

## St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

### Minutes of meeting Monday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021

#### Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

#### *Appointed*

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

#### *Elected*

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

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

- **Apologies:** Teresa Britton (Liturgy)

### **1. Opening Reading and Prayer**

Led by Fr. William

### **2. Apologies**

As recorded above

### **3. Parish Priest introduction**

Fr William made the following observations:

- Main issue for consideration is how best to ensure a 'post pandemic resurgence' of Parish life;
- Figures for livestreamed Mass attendance (regularly over 100 devices connected), participation in drive-through Holy Communion by individuals and family groups and in-church Mass attendance indicated that a large 'core group' of parishioners had remained engaged with the Parish throughout the fourteen months of Covid-19 restrictions;
- It was now important to reach out to parishioners who, for a variety of reasons, may have been on the periphery of engagement with the Parish during the period of Covid-19 restrictions;
- The period of Covid-19 restrictions had witnessed significant evolution of the Parish website and it was hoped that it now offered a greater breadth of service via a more user friendly format;

- Parishioners' use of the Parish website depended, in part, upon internet access and he was aware that supporting the widest possible parishioner access to the internet was an important element of 'future proofing', which would be of particular relevance in any subsequent period of 'lockdown'. Additionally, use of the Parish website depended, in part, on offering greater incentive for parishioners to log on. He thought potential initiatives, perhaps such as a live draw of the 200 club, may attract new users to the website;
- Protection of Parish income was another important 'future proofing' issue. St Mary's maintenance of a financial surplus during Covid-19 restrictions appeared unusual, both nationally and internationally. Fr William praised the loyalty and generosity of parishioners. He drew attention too to the increased number of donations made via text, noting text donations doubled in number in April 2021, when compared against the previous month.

#### **4. Approval of PPC 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 minutes**

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

#### **5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of the PPC 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 not itemised in the agenda)**

##### Item 8, bullet point 1

Fr William thanked everyone who had expressed concern for his safety when deliberating upon the most appropriate steps for the Parish to take.

##### Item 8, bullet point 2

Fr William noted that a significant reduction of Covid-19 incidences, had led him to decide an increase the number of in-church Sunday Masses from one to two was appropriate. Decisions regarding any increase in the number of Masses offering in-church participation took account of both the safety of in-church participants and the maintenance of a high quality of provision for livestreamed Mass participants.

##### Item 8, bullet point 4

Fr William explained that he had found it helpful to take account of PPC advice on the appropriate calibration of steps towards a resumption of normal Parish life with steps taken by government regarding life in wider society. Fr William explained that this had resulted in what could be characterised as a 'gradual approach' by the Parish. An example of this was the monitoring of the impact upon Covid-19 incidences of the return of children to in-school attendance, prior to facilitating in-church Mass participation.

##### Item 8, bullet point 5

One PPC member asked why the church had not been re-opened for private prayer during Easter week, as suggested by a PPC member at the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 meeting. Fr William

responded that, following the February 2021 PPC meeting, he had considered the suggestion seriously and without needing to wait for formal approval of PPC meeting minutes. His reflection on the very low numbers who had accessed private prayer opportunities offered at an earlier stage of the pandemic had persuaded him against acting on this suggestion.

Item 8, bullet point 7

Fr William confirmed that he had acted upon the suggestion that he remind in-church participants of the need to observe social distancing when leaving church at the end of Mass. He was pleased to report that this appeared to have had a positive impact.

Item 9, bullet point 1

Fr William stated that he had considered the suggestion to offer drive-through communion within church garden or grounds but had decided that this would be impracticable, due to the potential for traffic congestion within the relatively small car parking area, where car drivers would be likely to be seeking to simultaneously enter, park and exit. Fr William had been mindful also of the value of the natural rain shield afforded to him by the tree that bordered Church Lane.

Item 9, bullet point 7

Fr William confirmed that the size of font used in projection of 'drive-through' communion guidance had been increased to facilitate readability.

Item 9, bullet point 8 and ACTION

Fr William explained that he had checked the operation of microphones used within church, moving one to a more central location. Additionally, he had provided a practice opportunity to someone preparing to deliver a eulogy at a funeral. PPC members confirmed that the audibility of the eulogy had been good.

Item 10, bullet point 1

The St Mary's database had been used to promote the availability of livestreamed Masses.

Item 10, bullet point 2

Fr William expressed the view that a physical banner to promote means of accessing St Mary's Masses may be a useful temporary measure as the Parish returns to normal provision. A PPC member stated that the plastic coating of banners removed concern regarding premature weathering of a banner.

## **6. School Report**

Paul Jackson commented on key aspects of the previously circulated written report:

- He confirmed that the teaching staff complement for academic year 2021/2 had now been finalised. This process included appointments to cover 2 staff taking maternity leave and the appointment of a young, Catholic applicant who was a former student at St John Fisher's

School. Paul noted that pupil numbers for the forthcoming academic year had increased due to new housing development in Knaresborough. However, there was a lower proportion of Catholic pupils among the new entrants. The main challenge now was how to increase the proportion of Catholic pupils, rather than increasing pupil number to ensure financial viability;

- Paul also explained that every family within the school community had access to online learning, the school having supplied computers to families lacking one. Paul pointed out that the school's initiative was also useful to the Parish, as it sought to ensure access to livestreamed Mass to all parishioners. Fr William noted that a number of senior parishioners, with age ranges across the 80s and 90s, had participated in drive-through communion, indicating they had been able to access Mass via livestream;
- Paul noted that, with Fr William's help, the school has secured a new governor to serve on the Academy Council. There was currently a 'spare' governor, which would prove very helpful in ensuring future continuity of provision. Paul explained that the Academy Council was characterised by a range of relevant expertise, including members with backgrounds in finance and medicine as well as education;
- One PPC member asked Paul to explain the rationale behind the St Mary's School roles of Acting Head and Acting Assistant Head. Paul explained that a review of the role of the Executive Headteacher was underway currently within the Trust, with a view to ensuring that this role provided most appropriate contribution to schools across the Trust. This had meant that the Executive Headteacher was currently providing a reduced presence of approximately half a day per week at St Mary's School. Therefore, the governors had decided to ensure appropriate leadership until completion of the Trust's review of the evolving role of its Executive Headteacher. The decision to designate two posts as 'Acting' had ensured that the school avoided inappropriate commitment to permanent appointments prior to completion of the Trust's review. Paul stressed that the Executive Headteacher had played a in important and very positive role in the professional development of the current Acting Headteacher. St Mary's was, therefore, continuing to benefit from excellent leadership;
- Fr William expressed his gratitude to Paul, his fellow governors and the St Mary's School staff for their dedication throughout the pandemic.

## **7. Finance Report**

Fr William invited questions and comments on the previously circulated written report:

- A PPC member raised the issue of the Parish's 'Old School Hall' cleaning. In response, Fr William confirmed he had recently recruited a church cleaning co-ordinator.. After careful consideration, he had decided that it would be unreasonable to ask the cleaning team to include the Old School Hall within their range of responsibilities. Therefore, he had sought and obtained approval from the Finance Committee to hire commercial cleaning for the Old School Hall. The cleaning co-ordinator was supportive of this approach and was happy to communicate to the cleaning team;

- A PPC member raised the issue of the operation of the toy library. Fr William explained that toys had been lent to families for use at home during the pandemic, and it was now expected that on-site sessions re-commence soon;
- Fr William paid tribute to the loyalty of St Mary's parishioners during the pandemic. Donations via standing order now raised approximately £40,000 per year, with gift aid adding approximately £10,000 to this total. This represented a very healthy proportion of the £66,000 (approx.) annual income;
- Chris Clissitt noted that, though income had been reduced during the pandemic, this shortfall had been more than offset by the reduction in expenditure. However, it was unlikely that expenditure would remain at such a low level over the coming year;
- A PPC member noted the need to re-start fundraising, with careful consideration given to what was feasible and what volunteers would feel comfortable undertaking;
- Fr William paid tribute to the excellent work of the late Simon Knowles in his role as Hall Manager, commenting that Simon's death was a tragedy for his family and a significant loss to the Parish. Fr William hoped to appoint a new Hall Manager. In the interim, he was fielding requests to hire the Old School Hall. Fr William asked PPC members to contact him if they had any suggestions as to who may be able and willing to take on the role of Hall Manager.

## **8. Parish post pandemic resurgence**

Fr William reiterated his desire to reach out to those who may have been on the periphery of Parish life during the pandemic. He was keen to explore how an awareness of the Parish's move back toward normal provision be promoted most effectively. He considered that the school may be able to communicate with families and that a physical banner, initially for a temporary period, may be useful in alerting passers-by. Fr William thought an end of lockdown celebratory event, such as a barbecue, may be an attractive way to mark the Parish's return to normal activities. Additionally, Fr William acknowledged the need to rebuild 'structures', which included re-starting the work of eucharistic ministers, readers, servers, sanctuary participants, safeguarding officers, 200 club organisers, easy worship schedulers, audio-visual projectionists etc.

Fr William invited the thoughts of PPC members:

- One PPC member commented that re-commencement of an in-church Sunday 10.00am Mass as soon as possible would be a welcome and important step, as the congregation of this Mass has traditionally comprised a high proportion of family groups. Fr William was asked whether he thought it would be feasible to re-commence an in-church Sunday 10.00am Mass prior to 21<sup>st</sup> June. Fr William responded by noting the 21<sup>st</sup> June date's significance for society as it was the date on which the Government currently hoped to lift most or all Covid-19 restrictions. Fr William indicated that, within church, some Covid-19 restrictions may then still remain e.g. communion in one kind only. Regarding a decision on re-commencement of the Sunday 10.00am Mass prior to 21<sup>st</sup> June, Fr William explained that it was necessary for him to take account of the impact of current restrictions regarding in-church Masses upon the livestreamed Mass experience. In particular, singing within the in-

church Mass was not be permitted the homily could not be delivered close to camera. Fr William felt that the playing of recordings of hymns sung by the Parish Choir would be problematic, as in-church participants would not be allowed to join in. Equally, projection of hymn verses within church, which only livestream participants could use to support their singing, was not an approach Fr William felt minded to endorse. Fr William was keen to protect the quality of livestream experience because maintaining Parish togetherness was very important in what we all hoped would prove to be the final few weeks of restrictions. To illustrate the fragility of the situation, Fr William stated that one parishioner had informed him that they no had stopped accessing the 6.00pm Saturday Mass because of the absence of singing at the point that Mass offered in-church participation;

- The Health & Safety Officer outlined the current position and the prospects of potential easing of restrictions. He explained that government guidance may recommend social distancing of only one metre from 17<sup>th</sup> May. However, the number of in-church Mass participants at St Mary's would still be limited to 30-32, given then need to configure both safely and with attention to family groupings. There is no current prospect of change regarding other guidance relevant to church. Sanitisation requirements are expected to continue beyond 17<sup>th</sup> May and there is no projected date regarding permission for singing within in-church Mass to resume;
- One PPC member asked whether we had evidence regarding whether any decline in the livestreamed Mass participation numbers was offset by the number of in-church Mass participants. Fr William explained that there was clarity that there had been a falling away of livestreamed Mass participation since the resumption of in-church Masses, but beyond that it was hard to draw conclusions at this stage. Fr William indicated that his inclination was to 'hold on' to the current balance of provision for the next few weeks;
- One PPC member wondered whether provision of fewer livestreamed Masses would act as an incentive for a greater number of parishioners to opt for of in-church Mass participation. Linked to this, another PPC member noted that, however high the quality of livestreamed Mass experience offered by St Mary's, many livestreamed Mass participants were disturbed by the inevitable pressures of family life. A PPC member suggested that it may be possible to gather data on the numbers attending Mass via livestream in a scenario where livestream provision was offered for one Sunday Mass only. Data could be used to inform deliberations on the extent of demand for livestreamed Mass provision;
- Within discussion, several PPC members articulated their concern to ensure continuing livestreamed Mass provision for those parishioners unable, for different reasons, to attend in-church Mass;
- One PPC member asked whether there was yet information on when the obligation to attend Mass would be re-imposed. Fr William responded that there was, as yet, no date for this. His expectation was that re-imposition of the obligation would follow soon after the ending of Covid-19 restrictions.

Fr William explained that he felt there were sound reasons for continuation of livestream provision all Masses in the longer term. It was now a cultural norm and to turn away from it may incline some parishioners on the Parish periphery to attend livestreamed Mass elsewhere and so disengage with the Parish. Though he recognised the argument for a temporary reduction or even a temporary halt to livestreamed Mass provision to incentivise in-church participation, he felt more inclined toward

a policy of gentle encouragement as a means of re-building participation in Parish life, including in-church Mass participation, to as high a level as possible. Fr William explained that he would appreciate suggestions from PPC members regarding what forms such encouragement may take:

- One PPC member suggested that 'school Masses' could take place on Sunday at 10.00am, with that Mass being seen as a 'school Mass' to encourage greater family participation. Fr William expressed his desire to avoid Masses on specified Sundays being designated as 'school Masses', as had happened in the past. Rather, he would wish to encourage families to attend every Sunday and seek organic growth in the number of participants;
- One PPC member suggested that St Mary's School could write to families new to the school, perhaps offering a 'buddy' system that would emphasise that they would be welcome at Mass. Paul Jackson pointed out that, of 22 new starters for Sept 2021, only 8 were Catholics. Therefore, it would seem appropriate for any reach-out to new families to extend to non-Catholics also. This idea was supported by another PPC member;
- A PPC member recalled school Masses in the past, whereby the norm had been for each child present to have an adult member of their family also present in the congregation. A linked suggestion was that a school Mass could focus on new starters to the school, with a social dimension included, such as a picnic in the church garden. Paul Jackson informed PPC members that school Masses focussed upon specific school year cohorts, beginning with years 5 and 6 and then including year 4 from the point at which they began to receive Holy Communion;
- One PPC member suggested that a letter from Fr William to parishioners could be a useful means of informing and encouraging in-church Mass participation, as restrictions eased further. The letter could detail the stages of a return to more normal Parish life. Fr William agreed that this was feasible and that consider doing so. However, Fr William felt the most effective messages would be personal invitations from fellow parishioners;
- One PPC member asked whether those parishioners who had been fully engaged with the Parish during lockdown, described by Fr William as the 'core group', would know which of their fellow parishioners were on what had been described as the 'periphery'. Fr William accepted that he perhaps had the best level of knowledge in that regard. He nevertheless felt that all parishioners could encourage participation by contacting other parishioners known to them as Parish life began to move closer to normality. In this way, the 'core group' of parishioners would play a vital role in 'getting the message out';
- One PPC member wondered if the 'resurgence' of Parish life, including in-church Mass participation, may happen naturally when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted. Fr William agreed that this was possible and would be most welcome, but he feared that some parishioners may have lost the habit of involvement and may be supported by encouragement to return via a personal invitation from fellow parishioners. One PPC member echoed Fr William's concern, having noted that some parishioners who had been present at in-church Masses at the end of an earlier lockdown were no longer present at in-church Masses now.

## **9. Reminder of dates**

Tuesday 31 Aug  
Monday 1 Nov 2021

Proposed dates:

Monday 21 February 2022

Monday 9 May 2022

## **10. Final Prayer**

The meeting closed with a prayer.