

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Tuesday 31st August 2021

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

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

Elected

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

- **Apologies:** Teresa Britton (Liturgy), Amanda Kelly (Support), Barbara Watson, Paul Coman (Secretary)

1. Opening Reading and Prayer

Led by Fr. William

2. Apologies

As recorded above

3. Parish Priest introduction

Fr William explained that he wanted to use the meeting to review how the parish performed during lockdown, namely what went well and what we could have done better, so that we are prepared in the event of another lockdown in the future.

- He observed that we should start by celebrating what we did as a parish:
 - The large number of people who celebrated mass by livestream. There were over 100 devices connected each week until 23rd May, by which time a second in church mass had been established, and numbers fell only very slowly thereafter.
 - Drive through communion: regularly 60, 70, 80 participants.
 - Financial support maintained at a high level when the majority of parishes struggled during lockdown.
 - The number of parishioners who helped each other with shopping, food, collecting medication and in other ways.

- Things that we could possibly do better include the following: communication, celebration of mass and maintaining financial support. All three of these are separate agenda items.
- By way of example, on the subject of communication, Fr William noted that it took a little time to realise that not all parishioners would make use of the website which had become the main information resource for the parish.

4. Approval of PPC 10th May 2021 minutes

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

5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of the PPC 10th May 2021 not itemised in the agenda

Item 8, bullet point 7

It was noted that “school masses” suggested for Sunday at 10am should really read “family masses”. Paul Jackson mentioned the low number of catholic teachers at the school, some of whom belong to other parishes, making it a challenge to achieve a high degree of school participation in the family mass.

Fr William observed that on occasions in the past such a mass has been well attended at the beginning of term only for the majority not to be seen again until the next term. He believed that it was more effective, if more painstaking, for individual parishioners to invite families to participate in the Sunday mass who would in turn be a seed to bring other families in.

On the question of participation, Fr William said that we need to move to state where we all feel that we are participating in the mass whether we give input (e.g. minister of the word, minister of the eucharist) or receive (e.g. hearing the proclamation of the word.)

Pre-pandemic there were groups of year 5 singers leading the psalm response. When putting these groups together, Fr William recalled the enthusiastic response from children when asked if they would like to sing in church. However, on writing to parents to ask them to bring their children to church to enable them to sing in church only a minority would provide support. This often resulted in only a small group leading the response at many services.

One PPC member suggested that maintaining children’s church for key stage 2 pupils (i.e. post first holy communion) may help them engage with the mass because children’s church speaks to them in a way that the homily does not, the latter being aimed at adults. A discussion ensued on children coming to mass and their dependency on being brought by their parents.

6. Finance Report

The finance report from Stephen Walker was circulated to all before the meeting. Chris Clissitt made the following observations:

- Income only just under budget whereas expenditure approx. £6k below. This continues the pattern seen during the pandemic where income shortfall was more than offset by reduced expenditure.
- The main items where expenditure has reduced are heating, lighting etc but as Fr William pointed there are other areas where money has been saved. It was also noted that so far this year the contingency budget (£10k pa) is untouched as it was all last year, but it will certainly be drawn on later this financial year, not least for feasibility work relating to the church floor.
- The parish has survived the pandemic income squeeze remarkably well, and much of this is down to the proportion of income received by standing order (offertory £40k pa plus gift aid £10 represents nearly 70% of budgeted £72k income this year.)
- The building fund receives over £4k pa via standing order and further income through first Sunday collections. The parish's healthy cash position has enabled it to continue to make the £5k per quarter loan repayments irrespective of short term fluctuations in income and expenditure.

7. Lockdown review - communication to the parish

In March 2020 the website became the main information source for the parish. Fr William wanted to thank Graham Yare for all his extra work in expanding and updating the website over the last 18 months.

The desire was to make it routine for parishioners to use the website for information, including Fr William's weekly message, the bulletin, next Sunday's readings and other items. Many parishioners have indeed become regular website visitors but not all have made use of it.

It is a challenge to reach all members of the wider parish, especially those where involvement in the parish is marginal and who do not regularly attend mass. Fr William has sent a few emails to those for whom we have addresses but these do not reach everyone.

One PPC member suggested that articles or advertisements in The Knaresborough Post and Knaresborough Now would be a way to reach this wider group.

It was noted that the banner has now been installed on Bond End inviting people to join us either in church or by livestream.

Some people have popped their heads in the Bond End door while mass has been taking place. One PPC member asked if the door could be closed during mass as the traffic noise was very loud and sometimes interfered with hearing readings properly. Fr William said that both doors had to remain open to create a through draft for effective ventilation in line with H&S guidelines.

Finally, it was mentioned that some older people have lost a bit of confidence during the pandemic and may need someone to accompany them before returning to mass in church.

8. Lockdown review – celebration of mass

Fr William emphasised that mass via livestream was a proper celebration of mass. Some time ago he replaced the phrase “physically attended” with “in church” to distinguish between mass celebrated at home and mass celebrated in the church building.

It was noted that Fr William had encouraged parishioners to participate in the mass at home as if they were in church, for example by standing for the creed, voicing responses etc. Additionally, all masses were “live” in that they could not be accessed as recordings or joined half way through and rewound to the start.

He wanted to explore what needed to be done to prepare for any future lockdown or temporary closure of the church for any other reason. The view of the PPC was that we were now well prepared for such an eventuality with good quality livestream technology in place, the practice of livestreaming mass well established and many people familiar with accessing the bulletin and weekly messages on the website.

There is a decision to be made about future weekday masses. If they return to the chapel they will not be livestreamed, but holding mass in the main church is impractical in the colder months as it is not heated during the week.

9. Lockdown review – maintaining financial support

As noted in Fr William’s introduction, financial support has been well maintained at a time when the majority of parishes have struggled. The high proportion of parishioners donating by standing order has been a big factor, but there are now additional channels for donations (e.g. text giving, by card using the Dona machine) which provide good options for visitors, irregulars and those not using standing orders.

Text giving has been available since April 2020 but once it was actively promoted in 2021 donations exceeded £100 per month. In fact, the average for 2021 is £180 per month.

Fr William explained that he deliberately used his own phone in church to encourage people to feel comfortable to do so themselves. He asked if people were reluctant to get their phones out in church and some PPC members agreed that this was indeed the case. There some who hold the view that it is inappropriate to use a mobile phone in church. It was also pointed out that many regular mass attenders donate by standing order and would therefore be unlikely to make offertory donations by text.

The Dona machine is new and the only data available is for July when it took £48.

Second collections are down since the start of the pandemic. One PPC member noted that Stella Maris had provided a text giving option. She suggested that Fr William contact beneficiaries of forthcoming second collections and ask if they are able to set up text giving options. At the moment the only donation option for a second collection is an online payment via the parish account.

10. Lockdown review – helping people get online

Fr William asked how the parish could provide practical help to enable parishioners to get online. For example, the housebound would benefit from livestreaming mass in normal times, and anyone not online would benefit if there was another lockdown or church closure. Assistance could range from providing hardware to setting up equipment and showing how to use it.

Members of the PPC made various observations:

- Hardware alone is not sufficient – there must also be a broadband or data subscription.
- Many pensioners can afford it – it is wrong to assume that all would need financial assistance.
- There are some, especially elderly people living on their own, who want nothing to do with going online.
- There was a view that most people who wanted to go online would have done so by now, especially since the start of lockdown 18 months ago. Therefore many of those not online have chosen not to be.
- Safeguarding must be considered. If parishioners are to be visited in their homes for equipment to be installed and demonstrated it is desirable that it is someone they know already. The SVP may be an option.
- Assistance may be required on a regular basis. For people unused to using tablets, smart phones or PCs it will need more than an initial visit for them to be comfortable.

It was agreed that Fr William would place a note in one of his weekly messages inviting anyone interested in exploring the benefits of an internet connection to contact him. He could then establish what was needed and “broker” assistance from another member of the parish.

The weekly messages and bulletin are printed and delivered to many of our housebound parishioners.

11. Lockdown review – introducing a second in-church mass

In the interest of time, this item was not discussed.

12. Lockdown review – any other review notes

The collective opinion of the PPC was that it had been a very successful lockdown for St Mary’s and especially in comparison to other parishes. They complimented Fr William on his efforts and initiative in keeping the parish engaged and together through the pandemic.

Livestreaming helped people feel connected to the parish. There are many who live in parishes who did not livestream masses and they have had to access services broadcast from elsewhere. At St Mary's we have been able to participate in masses celebrated with our own PP in our own church.

Drive through communion was another success and helped deepen the sense of participation in the mass. No-one had heard of such an innovation anywhere else.

Financial performance through the pandemic has been covered earlier but is another element in sustaining the parish through this challenging period.

13. Reminder of dates

Monday 1 Nov 2021

Monday 21 February 2022

Monday 9 May 2022

Proposed date:

Monday 5 Sep 2022

14. Final prayer

The meeting closed with a prayer.