

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Minutes of meeting Monday 15th May 2023

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

- Katie Bleasdale
- 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

Apologies were received from Vince McGurk, John Westmancoat and Janet Holliday.

3. Parish Priest introduction

Fr William invited PPC members to comment and respond to his introductory remarks regarding 'liturgical formation'. The following views were expressed by PPC members:

- Experience at other churches had indicated that 'not watching' during the Eucharistic Prayer remained common practice;
- Fr William's use of the homily to explain and illustrate the liturgy had been 'very powerful', with silent and attentive congregations as testament to this;

- Fr William had succeeded in building a narrative within the homily, partly by linking a homily to those of previous weeks;
- Fr William's explanation of the rationale behind his invitation to 'watch' during the Eucharistic Prayer had been very effective. His approach of offering 'permission' to watch had been 'compelling';
- Permission to 'watch' during the Eucharistic Prayer had been welcomed by children and their accompanying adults;
- Fr William's explanations of aspects of the liturgy within his homilies were very welcome. Such explanations had not been offered before in church or school. Within contemporary religious education in secondary schools there was little emphasis upon explanation of the liturgy;
- Fr William's gentle reminders to 'watch' were very helpful to parishioners who had previously been taught to not watch and were finding it hard to break away from this habit.

4. Approval of minutes of PPC meeting 20th February 2023

The minutes were approved.

5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of PPC 20th February 2023 not itemised in the agenda

Item 5 Action : *In Masses during Lent, Fr William to explain to the congregation the place of 'liturgical silence' at points within the Mass'.*

Fr William stated that he had not found time within Lent to explain the place of 'liturgical silence' as points within the Mass. However, he hoped to address this in future Masses.

6. Synod 2021-23. Continued 'listening' to the contributions from our parish

Fr William introduced the item by referring members to the PPC minutes of July 2022 and to the Synod parish responses document tabled for today's PPC. Fr William reminded PPC members that we had previously considered responses to question 1 (*Who are the marginalised and why?*) & question 2 (*How might our local Church better listen to lay people, and especially young people, women and minorities, and those who are not represented?*) of the parish responses document. He referred to the 'official teaching of the church' currently denying to those divorced and remarried Holy

Communion, explaining that the Synod consultation may prompt some relaxation of this rule in the future.

Fr William recalled that the July PPC discussion had recognised a range of 'marginalised' groups and had concluded that it was more appropriate to work towards a welcoming and inclusive approach across all these groups rather than focus upon a particular group or groups.

Fr William referred to discussion at the July 2022 PPC regarding the possibility of widening the choice of 'contact persons' within the parish. Currently, the parish priest is sole nominated 'contact person'. The PPC had advised that training would be necessary for a nominated 'contact person' role. Fr William had raised the issue with the diocese and established that appropriate training was not available. Therefore, Fr William was to remain the sole nominated contact person for parishioners. He had now acquired a second mobile phone to ensure answer phone messages would be received and acted upon.

A PPC member commented that, where appropriate, SVP members had made people aware of Fr William's 'contact person' role. SVP volunteers recognised the importance of their role as informal 'listeners', but they had considered it wise to avoid signalling itself formally as a point of contact.

Responses to question 3 on the parish document (*How can everybody be encouraged to communicate appropriately what is important to them?*) were considered. A PPC member focused upon a response from 4 parishioners which advocated 'parish reconciliation services in Lent and Advent', explaining that a priest formerly at St Mary's had held a 'general absolution' service for a packed church. In response, Fr William explained a 'general absolution' lay within the rules within an emergency circumstance. He explained that there was a good argument that a 'general absolution' should not be a substitute for confession. In part, this was because confession offered opportunity and time to talk about their sins. In discussion, the following points were made by PPC members:

- Limited time is made available for confessions in parishes today;
- The day/time allocated to confession may not suit all parishioners;
- The strong take-up of general absolution services indicates a need of which we should be mindful;
- It was hard to shake off the idea that a general absolution was somehow akin to 'cheating'.

Fr William responded that St Mary's sets aside a half hour each week and it is possible to arrange an appointment at another date/time. A valid confession had to involve confession of at least one sin. Where this happens, yet other sins are

genuinely not remembered, absolution for those forgotten sins also is given at that confession. He did not expect the rules on confession to change soon. He appreciated that a searching examination of one's conscience prior to confession could be difficult and challenging.

Question 4 (*How might I be better able to participate in Mass and other religious service?*) was discussed.

Fr William recalled that he had reported on a relevant initiative at the July 2022 PPC. Within the period of Covid-19 restrictions, and in consultation with Vince McGurk (Heath & Safety Officer), he had taken his seat in advance of Mass commencing, thereby avoiding the need to process past the congregation. On reflection, Fr William had felt that this practice may also be helpful to parishioners looking to reflect quietly to 'prepare myself before' (17 responses).

PPC members made the following points in relation to Question 4 responses:

- The music played pre and post Mass was very helpful;
- Could prayers be projected at the end of Mass for those parishioners wishing to pray afterwards?
- Could the music be left on longer at the end of Mass?

Fr William responded by explaining that he was concerned to avoid delaying AV operators unduly at the end of Mass. Projection of important donation information took place after the recessional hymn, making projection of prayers problematic.

A PPC member suggested that appropriate music from the CD player could be played after Mass without delaying the AV operator. Fr William agreed this was a good idea, worthy of consideration.

Question 5 (*How can each baptised person become a 'missionary disciple', revealing Christ to others through their words and deeds?*) was discussed.

Fr William stated that he felt question 5 and its responses were particularly suited to consideration by the whole parish and was contemplating projecting the question and responses within a forthcoming homily.

A PPC member asked what the next steps of the Synod consultation were. Fr William explained that responses would be synthesised at national and then international level, prior to being sent to the Vatican. Fr William said we could then expect to receive a response from the Vatican. He felt it was important to set the Synod consultation within the broader context envisaged by Pope Francis. He explained that the word 'synod' meant 'walking together'. This Synod was merely the starting point of long term dialogue and walking together.

Question 6 (*How might we improve our conversations within our diocesan family and also outside of it, for example with people of different faiths, those who have no faith, and those who have particular roles and duties in society?*)

Fr William introduced discussion of this question by referencing the fact that the parish ensures that material is made accessible to Facebook users.

- One PPC member suggested we consider developing an online forum for young people of the parish, perhaps with the support of volunteers;
- A PPC member expressed the view that Facebook may now be seen as the province of older, not younger, users of social media;
- A PPC member suggested that question 6 may be best addressed at diocesan level. Fr William agreed that the diocese will examine how we may develop the ecumenical dimension;
- A PPC member felt that we were already involved in activities relevant to this question, citing the 'Christians Together' initiative, the Nativity play in the Market Square and participation in the distribution of Christmas cards. Fr William agreed that the parish was now more active at parish level. He wanted to continue and enhance this where possible;
- One PPC member highlighted the phrase '*particular roles and duties in society*' and wondered whether there is potential for more engagement with issues of morality, for example entering dialogue with local councillors;
- A PPC member asked whether our parish is expected to formulate a plan to address to parish responses. Fr William explained that our main role was to feedback the responses, but we were also expected to listen to the views expressed in our parish;
- Several PPC members thought we should communicate with our parish regarding the Synod parish responses and, where appropriate, our intentions in terms of addressing them;
- One PPC member expressed concern that a lack of communication regarding how parish responses to Synod consultation may influence parish practice and behaviour may unintentionally lead to apathy in future consultations.

In discussion, it was accepted that not every aspect could be addressed fully at parish level. However, several PPC members thought that communicating to explain the limit

of our influence at parish level would be helpful.

7. Elevating Sunday as the Day of the Lord

Fr William pointed out that it was now forty years since the introduction of the Saturday evening mass. An unintended consequence of this initiative was a perception that the celebration of mass fell under the umbrella of the secular concept of the 'weekend'. Unintentionally, the association of Sunday as the Day of the Lord had been weakened. Fr William was keen to re-emphasise Sunday's place as the Day of the Lord. Sunday was the first day of the week in Christianity and the day of the resurrection. As the Bishop had put it, Sunday was the 'soul of the week'. Fr William felt it important that we were conscious that Saturday evening mass was, in religious terms, a Sunday mass.

8. Date for Easter Children's Mass 2023 and Date for Christmas Children's Mass 2023-4

Fr William set the topic in context by explaining that timescale pressure had required him to make the decision to hold the Easter Children's Mass on Easter Saturday in 2023.

Fr William then summarised the recent history of the Christmas Children's Mass, which for many years had been held at 4.30pm on Christmas Eve. He explained that he had over a number of years worked to make this a more fulfilling experience for all who participated. Prior to this people had said that the children's mass didn't feel like they'd been to a mass at all.

Fr William's strong focus now was that the church recovers its foundations as this was the way the church could flourish in the long term. This involved enhancing our sense of the liturgy and our sense of Sunday as the Lord's Day. The only alternative he saw was a managed decline.

Fr William explained that a key element in the recovery of our foundations was a renewed emphasis on our sense of 'seasons', with the Christmas season being important here. Using the Christmas Children's Mass as illustrative, Fr William argued that while Christmas Eve 4.30pm scheduling had led to a full church on each occasion, the prevailing pattern was ongoing decline and had required us to compromise on of these key foundations, the distinction between the seasons. His conclusion was that the Christmas Children's Mass should be scheduled at an appropriate point within the Christmas Octave or at least within the Christmas Season.

Fr William sought PPC members' views regarding the date of the Christmas Children's Mass for 2023/4. He proposed either Tuesday 26th December, Saturday 30th

December, or one of the three Sunday masses for 31st December. Fr William invited views:

- One PPC member argued that the Christmas Children's Mass should continue to be scheduled at 4.30pm on Christmas Eve, with the possibility that we could also include a second Christmas Children's Mass within the Octave. The scheduling at 4.30pm on Christmas Eve had become a tradition, an important factor in shaping people's habits and expectations. The omission of a Christmas Eve Mass in 2022 had led to many families celebrating Mass on Christmas Eve at other parishes. We were unusual in not offering a Mass on Christmas Eve and were losing people with whom we would wish to celebrate Mass at St Mary's. It would be very sad to lose the Christmas Children's Mass held on Christmas Eve;
- One PPC member accepted that the Christmas Eve scheduling of the children's Christmas Children's Mass was popular and traditional. However, the PPC member wondered whether many young children were aware of the 'tradition' of children's Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve, suggesting that perhaps it was predominantly adults who felt the tradition should be preserved;
- One PPC member argues that, though we would not wish St Mary's parishioners to feel that they would rather attend Mass elsewhere and we always welcome a full church at Masses, we are not in competition with other churches in the diocese;
- One PPC member suggested that the parameters of the Octave implied that a Christmas Eve Mass should be more accurately described as an Advent Mass;
- Two PPC members suggested we consider offering and advertising an Advent Children's Mass, which could be held on Christmas Eve;

Fr William felt that an Advent Children's Mass held on Christmas Eve may create confusion with Christmas Masses. One PPC member supplemented this point by informing the PPC that the fourth Sunday of Advent in 2023 fell on Christmas Eve;

- One PPC member suggested the 10.00am Christmas Day Mass could be the Christmas Children's mass. The fact that Easter Sunday 10.00am mass was packed this year appeared to indicate that families were both able and prepared to celebrate Mass at that time of day as still had sufficient time later in the day to spend with families;
- One PPC member posed the following question. By not scheduling the Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve, were we losing anything beyond the date?

- In response, a PPC member stated that these questions could usefully be put to parishioners who went to other parishes that did hold a Christmas Children's Mass on Christmas Eve. Factors such as tradition and a connection with children's anticipation of Christmas were important;

In response to this one PPC member pointed out that this sense of anticipation was in fact the essence of the Advent Season and illustrated again the need to keep these two seasons separate and distinct.

- One PPC member posed a question. What defines a 'Children's Mass'?
- In response to the question above, one PPC member explained that they saw a Children's Mass as one where children's participation in the Mass was prominent, perhaps through undertaking readings, singing the psalm etc;
- Responding to the same question, a PPC member suggested that where parishes offered a 'Christmas Children's Mass they did so on the basis that children, parents, families and other adults were also welcome.

Fr William responded by stating that he was happy to offer a 'family' mass on Christmas Day and to offer a Christmas Children's Mass at a point within in the Octave or at some point in the Christmas Season;

Fr William expressed a preference for a Christmas Children's Mass on Saturday 30th December, proposing a time of 10.00am in order to be neither too early or too late for children, parents, families and other adults;

In response, a PPC member asked whether discussion had been held with Children's Church members to establish their availability and willingness to be involved. The PPC member knew of several Children's Church members who had expressed a preference for the Christmas Eve date for the Christmas Children's Mass;

Fr William explained that Children's Church members had been involved in the Christmas Children's Mass 2022. He hoped and anticipated that they would be involved again in 2023;

One PPC member suggested that we could adopt the approach towards the Christmas Children's Mass proposed by Fr William, undertaking to review this in future with the possibility of a return to the traditional Christmas Eve date remaining open.

9. School Report

Katie Bleasdale talked to the 'Catholic Self-Evaluation Document' (CSED) forwarded to PPC members. Katie stated that the key issue for St Mary's School staff to consider within CSED prior to inspection was the impact of their attempt to address issues raised in the previous inspection. She explained that staff had spent time working upon the second 'area for improvement' which had focused on the link between English and Religious Education (second action on CSED).

Katie explained that 'Writing' was obviously seen as relevant and important, yet staff had sought to ensure that meeting this requirement did not compromise the broader 'understanding' and enthusiastic engagement so vital within Religious Education. Additionally, Katie explained that staff had worked hard on 'collective worship' and felt rewarded by the positive and enthusiastic response from students.

The 'self-evaluation' document had graded St Mary's School overall as grade 2 ('good'). Katie explained that grade 2 felt appropriate partly because a lot of children attending St Mary's School had not been to church and/or had no background of faith, which meant there was considerable 'catch-up' work for staff to help these children reach appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. This approach appeared to have been successful. One child had been very nervous of attending Mass at St Mary's Church initially, yet now did so with enthusiasm. Katie invited questions or comments:

Fr William asked whether the 'catch up' support was given individually or within the class setting. Katie replied that it was the latter.

Fr William stated that he had been very impressed by the children's knowledge on his visits to the school. Several PPC members expressed admiration at the excellent behaviour of St Mary's School students at Mass.

10. St Mary's International Outreach Review

Fr William introduced this item, explaining that we plan give it more detailed attention at the next PPC. However, he wanted to make members aware that we had supported children's education in Zimbabwe by contributing donations to support payment of school fees. Donations via the parish website amounted to £93 per month. Fr William had travelled to Zimbabwe to see the impact of this donation. Fr William wanted PPC members to consider what other causes we may wish to support.

11. Reminder of dates

Fr William stated his intention to invite everyone to the parish AGM so all have the opportunity to raise a question or make a comment. The proposal was to schedule the AGM for Saturday 3rd June, commencing after the 6.00pm Mass. Several PPC members expressed approval for this timing, commenting that it made AGM attendance as convenient as possible for parishioners.

Monday 11th September 2023
Monday 6th November 2023
Monday 19th February 2024

Proposed dates:

AGM 3rd June 2023 after Sat 6.00pm Mass
Monday 6th May 2024

12. Thanks and Prayer

The meeting closed with a prayer.

Addendum (additional PPC meeting via zoom on 29th May)

Fr William Wright (Chair)

Appointed

Katie Bleasdale
Janet Holliday

Elected

Sarah McCann (Liturgy)
Angela Smith (Outreach)
Sheila Lund (Interaction)
Catherine Foster (Support)

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

Apologies were received from Malachy Stockdale

Fr William reminded PPC members that the running of the parish had been transferred from Ampleforth to the diocese in April 2019, when it had been agreed that Fr William would remain as St Mary's Parish Priest for a further five years.

Fr William explained that, because the end of the agreed five-year term was now approaching, he had contacted the Bishop in January 2023, with a view to hearing his thoughts regarding plans for St Mary's Parish after April 2024 and Fr William's return to Ampleforth. Fr William had met the Bishop two weeks ago. Fr William reported the following meeting outcomes:

- The Bishop was not intending to close the parish;
- The Bishop intended that St Mary's continue to be served by its own parish priest;
- Though planning at this stage had not focused on who may be Fr William's successor as St Mary's Parish Priest, the Bishop did not anticipate a difficulty in identifying a suitable priest for the role;
- The Bishop would wish St Mary's Parish to continue to have a resident parish priest. However, this would be subject to appropriate alterations being made to the priest's flat; specifically ensuring that there was an emergency exit route for the resident priest which satisfied health & safety requirements;
- Fr William thought it likely that the date when he relinquished the role of St Mary's Parish Priest would be within summer 2024, perhaps August of that year, as this was customary practice in such situations.

Fr William invited questions and comments.

- One PPC member asked whether the priest's flat was currently unsuitable for him on health and safety grounds. Fr William responded that he knew he was able to exit via the Atrium or the Chapel or to use the window as an exit to a flat roof, before lowering himself to the ground. However, the Bishop had understandably expressed concern when informed about the emergency exit situation. Fr William agreed that it made sense to seek to address the absence of a purpose-built escape route prior to a successor to Fr William taking up residence. The Bishop's view was that there should be a 'front door' exit route. Fr William reminded PPC that the Blessed Sacrament Chapel was sited where there had previously been a front door. One possibility was to move the Blessed Sacrament into the church and to recreate that front door. The Bishop intended to make contact with the diocese property manager, Kevin Anderson, to explore the options.
- One PPC member asked what Fr William's thoughts were regarding communication with the parish. Fr William explained his intention to incorporate a statement within his written weekly message for the forthcoming Sunday (4th June) so this would be available on the website for both reading and reference.
- One PPC member thought that timely updates, as appropriate, would be appreciated by parishioners.
- One PPC member suggested Fr William also communicate orally with all celebrating Mass at St Mary's this Sunday, as this would help inform parishioners unable to access the website. Fr William agreed that this would be helpful.

ACTION: Fr William to orally communicate news at Masses of Sunday 4th June regarding changes post April 2024.

- One PPC member asked whether there was a likelihood of a reduction in the number of Masses provided at St Mary's in the event that there was no resident priest at St Mary's. Fr William thought it unlikely that there would not be a resident priest at St Mary's. He explained that the number of Masses offered was a decision made at deanery level. Fr William was aware that the Bishop was keen to keep the 5.00pm Sunday Mass as it was the only one scheduled for that time within the deanery.
- One PPC member asked whether Fr William knew the role he would take up on returning to Ampleforth. Fr William said there was no news of that at this stage.