

19 DEC 2013

In re St Mary, Bourne Street

Judgement

1. The petitioners apply to sell 3 High Mass sets of vestments a red set, a green set and a gold set.
2. The details set out in the papers are scanty in the extreme and, frankly, curious. The reasons given, in an e-mail dated 20 October 2011 from the parish priest, Father Cherry to the Registry are that they "*are not in keeping with the present vestments and were bought without sufficient consultation with the PCC and are generally regarded as 'mistakes'*". The '*mistakes*' are identified as:

Red High Mass set-Gothic in shape

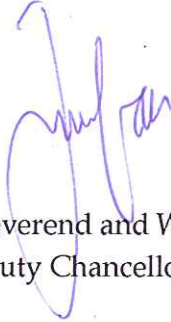
Gold High Mass set-too yellow for our gold setting

Green High Mass set-bad design, too dull

3. I confess I find it extraordinary that the very considerable expense of buying these vestments (I note that the Gold set alone cost £6,500) could have gone ahead without '*sufficient consultation*' with the PCC, especially as these vestments were purchased within the last few years. I assume that all of these sets were indeed purchased by the PCC. If any were gifts or purchased as a result of gifts of money, then the petitioners will have to satisfy me that they have made sufficient inquiries of the donors about what should happen to these vestments before this matter proceeds further.
4. It may be appropriate to deal briefly with the matter of financial responsibility. The Gold vestments purchased for £6,500 were, in May 2012, reckoned to be worth £3,000 on the open market. How a church spends its money is, of course, entirely a matter for the PCC. I note from the minutes of the APCM for 2013 however, taken from the church website; *St Mary's mission is funded largely from direct giving by those who worship at the church, the parish being unusual for a central London parish in lacking significant endowments of property or investments*. In those circumstances it strikes me that careful stewardship of parish resources should be paramount. Nevertheless, whilst I may deplore what may be seen as the potential waste of limited resources, that is a matter entirely for the PCC and the parish priest to deal with, it is not an argument for refusing this petition.

5. This application is based solely on matters of aesthetics. As a matter of taste, it strikes me that the vestments themselves are perfectly acceptable and to the untutored eye might be deemed sumptuous even to the most jaded of Spanish Cardinals. It is a truism that most faculty applications for the disposal of church property based solely on its aesthetic appreciation will be rejected out of hand. I am sure that the PCC and congregation of St Mary's would be loath to be parties to the possible iconoclasm that would be caused if this were not the case. In those circumstances, were this a petition for the disposal or removal of anything else I would have no hesitation in rejecting it. The faculty system is designed to reject whimsical applications based upon individual's personal fancies.
6. As it is, these are items that appear to have been introduced to the church without a faculty (and I criticise no one for this), they are deemed unsuitable by the priest and the PCC and their disposal is not opposed by the DAC. I have made my personal views clear in this judgement, but I am not here to impose my personal views, simply to deal with matters lawfully. In those circumstances I grant a faculty for the disposal of the High Mass sets of vestments as prayed, subject to the monies so realised being put towards replacement sets of vestments of designs that are to be approved and so minuted as approved by a meeting of the PCC.

4th December 2013



The Reverend and Worshipful Justin Gau,
Deputy Chancellor, Diocese of London.