

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Monday 20th February 2023

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

- Katie Bleasdale
- John Westmancoat
- Janet Holliday
- Vince McGurk
- Malachy Stockdale

Elected

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

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

1. Scripture Reading and Prayer

Led by Fr. William

2. Welcome & Apologies

Fr William welcomed Sarah McCann (Liturgy) to the PPC.

No apologies were for absence were received.

3. Parish Priest introduction

In addition to our celebration of Sunday together, which is always the core of our parish life, there are a lot of other things to be thankful for since our last PPC meeting in November.

During Advent we had the annual training and commissioning of our Ministers of the Word, with Sarah McCann and Will Cook joining this ministry.

During November and December 11 young members of the parish completed their preparation course for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and have now started celebrating this sacrament.

In January 9 young members of the parish completed their long 15 session preparation course for the Sacrament of Confirmation. They were confirmed by Bishop Marcus in St Roberts earlier this month.

Also earlier this month we had the annual elections to the PPC which in the last two years has given everybody on the parish database the opportunity to vote, and not just those who turn up to mass on a particular Sunday, as we used to do it.

And all the other great things that go on.

The work of the SVP and their ongoing support to those in the parish needing their support.

The ministry of our Eucharistic Ministers who take communion to the housebound. Several of the housebound are now set up and celebrating mass with us online in the safety of their homes. Communion is then brought to them from that mass by a Eucharistic Minister.

The work of our Parish Hall, supporting HK Toy Library and other activities, under the leadership of our new Hall Manager.

The ongoing success of our 200 club with the monthly draw now viewable in action online.

The ongoing support of our International Outreach programme.

And all the other charitable giving beyond the needs of the parish to the wider world.

And I'm sure there are other great things going on that I haven't listed.

In the last PPC meeting in November we did a lot of work on the celebration of the Liturgy, informed by the recent Letter of Pope Francis on the celebration of the Liturgy, for which much thanks to yourselves. I haven't yet taken this any further with the parish, partly because I'd just done several Sundays with the parish on this and felt it was time for a break and to talk about other things; and partly because I think there's something to be said for having a specific season dedicated to something like this and focussing on it for a season. So the plan is to focus again on this 'liturgical formation' during Lent, which is just about to break upon us, with a view to gradually enhancing our celebration of the liturgy for when we get to Easter. So it also gives us a goal.

Why am I so determined to respond to this reform called for by the Second Vatican Council and now by Pope Francis? Because I think that unless we do respond to this, the church will continue to decline and die.

And this actually is the motivation behind many of the reforms I've been striving for in the parish – recovering the word Liturgy for what it really means; reserving both the Ambo and the Altar for their specific liturgical functions; promoting our awareness of Sunday as the Lord's day, rather than just the secular concept of 'weekend'; recovering the full experience of the Church's seasons, especially Advent and Christmas which in

the secular world have become almost completely blurred with each other. I appreciate the changes I make are not always comfortable at the outset, but my concern is for the long term life of the parish and the long term life of the church as a whole.

4. Approval of minutes of PPC meeting 9th Nov 2022

Three amendments were agreed.

Item 5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of PPC 12th September 2022

Item 6

Fourth line down – words ‘the liturgy of’ within phrase ‘the liturgy of the Word’ to be deleted

Item 5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of PPC 12th September 2022

Item 6 - eight lines above the heading ‘Item 8’ – delete the words ‘traditional teaching’ and replace with the words ‘previous practice’

Item 9. Celebration of Christmas Octave

Two lines from the end of this item - delete the words ‘Children’s Christmas’ and insert the words ‘Christmas Children’s’

5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of PPC 9th November 2022 not itemised in the agenda

Fr William updated PPC members on progress regarding actions/intentions below:

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

‘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’. This action had been completed;

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

‘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’. Fr William is to undertake this during Lent;

Item 6 Pope Francis on the Liturgy

Final line of first paragraph - *'Fr William was keen to explain to the congregation the legitimacy of such 'inner silence' at points within the Mass'*. Fr William is to undertake this during Lent;

First line of second paragraph *'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 is to explain this to congregations during Lent;

Item 9 Celebration of Christmas Octave 9th bullet point

'Fr William proposed to retain the 8.00am Christmas Dawn Mass for 2022, but to signal its possible withdrawal from the 2023 schedule'. Fr William had, after reflection, now decided not to withdraw the 8.00am Christmas Dawn Mass from the 2023 schedule.

Item 11 'Reminder of Dates'

A PPC member pointed out that 8th May 2023 is now scheduled to be a Bank Holiday to celebrate King Charles' coronation. It was suggested that the PPC meeting set currently for 8th May be re-scheduled. It was agreed that the PPC May meeting be held instead on 15th May 2023.

ACTION: In Masses during Lent, Fr William to explain to the congregation the legitimacy of such 'inner silence' at points within the Mass'.

ACTION: In Masses during Lent, Fr William to explain Pope Francis' teaching that Jesus Christ wishes the congregation to feel his desire that they share the Passover with him'.

6. Pope Francis and the call to 'liturgical formation'

Fr William explained that he intended to offer 'frequent and gentle' reminders to the congregation to watch throughout the eucharistic prayer, bowing at appropriate points. He also intended to seek to convey the value of 'inner silence' at appropriate points of the Mass, specifically after the homily and after receipt of Holy Communion. Such an 'inner silence' would offer all celebrating Mass freedom from any obligation to either do or think anything. Fr William explained that this approach reflected Pope Francis' view that these parts of the Mass marked important points of 'arrival', which could be recognised appropriately by sitting in silence for a short period.

A PPC member suggested that it would be helpful for Fr William to provide a reminder of the rationale for, and benefit of, a period of 'inner silence' at the close of the homily.

Two PPC members endorsed this suggestion, adding that a verbal explanation from Fr William felt more appropriate than use of the AV system.

Fr William asked PPC members for their view of the value of playing *Allegrì Miserere* when the priest sits at the close of the homily. Several PPC members felt that the music inclined those celebrating Mass to reflect. One PPC member felt the music had a positive effect, as it 'bridged the gap' between homily and bidding prayers. Fr William explained that he would like parishioners to be aware that they were free to simply sit in silence without any requirement to consciously reflect or think.

A PPC member noted the relatively recent change to defer the hymn at Holy Communion in the 10.00am Sunday Mass until after receipt of Holy Communion. Another PPC member stated that her children enjoyed singing the Holy Communion hymn. Fr William explained that the practice of deferring singing of the hymn until after the procession was introduced originally as a Covid-19 safety measure to reduce risk of airborne transmission within the procession. A practice of processing to the background of the hymn in instrumental form had evolved, with singing of the hymn taking place after the procession. Fr William felt this worked well and was worthy of continuation. Fr William endorsed the current practice of a short Holy Communion hymn (typically a couple of verses), with a subsequent period of 'inner silence'.

Fr William stressed that his advocacy of 'inner silence' at points of the Mass was not compromised by the noise created occasionally by young children at Mass. He felt that parents managed such situations very well and was very appreciative of their efforts.

Fr William referred to Pope Francis' wish to fulfil Jesus' 'desire', expressed at the Last Supper, to 'share the Passover' with his followers. Fr William explained that Jesus' desire would be fulfilled where all celebrating Mass both watched the liturgical actions of the Eucharistic Prayer and listened to the priest. However, Fr William sensed that, following a return to kneeling rather than standing during the Eucharistic Prayer, fewer parishioners now watched when the priest acted *In Persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). Fr William explained that he understood how a kneeling posture tended to incline the congregation's eyes downwards. He wondered also whether the legacy of previous practice led some parishioners to feel the moment was too sacred for them to look up.

PPC members made the observations below:

- Fr William may find it necessary to re-iterate encouragement for the congregation to 'watch throughout' because changing habits takes time and would be supported by his frequent, gentle reminders at each of the Sunday Masses across some weeks and months, including a reminder to the congregation of the legitimacy of 'watching throughout';

- Could Fr William's encouragement to watch be highlighted on the weekly bulletin, in a gentle and encouraging tone? Though projection via the AV system at Mass could convey the same message, the PPC member felt that this would feel unduly directive and intrusive;
- Previous practice was likely to have had significant impact upon older parishioners, creating a sense of discomfort for some at the idea of watching rather than looking down;
- Parishioners who looked down, rather than watched, may, nevertheless, be 'participating' in the Mass;
- We could consider seeking the views of congregations at different Masses regarding their preference for standing or kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer;
- It would be unwise to encourage parishioners to either stand or kneel by individual preference as this would undermine 'united' action by the congregation. *Fr William responded by recalling a recent holiday in Bosnia, where he attended a Mass in which individual parishioners chose whether to kneel or stand.*
- Encouraging individual parishioners to choose whether to stand or kneel, or perhaps sit, during the Eucharistic Prayer could block sight lines for some members of the congregation;
- Having already piloted standing for a period, we could undertake a survey of parishioners' views on standing or kneeling;
- The main focus should be on increasing the number coming to Mass, rather than the nature of their participation;
- Was the decision to stand or kneel one that could legitimately be taken a Parish level, rather than by the Bishop. *Fr William responded by explaining that, though the GIRM (General Instruction of the Roman Missal) did place some limits on 'full and active participation', it did not prescribe whether to kneel or stand at particular moments in the Mass;*
- Did Fr William have knowledge of practices at other parishes? *Fr William answered that he did not have knowledge of kneeling / standing practices during the Eucharistic prayer at other parishes. He did think it quite possible that Pope Francis' recent letter may prompt other parishes to consider adopting reforms such as those piloted at St Mary's. Fr William acknowledged the importance of 'togetherness' between parishes, as well as within the congregation at Mass;*
- It would be wise to canvas opinion of the congregation at any Mass where standing may be re-introduced. *Fr William considered this good advice;*

- Some parishioners may be very unhappy about a re-introduction of standing. Two parishioners had cited the change to standing for the period of the pilot as their reason for not returning to St Mary's post Covid 19. Fr William wondered whether offering the option to sit during the Eucharistic Prayer would be helpful in facilitating the watching of symbolic actions. A PPC member thought that this would create sight line issues. *In response, Fr William suggested those inclined to sit could choose to position themselves at the front of the church. The PPC member thought that many people found it more comfortable to always celebrate Mass from the same seat / part of the church;*

In summing up, Fr William expressed his inclination to stay with the current practice of kneeling. He intended to give further thought to the potential re-introduction of standing during the Eucharistic Prayer at one of the Sunday Masses, perhaps the 5.00pm Mass.

ACTION. Fr William to provide explanation and gentle reminders in Masses during Lent and review at the May 2023 PPC. Fr William explained that he would seek to strike a tone whereby his reminders and gentle encouragement to watch throughout the Eucharistic Prayer (bowing at appropriate points) would be interpreted as liberating, giving 'permission' rather than 'imposing'. He explained that watching as well as listening meant the congregation's encounter with God was through both words and symbolic actions.

ACTION. Fr William to give further thought to the potential re-introduction of standing during the Eucharistic Prayer at one of the Sunday Masses, perhaps the 5.00pm Mass.

7. School Report

Katie Bleasdale referred PPC members to her written report, explaining that HLTA was an abbreviation of Higher Level Teaching Assistant and BWART an abbreviation of Bishop Wheeler Academy Trust.

9. Parishioner submissions

Two written submissions had been received, both of which requested the PPC consider re-instatement of a Christmas Eve Christmas Children's Mass at St Mary's.

Fr William provided some contextual background regarding the date and timing of the Christmas Children's Mass. In previous years when the Christmas Children's Mass had been held on Christmas Eve at 4.30pm the number of people celebrating Mass was very high, with many of these unaccompanied adults. This had raised concerns about safety.

Regarding the change made in 2022, Fr William expressed the view that the Christmas Children's Mass, held on the third day of the 2022 Christmas Octave, had been 'beautiful' and underlined the continuation of Christmas beyond Christmas Day. He felt that the number celebrating Mass was encouraging, especially considering that setting the Christmas Children's Mass within the Octave was a new initiative in 2022. Fr William received positive feedback from those who celebrated this Mass. A parishioner commented that the Octave Masses played a very positive role because the period between Christmas and New Year no longer felt like a 'no man's land'.

Fr William explained that he was comfortable that other parishes may choose to operate differently. Where they chose to offer a Christmas Eve Mass, this provided more choice for people.

Fr William thought it important that we support and promote the opportunities to celebrate Mass within the Christmas Octave. He acknowledged that this was a change and so would need both time and encouragement to grow in terms of knowledge, understanding and acceptance.

PPC members made a variety of observations, which are summarised below:

- Two PPC members had celebrated the 2022 Christmas Children's Mass within the Octave and agreed it had been a most positive experience;
- Fr William had made a clear and strong spiritual case for siting the Christmas Children's Mass within the Octave. However, many adults, parents and children appear to have a strong emotional connection to a Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve, perhaps partly as Mass then sits within the period of children's excited anticipation of Christmas;
- The lure of the Christmas Eve Mass may, for some adults, be rooted in convenience. This may partly explain the high number of unaccompanied adults celebrating this Mass in previous years;
- The number of unaccompanied adults at the Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve in previous years may be, in part, due to older parishioners wishing to attend a Mass during the afternoon when weather conditions are typically less severe and they can celebrate Mass with the children of the parish;
- The timing of a Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve should take account of the desire of many families to attend the 6.00pm Christmas Eve Knaresborough Nativity play in the market square;
- We should consider the overall number of Masses we are expecting one priest to celebrate each Christmas. Therefore, were the Christmas Children's Mass to again take place on Christmas Eve, would it be wise to consider deleting the Dawn Christmas Day 8.00am Mass?;

- We need to be mindful of losing parishioners to other parishes, where there is a Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve;
- The safety concern regarding numbers celebrating a Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve could be addressed by introduction of a ticketing policy;
- We could consider offering a Christmas Eve Mass for all parishioners, with a specific Christmas Children's Mass set, as in 2022, within the Octave;
- It is important that the date set for a Christmas Children's Mass within the Octave take account of bank holidays and common return to work dates for parents;
- Where St Mary's parishioners exercised choice and celebrated Christmas Eve Mass at another parish, typically they would much rather have celebrated Mass on Christmas Eve at St Mary's;
- One parishioner's submission had seen children 'dressed as Mary, Joseph and Shepherds' at another parish's Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve and implied this was a positive feature. Is this something we could incorporate in a St Mary's Christmas Children's Mass?

10. Date for Easter Children's Mass 2023 and Date for Christmas Children's Mass 2023-24

Fr William noted that Christmas Eve 2023 fell on Sunday 24th December, which is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Therefore, there will be a 5.00pm Sunday Mass on Christmas Eve. Fr William thought this illustrated the necessity for the Church to maintain the boundary between Advent and Christmas.

One PPC member, who had expressed support for the re-instatement of the Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve, asked that their disappointment at this decision be noted.

We ran out of time to discuss dates for Easter Children's Mass and Christmas Children's Mass so this consultation was deferred.

12. Reminder of dates

Monday 15th May 2023 (revised date)

Monday 11th September 2023

Monday 6th November 2023

Proposed date

Monday 19th February 2024

13. Thanks and Prayer

Fr William expressed his gratitude to Simon Stockdale and Teresa Britton, who had both now completed their term of service to the PPC.

The meeting closed with a prayer.