of the impact of easing of measures in wider society, such as the re-opening of schools;
- Our 're-opening' plan should consider how we approach the tendency for parishioners to gather outdoors on leaving church after Mass and proceeding through church grounds. Vince McGurk explained that the legal definition of 'the church' does include its grounds. Discussion included the observation that outdoors mixing is now regarded as carrying a low level of transmission. It was suggested that Fr William may remind and advise those in church for Mass to be mindful of maintaining social distancing as they leave church and proceed through church grounds, perhaps offering suggestions regarding the option of conversations within the nearby grounds of Knaresborough House, where there was likely to be more space to socially distance;
- Fr William thanked PPC members for the range of views and suggestions. He concluded that, though it appeared not appropriate to open immediately, the government's current expectation of the Covid-19 position at 15th April offered a useful indicator for his thinking.

9. Celebrating Mass by livestream and drive through communion - review of current experience

Fr William explained that the most recent record indicated that approximately 130 devices accessed livestreamed Mass (across all 3 Sunday Masses), with more than 70 parishioners receiving communion via 'drive-through'. Fr William had received positive comments from some parishioners regarding 'drive-through' communion. In particular, comments noted an enhanced feeling of 'connection' with the 'real experience' of Mass and a reinforced sense of Parish 'community'. Fr William detailed the Covid-19 precautions he took in relation to 'drive-through' communion, including sanitisation and wearing of face covering. He asked whether, nevertheless, the 'drive-through' communion process raised any concerns regarding increased Covid-19 risk and for the views of PPC members on how current arrangements may be improved, particularly with a view to facilitating increased take-up of 'drive-through' communion.

Vince McGurk detailed the Covid-19 precautions in place for 'drive-through' communion and explained the rationale behind these, with particular reference to the recently introduced request to communicants to open both windows of the car to reduce the risk to Father William posed by the a movement of hotter air from the car to colder air outside.

The following points were made:

- Perhaps use of the church garden or grounds for 'drive-through' communion would give communicants a stronger feeling of being within 'the church';
- The prospect of leaving home for 'drive-through' communion perhaps, for some, could be felt to undermine the experience of home celebrating the Mass via livestream;
- The very good experience of livestreamed Mass may, in itself, provide some parishioners with a sense of completeness they did not wish to disturb;
- The unavoidable separation between the livestreamed Mass and participation in 'drive-through' communion perhaps, for some, created a feeling of 2 uncomfortably distinct processes;
- It was important to recognise that the combination of livestreamed Mass and 'drive-through' communion was greatly welcomed and appreciated by some parishioners;
- One PPC member observed that walking to 'drive-through' communion had felt like less 'separate' from the Mass than had driving;
- The size of font used to project some text within livestreamed Masses may be too small for some parishioners. In discussion, members confirmed that font size used for hymns did appear readable, with font size issue primarily a concern relating to other text;
- The possible variation in quality of the microphones used in church was raised by one PPC member. The livestream audibility of a eulogy at a recent funeral had been poor.

ACTION: Fr William to check the operation of both microphones.

10. Holding the parish together – how are we doing? How can we do better?

Fr William was very keen for the Parish 'stick together' during the pandemic and asked PPC members for suggestions regarding greater reach-out to the Parish community.

The following points were made:

- Paul Jackson indicated it was possible to promote the availability of livestreamed Masses via St Mary's School database;
- The attaching of a banner to the church railings was suggested as a potential means of promoting livestreamed Masses;
- The profile of St Mary's School could, perhaps, be raised through reference to it on the PFC proposed banner attached to the railings outside church. Initially, this would require discussion with the Academy Council;
- One PPC member raised the concern that both the adverse impact of weathering on the banner and the government's timetable for easing of Covid-19 restrictions perhaps indicated that the proposed banner may prove relevant for a very short period only;
- The potential value of social media in raising awareness of church activities was raised. In discussion, it was suggested that younger parishioners, in particular, were now more likely to use Instagram rather than Facebook.

11. Online giving to offertory' and second collection – how can we make this as easy as possible?

Fr William asked PPC members to make him aware of any glitches within the system.

12. What positive changes accelerated by the pandemic might we want to hold onto?

Due to time constraints, this item was deferred to the next PPC meeting.

13. Implementing the reforms of Vatican 2

Due to time constraints, this item was deferred to the next PPC meeting.

14. Reminder of dates

PPC (all Monday 1900)*
10 May 2021

Proposed dates

*Tuesday 31 Aug – (*this date chosen after discussion, in light limited availability of PPC members for Mon, 30 August*)

1 Nov 2021

February 2022 – date pending FC date

2 May 2021 AGM after 10am Mass

15. Final Prayer

The meeting closed with a prayer.