

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Monday 7th November 2022

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

- Katie Bleasdale
- John Westmancoat
- Janet Holliday

Elected

- Angela Smith (Outreach)
- Richard Martin (Formation)
- Teresa Britton (Liturgy)

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

- **Apologies:** Sheila Lund (Interaction), Vince McGurk, Simon Stockdale

1. Opening Reading and Prayer

Led by Fr. William

2. Apologies

As recorded above

3. Parish Priest introduction

I continue to be inspired by the call of Pope Francis to a 'serious and dynamic liturgical formation' for the church. Formation in the Christian context means our ongoing growth, instruction and development. To give you an example, the preparation courses we put on for our young people leading up to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, eucharist, reconciliation are all prime examples of formation. Formation for us as Christians isn't just for sacramental preparation. It's a lifelong project. We are called to ongoing formation throughout our lives. And now Pope Francis has put out this call to the whole church. He writes 'We are in need of a serious and dynamic liturgical formation'.

It's a call that is not new. The Second Vatican Council has been calling us to a liturgical renewal since 1965, a liturgical renewal that is often summed up in the call to 'full, conscious and active participation'. What Pope Francis is saying is that unless we intentionally go about instructing our parish communities in the celebration of the liturgy, then the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council might just remain an aspiration never really fulfilled.

So, that's exactly what we have done in St Mary's. We have embarked on this serious and dynamic liturgical formation that Pope Francis calls us to. Our liturgical formation is grounded in the teaching

of the Second Vatican Council, and following the guidance of Pope Francis. But at the same time we're taking this reform at a slow and gradual pace. We're being sensitive to what parishioners have been used to, probably for most of their lives. And while there is scope for some variation between parishes, we're also being careful not to be too out of step with other parishes. Returning to kneeling for the Eucharistic Prayer is an example of this. The discussions we had in the September council were very helpful. I was all for continuing with standing for the Eucharistic Prayer, and building on this, building our full, conscious and active participation on this more active posture. But the discussions we had in September persuaded me to pull back on this for the sake of togetherness across the other parishes. I think 'full, conscious and active participation' will be more difficult when kneeling, and it also seems to go against what Francis is calling for: everybody – priest and congregation – doing the same thing at the same time. But I think on balance we now stick with kneeling and maximise participation within this limit.

We have also, as I mentioned, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal to keep in mind, a document drawn up in 1969 four years after the council. For whatever reason, and we can speculate what those reasons might have been, it seems to place restrictions on the 'full participation' called for in the council. So we have Francis wanting to put his foot on the accelerator, and other forces in the church wanting to put the brakes on. As I'm sure you can tell I'm very much with Francis. But I can also see good reasons for putting on the breaks a bit too and our discussions in council have been very helpful and very much appreciated.

What motivates me above all to embrace these reforms, for example 'full, conscious and active participation' is two fold. First because I believe the Spirit is trying to lead us in this direction, that it is the Spirit speaking to the church through the Second Vatican council. The second motivation is an existential one. If the church doesn't rediscover the priesthood of the laity, if the church doesn't rediscover full, conscious and active participation in the celebration of the liturgy, the church seems set to continue its slow decline. The diocese of Portsmouth has just recorded 35% drop in baptisms, 40% drop in confirmations, and a 44% fall in Mass participation since 2019. This pattern is typical of dioceses around the country and in western Europe as a whole. The pandemic may have contributed to this decline, but it's a downward pattern that predates the covid pandemic, a downward trend that, well who knows where it will end.

If on the other hand we do rediscover the priesthood of the laity, if we do rediscover the full, conscious and active participation called for in the Second Vatican council, then the church will begin to awaken to new life. Our generation and the younger generation are no longer motivated by the obligation to come to mass or fear of mortal sin if they don't. People will only keep coming back for more if the celebration of the liturgy, particularly the Mass, is a truly meaningful experience. They will keep coming back for more only if they experience the liturgy of the word as a dialogue between God and his people, if they experience the liturgy of the eucharist as a sacrifice in which they offer themselves with Christ to the Father.

And what Francis says about symbols is key this. 'The challenge is extremely demanding' writes Francis 'because modern people have lost the capacity to engage with symbolic action, which is the essential trait of the liturgical act'. (DD27). He's inviting us to rediscover the capacity to rediscover our capacity to engage with symbolic action, so essential for a truly liturgical experience. I want for you, for our parish, for the church, what Francis wants. 'With this letter' he writes 'I simply want to invite the whole church to rediscover the power of the Christian celebration of the liturgy.' (DD16)

Let me mention two other items on the agenda. Elevating Sunday as the Day of the Lord. And Celebrating the Christmas Octave. These two aspirations are also motivated by the church's ongoing

project of reform. It's one of the church's mottos attributed to St Augustine: *semper reformanda* – the church always needing to be reformed.

In April 2021, shortly after covid restrictions were lifted, the bishops of E&W put out a document called 'The Day of the Lord'. It had two closely related objectives: a) to call people back to mass because people didn't seem to be coming back after the restrictions had been lifted, and b) to recover in our minds the centrality of Sunday itself as the Day of the Lord. Maybe I didn't make enough of this document at the time. Have we lost our sense of Sunday as the Day of the Lord? Do we still think of Sunday as the Day of the Lord? We even talk about it now as the 'weekend'. See you at the weekend, instead of see you on Sunday. We talk about weekend masses rather than Sunday masses. Introducing an extra Sunday mass on Saturday evenings as we did back in the 1970s has been an important and much appreciated pastoral provision. But it means we've got to do the mental gymnastics to remember that it's a Sunday mass and not a Saturday mass or even a weekend mass. How can we help recover our parish awareness of Sunday, and restore it, and even elevate, it as the Day of the Lord?

And celebrating the Christmas Octave. Bishop Marcus has encouraged us to observe the whole Christmas Octave with masses throughout the eight days. How can we best respond to this in our celebration of the liturgy, and maybe in our apres liturgy celebrations too, during the Octave, or by extension in the Christmas season as a whole?

4. Approval of minutes of PPC meeting 12th Sept 2022

The use of the phrase 'talked to a hard copy' in item 9 'Inclusivity' was accepted after clarification. A typographical error was noted in 'Synod 2021-3 (item 8)'. It was agreed that the word 'not' in paragraph 2, line 4 be deleted.

5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of PPC 12th September 2022 not itemised in the agenda

Item 6_PPC 12th Sept 2022

Item 5, bullet points 2, 3 & 4 PPC 9th May (re-scheduled to 4th July) 2022

Fr William stated that he had reflected carefully upon the suggestion that a young person deliver one of the readings. He explained that he understood the Mass to involve two different dynamics, 'receiving' and 'responding'. He had concluded that it was important for children and young people to 'receive' the Word, in which God was speaking to them. The commissioned Ministers of the Word were acting as the 'mouthpiece' of God. He considered it to be appropriate for children and young people to lead a 'response' in Mass, for example, to lead the Psalm.

A PPC member put the view that, perhaps, young people could be commissioned as Ministers of the Word as they may command greater attention from young people in the congregation. Fr William accepted this, yet, on balance, felt children and young people would benefit more from 'receiving' the Word. He acknowledged that there was a decision as to where to set boundaries that determined different roles for children, young people and adults. Fr William considered it appropriate for children to participate as servers and acolytes until yr 11 and, from yr 13, to act as bidding prayer leaders. As young people approach adulthood and so become 'settled into life' then, where appropriate, being

commissioned as Ministers of the Word appeared sensible. Fr William made the wider point that as the Parish works towards parishioners being more actively engaged in the Mass, the sense of greater involvement should benefit children and young people as well as older parishioners.

Fr William referred to the suggestion made at the 12th Sept 2022 PPC that a gesture be invited from the whole congregation at the Offertory. Fr William recalled that this approach had been trialed in the Easter season several years ago when the congregation stood at the Offertory. He felt that the more passive postures of sitting, or kneeling, rendered hand gestures less 'natural'. Fr William considered that the current practice at the 10.00am Sunday Mass, where children stood and made the gesture on behalf of the entire congregation, was effective.

A PPC member raised the question of gifts being brought within the Offertory. Fr William stated that this had not yet been reintroduced following implementation of Covid measures. However, the children did process from the back of the church to form a row in front of the altar. Fr William stressed that he was keen to re-introduce the bringing of gifts and stated that the Health & Safety Officer had confirmed that this could be done in a Covid secure manner. Fr William explained that he needed to arrange for hand sanitisation facilities to be available and ensure a suitable table was put in place.

ACTION: Fr William to arrange for safe offering of gifts at the Offertory by making available hand sanitisation facilities and ensuring a suitable table is in place.

Fr William felt that it was not appropriate to encourage the kneeling congregation to make a gesture during the Eucharistic Prayer. However, he planned to offer frequent and gentle encouragement to watch actions at the ambo and the altar.

Fr William asked for PPC members' feedback on his recent explanation of the early church origins of the priest's greeting at the start of Mass to congregations at Sunday Masses i.e. 'The Lord be with you' and the congregation response, 'And with your spirit'. PPC members' view was that Fr William's explanation had had a very positive effect, as it was a powerful means of deepening understanding. One PPC member considered that the legacy of previous practice meant it was proving more difficult to encourage parishioners to watch the actions during the Eucharistic Prayer. A PPC member observed that the typically younger demographic of the Sunday 10.00am Mass appeared to have led to a higher proportion of the congregation watching the actions during the Eucharistic Prayer, perhaps confirming that older parishioners were inhibited by the teaching they received.

Fr William intended to provide frequent and gentle reminders, over several consecutive Sundays at each Sunday Mass, to reinforce the message regarding watching and bowing at appropriate junctures within the Eucharistic Prayer as widely as possible.

Item 8 - PPC 9th May (re-scheduled to 4th July) 2022

Fr William commended PPC members' advice at the September 2022 PPC, regarding the possibility of parishioners adopting a pastoral role within the parish community. He recalled that the issue of training to ensure appropriate safeguarding practice had been raised at that PPC. Fr William had since had dialogue with the Diocese and established that such training was not available. After considering PPC and Diocesan advice, Fr William had decided to continue to limit a formal counselling role to the parish priest. Fr William explained that informal support offered by parishioners to other parishioners was, of course, still very welcome. Where further intervention was considered

necessary, Fr William was happy for matters of concern to be referred to him. Fr William informed the PPC that had recently added a parish telephone number to his cell phone.

Item 7 - PPC 12th Sept 2022

Janet Holliday explained that concerns regarding ambo microphone audibility appeared to have been resolved by turning the volume up to number 7. It was agreed that the situation continue to be monitored over the next few weeks. Fr William expressed his gratitude to Janet.

One PPC member commented that the speed at which some Ministers of the Word read appeared to be another factor that negatively impacted clarity of reception for some in the congregation. It was suggested that, perhaps, some Ministers of the Word did not realise that they were reading rather quickly. A second PPC member suggested that this could be because some Ministers of the Word may be affected by nerves. It was suggested that Ministers of the Word could be encouraged to be less concerned about making errors, which would occur inevitably to all on occasion. Rather, Ministers of the Word should be encouraged to focus more on a slower reading speed.

6. Pope Francis on the Liturgy

Fr William introduced this agenda item by outlining Pope Francis' teaching on the value and purpose of 'liturgical silence'. Fr William cited two periods of silence that occur within Mass, firstly when the priest sits after the homily and, secondly, when the priest sits after Holy Communion. Pope Francis had observed that 'outer silence' and 'inner silence' were relevant dimensions of silence. The concept of 'inner silence' meant both priest and congregation could simply sit silently as a form of recognition that the Mass had reached a significant 'point of arrival'. Fr William was keen to explain to the congregation the legitimacy of such 'inner silence' at points within the Mass.

Fr William explained Pope Francis' teaching that Jesus Christ wishes the congregation to feel his desire that they share the Passover with him. Fr William asked PPC members for advice as to whether he should explain this to the congregation. Two PPC members voiced strong support for Fr William to do this.

7. School Report

Katie reported that a Trust review, which may be described as a 'mini-Ofsted', had taken place at St Mary's School the previous week. The review was not focused on religious education, but covered general matters such as children's behaviour, children's attitude towards learning, teaching quality and the meeting of children's individual needs. The review's outcome had been very positive.

Katie clarified that as Paul Jackson now sits on the Trust-wide Board, it is no longer tenable for him to sit on the Academy Council.

In response to questions from PPC members, Katie made the following points:

- GRT was shorthand for Gypsy Roma and Traveller;
- The smaller number of Catholic children at St Mary's School was a factor that managers and leaders were aware of, rather than something that was a 'worry'. The school continued to play an important missionary role by introducing some children to the Catholic faith, worship and

living by Gospel values. Indeed, the school hoped that non-Catholic children's introduction to Catholic worship would encourage some of these children and their parents to attend Mass as a family;

- No parents had exercised their right to withdraw their children from Mass or other religious learning or experience;
- Children participated actively and with enthusiasm to planning and practice for acts of worship (singing, reading etc).

9. Celebration of Christmas Octave

Liturgical celebrations

Fr William introduced this item by reference to 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic was the trigger for the church to emphasise that the obligation to attend Christmas Day Mass may be fulfilled by celebrating Mass on one of the days of the Octave. The intention was to spread the number of parishioners attending Mass across Octave days so smaller congregation numbers would further reduce the Covid-19 infection risk at each Mass. Fr William explained that, though the 2020 church initiative was Covid-19 related, it was important to note that the Christmas Octave also formed part of our heritage. Therefore, we may continue to view liturgical and non-liturgical elements of Christmas within the context of the Octave.

Fr William also asked for PPC advice on whether it was necessary to retain the Christmas Day 8.00am Mass, as the Octave now offered a wider range of Mass dates and times from which parishioners could choose.

Fr William shared the Octave of Christmas bulletin for 2021 with PPC members. Views expressed are below:

- Several PPC members commented positively on the additional flexibility offered by the Octave, enabling family and church commitments to be fulfilled with more flexibility;
- Two PPC members, one of whom had regularly attended the 8.00am Christmas Day Mass, pointed to the strong attendance at that Mass, but did agree that the range of choice offered by the Octave meant that parishioners was such that the 8.00.am Christmas Day Mass could reasonably be withdrawn;
- One PPC member considered that parishioners may need explanation and information as to how the validity of the Octave's greater flexibility regarding Christmas Mass attendance was not limited to the period of severe Covid-19 restrictions. Additionally, people's Christmas plans were often set well in advance and so explicit communication regarding the Christmas Octave needed to be provided well in advance of the Christmas season;
- One PPC member suggested that a Mass held during daylight within the Christmas Octave may be beneficial for older people who may have concerns about leaving home in cold weather and darkness. Fr William confirmed that there were no restrictions regarding the times of Masses on Christmas Octave dates;

- One PPC member recalled the importance and spiritual value that they attached to the Christmas Octave Holy Family Mass in childhood, scheduled for Friday in this year's Christmas Octave;
- One PPC member put the view that evening Masses may not be easy for children and parents and wondered whether a daytime family Mass may enable more families to attend;
- One PPC member asked whether it was intended that each Mass continued to be livestreamed;
- One PPC member noted that St Mary's had for a long period offered a 4.30pm Christmas Eve Mass, but that this had been discontinued.

Fr William's response

Fr William addressed views and points raised:

- Fr William proposed to retain the 8.00am Christmas Day Mass for 2022, but to signal its possible withdrawal from the 2023 schedule;
- Fr William felt it would not be appropriate to re-introduce the 4.30pm Christmas Eve mass as church had often been very full for this and Covid-19 remained an issue. Additionally, parts of the church floor were in a less than ideal state of repair. Above all he felt that the Christmas Octave allowed us to offer parents and children an opportunity to celebrate Mass together within the Christmas Season
- Fr William stated that he remained in favour of continuing to offer livestreaming of each Mass;
- Fr William stated he was happy to work with the view that the family Mass within the Octave was valuable and asked for views on the date and timing.

PPC members considered factors such as daylight, bank holidays, the rhythm of family life and likelihood of parental work commitments. The Saturday of the Octave, 26th December and 27th December were dates discussed. A consensus emerged that 11.00am on Tues 27th Dec was most suitable. There was the possibility of offering refreshments, such as hot dogs. Katie agreed to promote this mass at St Mary's School.

Non-liturgical celebrations

Fr William recalled that a jazz evening had been suggested at a previous PPC and wondered whether this could be run during the Christmas Season. PPC members reported that Sheila Lund, who had sent apologies to this meeting, was still in the process of exploring the feasibility of such an event. It was felt that Christmas may prove a difficult period in terms of availability of key people.

ACTION: Fr William to explain the Christmas Octave and the additional opportunities it will provide to celebrate a Christmas Mass and to signal to parishioners that the Christmas Day 8.00am Mass may be withdrawn in 2023. Fr William to promote the Christmas Children's mass scheduled for 27th December.

11. Reminder of dates

Monday 7th November 2022

Monday 20th Feb 2023

Monday 8th May 2023

Proposed date

Monday 11th September 2023

12. Glory be

The meeting closed with a prayer.