

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Monday 9th May 2022 (rescheduled to 4th July 2022)

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

- Barbara Watson
- Vince McGurk
- Simon Stockdale
- Katie Bleasdale
- John Westmancoat

Elected

- Catherine Foster (Support)
- Teresa Britton (Liturgy)
- Angela Smith (Outreach)

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

- **Apologies:** Sheila Lund (Interaction), Richard Martin (Formation)

1. Opening Reading and Prayer

Led by Fr. William

2. Parish Priest introduction

- Fr William stated that celebration of Sunday Mass continues to be at the centre of our Parish life, with numbers in church slowly increasing. He highlighted the success of the 2022 Easter Vigil Mass, where a higher number of parishioners celebrated Mass, a new fire hymn was introduced, an adult baptism took place and Year 5 singers led the first psalm. Fr William also expressed his approval of the greater passion and conviction with which the Creed is now being professed in Mass. Overall, Fr William felt the Parish was moving strongly towards the ambition expressed at Vatican 2 for full, conscious and active participation in the Mass.
- Fr William noted a decrease in the number of children enrolled for sacramental programmes run by the Parish. He speculated that the impact of Covid-19 may play a part in this, noting that the programmes comprised a mixture of age groups. Fr William also wondered whether the decrease in numbers may be explained by fewer children wanting to join the sacramental programmes. The fact that the number of Catholic children enrolled at St Mary's School is currently falling appears to support this hypothesis. Though the number enrolled for Confirmation this year appears higher (15, in comparison to 10 last year), this apparent boost may be explained by 5 of the 15 joining our Parish programme from Bishop Thornton Parish.
- Fr William reported on the continuing support offered by Eucharistic Ministers' delivery of his weekly message together with the weekly bulletin and linked documents to parishioners without internet access and the help given to those in need by the SVP.

- Parish finances are a concern. Fr William expressed his pleasure and gratitude at the success of two recent fund-raising events, the Platinum Jubilee tea and the Bed Race café. He hoped that his invitation to individual members of the Parish to both suggest and co-ordinate or contribute to specific fund-raising events would continue to bear fruit.
- This PPC meeting's main focus is the Parish responses provided in the Synod consultation held in December 2021. Analysis of responses indicated leading themes to be those stated in italics below, in descending order of priority as determined by number of comments:

- 1) *Divorced parishioners feel marginalised and are marginalised*
- 2) *LGBT parishioners feel marginalised and are marginalised*
- 3) *We could usefully develop an effective forum for people to communicate*
- 4) *Parishioners' engagement in Mass may be supported by quiet time before Mass as preparation and quiet time after Mass for thought and prayer*

3. Apologies

As recorded above

4. Approval of PPC 21st February 2022 minutes

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

5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of the PPC 21st February 2022 (not itemised in the agenda)

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

Item 5, bullet points 2, 3 & 4

Fr William stated that he had reflected on advice regarding making the Mass more appealing to younger people. His conclusion was that he was keen to offer young people experience of the transcendent and 'other worldly'. He felt they had the capacity to appreciate this. Indeed, an attempt to compete with contemporary entertainment enjoyed by many young people may prove futile and deny them that which is unique in the Mass experience.

PPC members raised related points, as in italics below:

The engagement of our Year 5 and Year 6 children at the 29th June St Peter and St Paul school Mass appeared very strong, despite some children being unsure of some responses.

Fr William responded by saying that he may need to offer more practice regarding responses to young people attending a school Mass.

A young person undertaking one of the two readings in a school Mass may generate greater engagement from young people.

Fr William agreed this was worthy of consideration.

The return of an Offertory procession may generate greater engagement.

Fr William explained that he was moving cautiously and thoughtfully towards restoration of pre-Covid-19 practices, with support and advice from the Parish Health & Safety officer. As a result, he had recently stopped wearing a face covering when giving Holy Communion but continued to sanitise his hands. A PPC member and Eucharistic Minister confirmed that hand sanitisation before and after taking the ciborium, and prior to giving Holy Communion was undertaken by Eucharistic Ministers. Fr William stated that he had received a number of positive comments regarding the safety measures taken in the Parish since the onset of Covid-19, though he recognised that individual parishioners may hold very diverse views. The Health & Safety Officer explained that Diocesan guidance had become more limited in recent months, placing a greater decision-making burden upon individual parishes. Fr William assured the meeting that he would welcome re-introducing the Offertory procession as soon as appropriate.

Item 5, bullet point 5

Fr William explained that he had considered the suggestion that he explain the purpose of different parts of the Mass in an attempt to enhance engagement. On reflection, he felt that 'breaking into' the Mass in this way just doesn't feel appropriate. Therefore, he has instead sought to sometimes use the homily to explain the purpose of different elements of the Mass. He did appreciate that stopping for explanation at a particular point in the Mass may, on occasion, also be helpful.

Item 5, bullet point 6

Fr William confirmed that he had consulted the Parish Children's Church leader regarding extending access to Children's Church for a year following first Holy Communion. This was agreed to be a positive step. The Children's Church leader and catechists were happy to enter dialogue with parents regarding the appropriate point for individual children to move from Children's Church to full participation in the liturgy.

Item 6, bullet point 4

Fr William explained that he had given thought to moving the projection of Offertory donation details to immediately following the final hymn, where second collection donation details are currently displayed. This had been suggested by some PPC members, who thought parishioners may feel more comfortable using their mobile phones outside of the Mass itself. However, Fr William continued to have reservations, on the grounds of the practical difficulty of displaying double the amount of information required by two collections..

Fr William noted that text giving had initially risen sharply, but has subsequently declined. In part, this may be due to an increase in the number of standing orders (an increase of 4 since the previous PPC). A PPC member suggested the economic pressures now facing people may be a factor. Fr

William appreciated this, but also wondered whether it would be helpful for him to provide fresh reminders regarding the text giving process and to provide more information about the causes seeking support from donations.

Fr William explained that cash donations were now being taken again in order to offer the maximum number of donation options, despite the additional volunteer time involved in administering cash donations.

PPC members noted that some fellow parishioners and visitors to church still appeared to view use of a mobile phone in church as inappropriate. It was suggested that the 'Welcome' slide could usefully signal the online address of Fr William's weekly message both to offer access to it and indicate that use of the internet in church may be entirely appropriate.

ACTION: Fr William to provide EW schedulers with a form of words for to add to the 'Welcome' slide.

Fr William reported that Chris Clissitt had established that the current PC could be used to record cash donations.

Item 9

Fr William noted that Synod consultation responses advocated greater emphasis upon individual conscience in matters such as divorced parishioners' receipt of Holy Communion. Fr William explained that he had a duty to uphold the teachings of the church. Equally, he also recognised his responsibility to welcome all and was very happy to have conversations with those who may feel marginalised. Fr William also indicated that members of the PPC and other parishioners could also play a key role in welcoming visitors, newcomers and have conversations with those who may feel marginalised.

Item 10, bullet point 2

A PPC member noted that receipt of donations to support fund-raising events from parishioners not attending the event, but wishing to make a financial contribution nonetheless, had happened in the past. Indeed, the recent Bed Race café event had received additional monies in this way.

6. Finance Report

Fr William thanked the Chair of the Finance Committee for the report. Fr William reiterated the rationale for changing the fund-raising structure from a 'committee' model, where a small group of parishioner volunteers took responsibility for designing and running every event, to a 'whole parish' model, where individual parishioners could volunteer to take responsibility for designing and running specific events. Fr William hoped that this would both spread the load more broadly and generate greater diversity of ideas. The Platinum Jubilee tea and the Bed Race café represent the first two examples of the new model operating successfully. Fr William explained that he was keen to facilitate parishioners' creativity regarding fund-raising initiatives, though appreciated that offering parishioners' suggestions also had a part to play.

One PPC member suggested that the identification of a 'co-ordinator' as the focal point would be very helpful step so that a group of individual parishioners volunteering to take responsibility for a single fund-raising event had an organisational focal point.

PPC members raised several suggestions for further fund-raising events, including a jazz & tapas evening and a Christmas raffle.

7. School Report

Katie Bleasdale informed Council that St Mary's School numbers were continuing to slowly grow towards target. In response to a PPC member's question, Katie explained that many newcomers were non-Catholics.

8. Synod 2021-23 – continuing to listen to contributions from our Parish (Synod consultation questions in italics below)

Who are the marginalised and why?

- Fr William explained that he had used the homily to stress that all Christians belonged to Christ. He had explicitly mentioned 'married, single or divorced, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or straight'.
- Fr William reiterated that he also had a responsibility to uphold the teachings of the church and understood that some parishioners found church rules on full sacramental participation to be painful.
- Fr William reminded members that an important purpose of the Synod consultation was to synthesise views and feeling from across the global church and it was possible that consideration of these could lead to revisions in aspects of church discipline and practice.
- Fr William considered how we may reach out to those in a marginalised category. He asked members their views regarding the possibility of extending an invitation to dialogue to specific categories suggested were marginalised by Parish Synod responses .

In discussion, several points were made by PPC members:

- One PPC member wondered whether representatives of at least some categories could be reached within normal church communication – the nature and extent of their marginalisation may be such that they are disconnected from Mass or church communications. Illustrating this, a PPC member made the point that Synod responses had not signalled young people to be a marginalised category, yet this may well reflect the involvement of very few young people at the Synod consultation event, itself perhaps indicative of marginalisation.
- One PPC member focused upon the impact of church teaching regarding denial of access to Holy Communion for divorced parishioners, suggesting that it was possible many had felt so marginalised that they left the Catholic church to become members of the Church of England.
- One PPC member warned of the risk of inadvertent tokenism in targeting a marginalised 'category'. It was suggested that an across the board welcome / invitation would appear more authentic and be more effective.

- One PPC member identified some ambiguity in the Synod question relating to marginalisation, whereby some parishioners may have responded with a focus upon societal marginalisation and others with a focus on parish marginalisation.
- Fr William concluded that discussion pointed away from targeting categories of the marginalised and towards a broader, sincere invitation to hold dialogue with him, with other parishioners or with St Mary' School staff, as felt appropriate by those with points to make or concerns to express.
- Fr William informed Council that he had held a reconciliation service, but only 7 people were present.

How can everybody be encouraged to communicate appropriately? What is important to them?

One PPC member suggested that parishioners may attend a reconciliation service or confession at different churches in the Deanery, because arrangements varied – for example, some parishioners had expressed a desire to make their confession within the traditional confessional 'box'.

How might I be better able to participate in Mass and other religious service?

- Fr William stated that 17 parishioners had reported that having some quiet preparation time prior to Mass would be helpful. 10 parishioners had reported that some quiet time for prayer at the end of Mass would be helpful.
- PPC members suggested that music and lighting be left on until all parishioners had chosen to leave church at the end of Mass, to avoid inadvertently appearing to indicate that the church was to 'close' at the point Mass had ended.
- Fr William asked members whether that felt it would be helpful to remind parishioners of his suggestion that they read the Mass readings prior to attendance at Mass. It was agreed that a reminder would be worthwhile.
- Fr William explained that he found children to be very attentive in Mass. He felt that they benefited when the Word was communicated with clarity and conviction.

9. Inclusivity signage

Angela Smith reported that a questionnaire had been received from the Diocese via the Caritas organisation. This has prompted thought and action. We now have a 'welcome' sign and a 'welcome' within the weekly bulletin. Access issues have been examined and signage issues have arisen. Specifically, there is a need to ensure wheelchair users are directed to the Church Lane entrance through appropriate signage at the Bond End entry to Church Lane and at the car park / garden entrances. Such signage could also provide information on the website and Mass times. Additionally, it had been noted that appropriate signage could help newcomers avoid confusing the Parish Hall entrance with the entrance to the Church itself. The Atrium could usefully signpost baby changing and accessible toilet facilities. Some research had already been undertaken to identify local firms and the most appropriate materials to progress the signage aspirations.

Angela made a related Health & Safety point, suggesting that we should ensure that the car park surface is maintained so it is sufficiently smooth for wheelchair use.

10. Thank you to those completing terms of service

Fr William expressed his gratitude for the service of Paul Jackson, Chris Clissitt and Fran Watson, all of whom had reached the end of their terms.

Additionally, PPC members were informed that Barbara Watson was now stepping down from the PPC, as family circumstances had determined she would have to spend considerable time away from the UK.

11. Reminder of dates

Monday 12th Sept 2022
Monday 7th November 2022
Monday 20th Feb 2023

Proposed date

Monday 8th May 2023

12. Final Prayer

The meeting closed with a prayer.