

## St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

**Minutes of meeting Monday 6<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023, postponed to 27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023**

Present:

- Fr William Wright (Chair)

*Appointed*

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

*Elected*

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

Paul Coman (Secretary to PPC)

### **1. Scripture Reading and Prayer**

Led by Fr. William

### **2. Welcome & Apologies**

Apologies were received from Catherine Foster and Malachy Stockdale.

### **3. Parish Priest introduction** *(written by Fr William)*

The main item for this meeting of the council is again the Youth Mission project being proposed by Christians Together in Knaresborough.

We had a Christians Together meeting focussed on this project last Monday. Leaders of all the churches and Christian groups were present – Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed, and a Christian group called Third Place who have been part of our Christians Together in Knaresborough for many years.

What is the rationale for this proposed Youth Mission? What are we hoping to achieve? I would say that the direction of travel has moved away from any notion of trying to get young people to come to our churches and join us for our church services. There is now a clear consensus that if this Youth Mission project is to go ahead, it is to be a mission to young people where they are, to help establish fellowship and community

among young people in ways and in places and in activities that will best offer them an experience of Christian community, and bring together young people from across the different Christian communities.

And I think this is right. It gets us away from any notion that we're trying to catch them for church, like putting sugar lumps out to catch a horse. It's gets us away from any notion that we're trying to get them recruited in order to prop up a declining institution. And it's unambiguous about who we are doing it for. We're doing it for them, not for ourselves.

To want young people to join us in church is an okay thing to want, a good thing to want. But if we want this, if we want young people to join us in church, and if we want them to keep coming back for more, then we need to make the celebration of Mass itself a better experience.

In the CTiK meeting last Monday there was one aspect of this Youth Mission project that received particular attention – how explicitly Christian should it be? How explicitly Christian should the Youth Leader be in approaching and interacting with these young people? How explicitly Christian would any activities be that were laid on for them? A range of views emerged. One church leader thought it should be explicitly Christian. One church leader thought that if the Youth Leader was motivated by a love for Christ and a passionate desire to serve him, that was enough in itself. In other words, different understandings of what we mean by Christian Mission. Is it to bring people to an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ? Or is it to bring to people an experience of the love of Jesus Christ even if we don't name him. Maybe some balance between these two approaches. Maybe this is something that needs to be sussed out, discerned, in an ongoing way as the Youth Leader feels their way into the openness of each individual young person or group, and their specific needs.

One church leader raised the question of openness and inclusivity to other religions. No firm conclusion was reached on this aspect of the project, and I think we need to reach more of a consensus on this. My own thoughts are that it needs to have a Christian identity. But this certainly wouldn't rule out events and invitations to get together with groups of young people from nother religions eg Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, to mix and learn about each other and each other's religion.

One thing to say about the questions we raised and the comments we made about this project at our last PPC meeting in September. These questions and comments that we raised amounted to four pages in the minutes of our September meeting. These four pages of questions and comments from us were taken to the CTiK in September. Fast forward two months and the CTiK meeting last week sprang from the need to address exactly these kinds of questions. I think we progressed sufficiently with this Youth Mission proposal in CTiK last Monday to answer all of these questions. I will say a bit more about the CTiK meeting last Monday when we get to this item on the agenda.

I didn't ask Katie for a report on the school for this council meeting as she is still on maternity leave. There is however a finance report from the Parish Finance Committee and I've put that on the agenda.

And on the Synod 2021-2023 we have two more Questions to look at, 9 and 10, or rather the parish responses to these two remaining questions.

#### **4. Approval of minutes of PPC meeting 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

The minutes were approved.

#### **5. Actions / matters arising from the minutes of PPC 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023 not itemised in the agenda**

##### Item 7

Fr William updated members on plans regarding accommodation for a new resident parish priest. He reported on the visit of Kevin Anderson (Diocesan Property Manager) and Stephen Webb (Bishop's Secretary). Though aware the bishop had considered conversion of part of the current Blessed Sacrament Chapel to provide private access to and from the flat for a resident parish priest, these visitors did not wish to see the Chapel. Fr William inferred the bishop may now have decided not to pursue an option impacting the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

Fr William reiterated that the bishop had expressed a desire to continue have a resident parish priest at St Mary's. Fr William felt sure that St Mary's would continue to have its own parish priest, following his return to Ampleforth. Fr William stated that the presence of St Mary's School within our parish made a very strong case for St Mary's to continue to have a parish priest. Fr William invited questions and comments. A question from a PPC member is detailed below:

When could we expect the bishop to decide whether the parish priest assigned to St Mary's would be resident?

*Fr William's response was that we could expect the decision to be communicated prior to August 2024. However, he explained that the bishop's decision and its timing would be determined by the bishop's responsibility to take account of a wide range of diocesan factors such as resources, logistics and organisation, some of which may either emerge or change in the New Year.*

##### Item 9

Fr William referred to Synod question 7 (*Are our relations with our Christian brothers and sisters good? How might they be improved?*). He expressed his intention to explain within Mass that the question had not been presented in the same terms as intended.

Fr William explained his intention to address issues regarding hierarchy and volunteering raised in Synod question 8 (*How might we develop teamwork and a sense of co-responsibility in our local Church?*) (12<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023 PPC minutes item 9, bullet points 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 & 10).

Regarding volunteering, Fr William shared with PPC members relevant spreadsheet information on parish roles and associated volunteers. He made two points, as below:

Somewhat in contrast to the description of a 'small pool' of volunteers (PPC meeting 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023, Item 9, bullet point 5), the spreadsheet indicated a high number (149) of volunteers at St Mary's;

Concerns expressed regarding 'hierarchy' (PPC meeting 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023 Item 9, bullet points 2, 3, 4 & 6) deserved consideration. Fr William thought it possible that reference to 'co-ordinator' roles within the volunteering structure had contributed to some parishioners' perception of 'hierarchy'. He pointed out that 'co-ordinators' were invaluable as they provided him with a manageable number of contacts with whom to liaise, thereby facilitating a wide range of activity to run smoothly.

Fr William invited comments and questions from PPC members. These are detailed below:

- From the perspective of a PPC member performing a 'co-ordinator' role, it was enormously helpful that volunteers within the team worked together to achieve the objectives of that team. The current 'co-ordinator' structure supported such an approach;
- The spreadsheet details a wide number of activities and roles. There may be parishioners currently unaware of some of these, particularly where volunteer/s presence or activity is not directly visible at Mass;
- Would it be sensible to publicise spreadsheet information via the parish website, as this would inform and enable parishioners to identify where they may feel able to help? *Fr William responded that this was an option, noting that GDPR requirements regarding publication of names would first need to be addressed;*

- It would be possible to publicise only the roles and number of volunteers in place or now needed, without naming volunteers;
- PPC members' names are publicised alongside so their role without objections arising and so it would appear consistent to publicise volunteer names and roles;

*Fr William replied that he would wish to be ensure that volunteers are happy to have their name made public.*

- A single point of contact could be advertised for each role/function, offering easy access to information for parishioners wishing to volunteer;
- A 'traffic light' system could be added to spreadsheet information on roles / activities, indicating to potential volunteers where we have sufficient or too few volunteers;

*Fr William responded to suggestions regarding volunteer recruitment. He explained that he had taken the approach of getting to know individual parishioners prior to issuing an invitation to a specific volunteering role. He thought this increased the likelihood of a good match between volunteer and role, to the benefit of both the parish and volunteers themselves.*

- It would be possible to categorise some roles as 'sensitive' and for Fr William to continue to invite individuals he felt would be well suited to the role. Perhaps other roles could be open to general appeal / invitation.

*Fr William agreed, explaining that he had quite often put out 'open ended' invitations where the felt this was appropriate and would continue to do so.*

- Greater awareness within the parish of the roles for which parishioners may volunteer could encourage more parishioners to feel comfortable to come forward regarding a role in which they had interest and/or expertise;
- It can prove important to be able to match the skills of a volunteer to an urgent need at very short notice, e.g., repairing a roof leak;
- Sharing information about volunteering roles and the nature of the work that takes place may alleviate concerns regarding 'hierarchy'.

**Action:** Fr William expressed his intention to:

- a) Publicise the range of volunteering roles;
- b) Further reflect on whether it would be appropriate to publish the names of current volunteers.

## **6. Christians Together in Knaresborough \* (CTiK) – ‘Youth Mission’ proposal**

### *Fr William’s introduction to this agenda item*

At the CTiK meeting last Monday, by invitation, were a woman called Sam, and man called Ben, both Christians from Harrogate. Sam is the director of a Christian organisation in Harrogate called Netmakers which builds bridges between the different Christian communities in Harrogate. Sam was invited to the CTiK meeting last Monday because she and Netmakers have already gone down this route in Harrogate. They have done what we are looking at. They have employed a Youth Leader called Catherine. They’ve called the role Pioneer Youth Worker. The man called Ben who was also at the meeting is the leader or minister of a Christian church in Harrogate called Xairos Church. He was there because he is effectively Catherine’s line manager in her role as Pioneer Youth Worker. So between Sam and Catherine they were able to answer some of our questions, and tell us more about how it’s working out in their own Youth Mission project.

What is the job description for their Pioneer Youth Worker? We have their Pioneer Youth Worker Vision and Job Description. Happy to look at that if you want. What is the governance framework for this position of Pioneer Youth Worker? We have the Governance Framework for Netmakers if you want to look at this. Pioneer Youth Worker is part of this larger picture. Netmakers also handle Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Risk Assessments, GDPR, Insurance etc.

Who is the employer for this role? Interestingly they have opted to designate one chosen church to be line manager, and payroll manager, and that is Xairos Church led by Ben at the meeting.

Who is the Pioneer Youth Worker answerable to? I asked this question and said that if we were to adopt a similar model our Youth Leader should meet regularly with a CTiK committee, including church leaders like myself, so answerable to CTiK as a whole and receiving guidance and direction from this CTiK committee. Sam said that they have exactly this in their model.

Experience so far? It’s early days with this new role. Catherine is focussing on building up one Christian group, I think multi denominational, by going into one particular school and inviting participation. The idea is eventually for the Pioneer Youth Worker to establish multiple groups like this from across Harrogate.

*Fr William invited comments and questions from PPC members. These are detailed below:*

Comments and questions relating to the CTiK meeting and the Harrogate 'Netmakers' youth project

- How old are the adults directly involved with the young people?

*Fr William's impression was that the two representatives he met were likely to be in their thirties.*

- Fr William's summary of the CTiK meeting indicated that the adults in young people facing roles were likely to have a good rapport with them;

*Fr William agreed, adding that his impression was that this was the case. He felt that Ben (line manager of the 'pioneer youth worker' and minister at Xairos Church) had a range of important and relevant qualities.*

- What activities are conducted by 'Netmakers'?

*Fr William explained that the most recent CTiK meeting had not gone into detail on activities but agreed it would be necessary to establish that. His impression from the CTiK most recent meeting was that ice-breaker activities, bonding activities, talks, prayer and trips to retreat centres were likely to feature. He felt confident that the youth leaders were sufficiently knowledgeable and skilled to ensure activities were suitable and likely to engage young people.*

- Outings need to be paid for. Prior to St Mary's parishioners being approached regarding any financial commitment, clarity of objective/s would be essential.

Comments and questions relating to next steps

- Is there a decision the PPC needs to make today?

*Fr William said no decision was required at this stage. There was another CTiK meeting in January, 2024, and he was happy to take PPC views expressed today to that meeting.*

- What are the next steps?

*Fr William explained that much of the most recent CTiK meeting was devoted to gaining an understanding of the 'Netmakers' project. He anticipated that a possible next step for CTiK may involve considering whether CTiK should merely learn from the 'Netmakers' approach prior to setting up an independent CTiK project or, alternatively, seek to become part of the 'Netmakers' project.*

- We need to consider whether it would be feasible for the Knaresborough context to provide a parallel set of roles to underpin the 'Netmakers' project here;
- Perhaps the project could meet young people 'where they are', yet offer them opportunity to move forward by drawing upon gospel stories shared by all Christian denominations;
- Demographic evidence makes clear that a high proportion of young people do not attend Mass or engage with the parish. This makes it imperative we do something regarding a youth project;
- What would happen to the youth mission project when Fr William leaves St Mary's?

*Fr William stated that he was deliberately 'treading lightly' regarding the youth project. He was keen not to impose his view, but rather to facilitate the parish's thinking and decision making. Were the parish to decide that a youth project was both worthwhile and affordable, this would be a good platform upon which to make the case to proceed to Fr William and/or his successor;*

- Perhaps diocesan youth workers could play a very useful and unpaid role in a youth project that was located and run within St Mary's Parish, making the project more affordable.

#### Comments and questions relating to values, aims and objectives

- We need more clarity regarding aims and values before deciding whether we join 'Netmakers' or develop our own CTiK project;

*Fr William agreed. He thought it necessary to determine whether the project would offer an explicit Christian focus (which carried a risk of loss of engagement by some) or simply minister to young people 'where they are'. Fr William thought that the latter approach would, of course, involve implicit communication of Christian values.*

- Meeting young people 'where they are' would be wise as it would be likely to attract greater engagement;
- A starting point should be to meet young people 'where they are' in terms of their environment and language. This would build their trust;



- It is possible that the Harrogate 'Netmakers' project could extend their sphere of operation to Knaresborough. Its values would be relevant here also. Adjustments could be made to serve the Knaresborough community's needs;
- We need to remain mindful of our ecumenical responsibilities, which have been underlined recently within the Synod. It would be wise to avoid a return to the animosity that some within Knaresborough's Christian community had in the past felt towards St Mary's;
- The issue of growing our own parish is important, yet perhaps different from a youth project, where working with others beyond the parish may be an objective. This underlines the importance of obtaining clarity regarding the youth policy objective/s;
- There may be ways of reaching our objective/s, other than a youth mission. Again, this underlines the importance of establishing clarity regarding our objective/s;

*Fr William recommended we keep these two objectives distinct and unrelated: (a) Ministering to Youth as a mission of the church; (b) Growing our parish. This consultation is about (a) Ministering to Youth as mission of the church (a joint mission by CTiK). It shouldn't be a means to an end, but an end in itself. Any spin off in terms of growth in our parish is welcome but not looked for in this project. Growth of our parish as a separate objective is also an important project but is not the focus of this particular consultation.*

- Where are the young people to whom we would take the youth project and how do we reach them?

*Fr William thought this was an important question and explained that 'Netmakers' visited schools by invitation, enabling the project to become known. At school visits, 'Netmakers' extended their own invitation/s to events and activities outside of school.*

- What about current 14 - 15-year-old young people?

*Fr William explained that 'Netmakers' had focused upon Year 6 initially.*

- It may unfortunately be the case that many young people aged 14-15 would be hard to reach as they may have already made a conscious decision to disengage;

#### Comments and questions relating to the evaluation of a youth project

- How would we know whether the youth project was successful?

*Fr William replied that, perhaps, we may not know. However, having planted the seeds, we could place trust in Christ's love getting to work.*

- Consistent levels of attendance at youth project activities / events by young people would be a strong indicator of success;
- Is a youth mission the best means of bringing Christ's love to people?

*Fr William responded that the youth mission was one, but not the only, way of doing this.*

- We have evidence from St Mary's Parish that our approach to preparation for Confirmation did develop strong and lasting bonds of friendship within Confirmation cohorts;

*Fr William stated that the St Mary's approach to Confirmation involved instruction, but also activities that would fall within the orbit of youth leader work. It is possible to see this as a useful template for an ecumenical youth project approach.*

## **7. Parish Finance Committee Report**

The overall picture is positive. Fr William reflected on the impact of his post- Covid 19 decision to not return to passing the plate round the congregation at the Offertory. He expressed his preference for the current system of voluntary donations made with an absence of social pressure. The parish continues to receive the necessary funds.

Fr William felt it very likely that forthcoming months would incur some expenditure in refurbishing the resident's priest's flat, prior to the anticipated arrival of his successor. Little had been spent on the flat since he took up residence.

Vince McGurk stated that it was pleasing the loan had been paid off. He alerted PPC members to the substantial forthcoming expense of repairing the church floor, explained that this was now being put out to tender.

A PPC member asked about plans to extend the church car park.

*Fr William said it was possible to tarmac the car park to the hedge or to choose to take the hedge out. The addition of making individual parking bays was also under consideration. The key objective was to maximise capacity. There was a need to have signage to convey a 'please do not park here' message. This would be a politely expressed deterrent to potential car park users whose business is unconnected to St Mary's Parish.*

## **8. Synod 2021-23. Continued listening to contributions from our parish – Questions 9 & 10 (item deferred)**

## **9. Expression of thanks**

Fr William noted that Vince McGurk had now reached the end of his second term of office as a PPC member, having given six years of faithful service to the parish in this capacity. Fr William expressed his gratitude for this.

## **10. Reminder of dates**

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (FC 29<sup>th</sup> Jan)

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (FC 22<sup>nd</sup> April)

*Proposed date*

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024 (FC 22<sup>nd</sup> July)

## **11. Glory be**