

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Monday 21st February 2022

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

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

Elected

- Catherine Foster (Support)
- Sheila Lund (Interaction)
- Richard Martin (Formation)
- Angela Smith (Outreach)

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

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

1. Opening Reading and Prayer

Led by Fr. William

2. Welcome to new councillors

Fr William welcomed Richard, Catherine and Angela to the PPC, following their election to particular ministries. He explained that their role also involved offering their counsel on any matters on the PPC agenda.

3. Apologies

As recorded above

4. Parish Priest introduction

Fr William made the following points:

- Sunday Mass attendance numbers were in decline in the Parish, the country and across the western world. St Mary's was approximately 50% down on in person attendance at church figures pre-Covid. This is in line with the majority of nearby parishes.
- The trend of declining Mass attendance numbers has been evident over several decades, pre-dating both Covid 19 and media coverage of abuse cases linked to the church.

- One factor likely to have an adverse impact on Sunday Mass attendance numbers was the increased range of entertaining activities now accessible to people.
- Some parishes have sought to make Mass more appealing in an attempt to reach out to younger people in particular. However, there was a risk that what was unique about the Mass i.e. the experience of entering a different and sacred space, would be sacrificed if the sacred liturgy was diluted. There was a risk also that this sacrifice would be made without stemming the tide of declining Mass attendance numbers.
- PPC members were invited to share Fr William's vision and his renewed focus upon St Mary's parishioners' experience of the sacred liturgy. He felt the Parish had made a very good start and could look forward to talking further steps.
- PPC members were reminded that, should they disagree with any element of Fr William's approach, they were most welcome to express their thoughts.

5. Approval of PPC 1st November 2021 minutes

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

6. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of the PPC 1st November 2021 (not itemised in the agenda)

Fr William invited PPC members to raise any actions/matters arising.

Item 8

- One member observed that, though November's PPC minutes recorded extensive review of the Parish carbon footprint, today's PPC agenda did not contain an item on this issue. The view was expressed that it would be appropriate for the Parish to develop a more systematic approach, where a clear plan would enable us to work through a list of agreed priorities and to measure progress in the way some other parishes were doing.
- It was suggested that young people in the Parish may have particularly strong interest in minimising the Parish carbon footprint and so may be most appropriate to lead on this.
- Fr William offered to put out a 'call' for such volunteer/s in the Parish bulletin. This was welcomed by a PPC member.

ACTION: Fr William to seek volunteer/s to lead on Parish carbon footprint initiatives via the Parish bulletin.

- One member raised the importance of expert advice being available to inform those leading in addressing the Parish carbon footprint. In particular, a person with knowledge and expertise on the

Parish building could be very useful. Fr William explained that currently Stephen Walker was covering this area for Philip Burnett, who had buildings maintenance expertise. Therefore, Fr William would need to liaise with Philip and, perhaps, Stephen, to seek to establish who may be able to provide such support to a volunteer leading on carbon footprint matters.

- Sheila agreed to keep in contact with Fr regarding the Parish carbon footprint so that the issue maintained prominence, relaying information on initiatives in other parishes where that was available.

Item 8, bullet point 5

Fr William stated that he was now including environmental issues within the bidding prayers regularly.

Item 8, bullet point 4

Fr William referred to the suggestion that information regarding Parish carbon footprint initiatives be displayed in the Atrium. He wondered whether, given earlier discussion within this meeting, some younger parishioners may be interested in taking responsibility for such a display.

Item 5, bullet point 3

Fr William explained that he had given thought to using pictures and images to illustrate the readings, but concluded that the proclamation of the Word should stand alone as a direct communication from God to the congregation. Fr William felt pictures and images could be appropriate within the homily, where the Priest's role is to mediate the readings so that its relevance is appreciated by the congregation. This mediating role has been described as 'breaking the Word to feed to the people'.

Item 5, bullet points 2 & 4

Fr William reflected that he did give considerable thought to his homily each week, bearing in mind the need to appeal to younger members of the congregation in Years 6 & 7.

One PPC member pointed to Fr William's success in generating younger parishioners' interest in the homily, noting that the homily style and content had sometimes prompted further discussion within the family.

Item 5, bullet point 5

Fr William assured the PPC that he had not forgotten the suggestion that he explain the purpose of different parts of the Mass. In response, a PPC member informed the meeting that this had been a feature of this term's curriculum at St Mary's School.

Item 5, bullet point 6

Fr William explained that he was involved in discussions regarding the continuation of 'children's church' for one year beyond First Holy Communion.

Item 6, bullet point 4

Regarding the suggestion that donation details be shown after the final hymn, on the grounds that many parishioners may feel more able to focus on this matter at the end of Mass, Fr William stated there was value in donation details continuing to be displayed during the Offertory, as this may be useful to parishioners wishing to donate to a second collection.

Fr William noted that he was looking into the re-introduction of cash donations, but several requirements had to be met. These included the recruitment of volunteers to count the money, to enter totals onto a spreadsheet and to take money to the bank. Additionally, access to the safe and allocation of key holders had to be arranged. He understood that purchase of a new computer would be necessary, as he had been informed that the old computer, recently retired from AV projection service, could not be re-used. Chris offered to check whether re-use of the old computer to record cash donation totals was, in fact, unfeasible.

ACTION: Chris Clissitt to check whether old computer could be re-used for recording of cash donations.

Item 7

Fr William explained that the provision of electronic voting for the recent PPC elections had been used as an opportunity to encourage parishioners not yet on the database to provide the necessary details. Though some had done so, the number was relatively low.

Chris explained that, nevertheless, Parish records held a high number of email addresses which had facilitated widespread distribution of the electronic voting opportunity for recent PPC elections.

General point

Fr William observed that he did not view the relatively few 'conclusions' reached at PPC to be problematic. Indeed, an important PPC purpose is to offer him advice upon which he may then reflect.

7. Finance Report

Fr William asked members if there were any comments or questions in relation to the written report that was distributed prior to the PPC meeting. There were none.

8. School Report

Paul Jackson informed the meeting that new house building in Knaresborough meant St Mary's School was confident it would recruit to the Trust's PAN (Published Admissions Number) target of 30. However, the proportion of new entrants who were Catholic children continued to decline. Within subsequent discussion, Paul confirmed that the decline in number of Catholic children registering for St Mary's School was in line with the lower number of baptisms that had taken place. Paul indicated that St Mary's School had been active in reaching out to families moving to Knaresborough, with the school brochure being forwarded to them via the house builders. Paul expressed the view that good communication between Fr William and the Head of St Mary's School continued to be essential in ensuring that Catholics moving into Knaresborough were contacted by St Mary's School.

Discussion highlighted St Mary's School's positive role in evangelisation. Paul stated that non-Catholic parents had been very strongly supportive of St Mary's School's Catholic values, with no parent seeking to excuse their absence from assembly or Mass. One PPC member suggested that St Mary's School's evangelical influence may extend to children of Catholic parents who had stopped practising their faith.

9. Synod 2021-23 – contributions from our Parish

Fr William spoke to a previously circulated document which captured the 'top scoring' Synod response comments of St Mary's parishioners. These acted as a good indicator of voices within the Parish. The Synod questions were focused on 'Synodality' i.e. how best to consult. Fr William referenced the 2nd Vatican Council as supportive of the view to consult as widely as possible.

Fr William noted that St Mary's parishioners had made a great response in terms of the number attending the consultation meeting. A key theme of St Mary's responses had been a desire to reach out to those currently marginalised by the Catholic church, such as those who had been divorced. Fr William stressed his intention to continue to 'welcome' all to St Mary's. He recognised also that it was incumbent on him to uphold current church teaching.

In discussion, several points were made by PPC members:

- Perhaps individual conscience may be afforded more weight in matters such as the divorced having access to Holy Communion.
- The sheer volume of feedback to the universal church may make identification of response patterns extremely challenging. Linked to this, the process by which such a huge number of parishioners' views across the world would be fed back to the universal church may result in views being filtered through the Bishops, perhaps unintentionally affording Bishops' views unduly heavy weighting.
- Study of photographs of parishes' Synod consultations highlighted the low engagement of young people in consultation meetings, including at St Mary's. A PPC member responded to this point, stating that consultation facilitators had indicated that they were actively going into schools to secure the views of children and young people. A PPC member voiced concern that the considerable 'depth' of some of the Synod consultation questions may be especially off-putting to younger people. It was also noted that young people's engagement with the Parish had been adversely impacted by Covid-19.
- A suggestion relating the greater engagement of young people was that they may enjoy operating the AV projector at Mass, given the enthusiasm the children of one PPC member had for this role.
- The Synod consultation appeared to have had very limited success in obtaining the views of those who do not come to church.
- The engagement of those not regularly coming to church represented a challenge also regarding local Parish matters. For example, the implementation of electronic voting system for the recent PPC had resulted in 25% choosing to vote, despite a much higher percentage opening the email that invited them to 'click' and vote.

- A question was raised regarding the number of parishioners continuing to celebrate Mass via livestream. Fr William confirmed that we only have data on the number of devices livestreaming Mass. This number was now significantly reduced from its peak in 'lockdown'. However, it was possible that many devices represented more than one parishioner's engagement.

10. Fundraising

Fr William expressed his enormous gratitude to the fundraising team. The team had worked with great energy and success over several years. In what everyone hoped was the start of a post-Covid restrictions era, Fr William had considered it an appropriate juncture at which to ask members of the team whether they wished to continue their work. All had expressed the view that now was the right time for them to stand down from a role that had been enjoyable and worthwhile, yet equally both challenging and time consuming

Fr William recognised that lifestyles and the national economic outlook had been changed by measures taken against Covid-19. He proposed a different model for future fundraising activity. Rather than ask a small group of parishioners to take on all events / activities, he thought that volunteers may be willing to take responsibility for a single event / activity, thus sharing the burden more broadly across the Parish and, perhaps, engaging a wider range of interests, ages and ideas across the year.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Members of the fundraising team had done a tremendous job.
- It may be very useful to facilitate donations to events / activities by all parishioners, so that those not attending / participating could nevertheless contribute to funds.
- There is sometimes a tension between a 'social' emphasis for an event / activity and a 'fundraising' emphasis. Currently, as people gradually mix again, the social element appears very important.
- Several ideas were mooted – a revival of the formerly successful 'workshop' events e.g. wreath making prior to Christmas. One PPC member noted that the Queen's platinum jubilee provided opportunity for a successful fundraising event (provided direct clashes with other local events were avoided).

11. Reminder of dates

Monday 9 May 2022

Monday 12 Sept 2022

Monday 7th November 2022

Proposed date

Monday 20 Feb 2023

12. Final Prayer

The meeting closed with a prayer.