

Parishioners' Open Meeting

15th July 2020 conducted via Zoom

29 participants

Including Fr Simon, Fr Bob, Deacon Geoff, Stephen Warde (Chair), Sarah Sykes (Minutes)

Apologies: none

The Chair opened the Meeting with brief instructions on how the meeting would run over Zoom. He congratulated Mike Smith who recently joined the Diaconate at a small gathering in his college chapel in Rome. We look forward to welcoming Mike back at St Laurence's once his two week quarantine is completed.

The minutes of the last meeting received no comments or corrections and were agreed to be an accurate record.

1. Reopening the church for Mass – review, feedback, suggestions

The Chair gave a short introduction on how we had reopened the church 2 weeks ago running all our usual Masses at their normal times with the addition of the 5pm Mass.

Attendance for the Sunday of the second weekend most recent before this meeting was:

8am = 23

9.30am = 24

11am = 61

5pm = 35

Before returning to church a Risk Assessment was completed and the document is available on the website. We are enforcing the 2 metre distancing rule which means that benches can be filled with 1 household of up to 7 people, or 2 individuals, or 1 couple and 1 individual. Our capacity is roughly 65 people, which includes the use of the balcony area, depending on the configuration of groups and singles attending.

The Chair thanked Jim and Mary-Jane O'Sullivan for measuring and calculating the socially distanced seating and capacity. We do have the option to change the distancing from 2 to 1 metre. If we took this option up then all participants would need to wear face masks.

We have put in place a process for queueing, if needed; extra hygiene, extra cleaning, the option to give contact details for the government's track and trace scheme. Communion is distributed by priest/minister going to the congregation rather than the congregation going to the priest/minister. We have a steward's rota with 4 stewards on duty at the busier weekend Masses and 2 for quieter or weekday Masses. The Chair thanked Nora Darby and Jo Wager for their work on the rotas.

Fr Simon said that although he had initially been surprised at the low numbers attending, on reflection he sees that people are being cautious and he hopes the numbers will gradually increase. Live streaming numbers have not dropped as people have returned. We regularly

have people attending from outside the parish and have received both written and monetary appreciation.

Fr Bob felt that the return of people to Mass had been a great success so far. On a personal point he appreciates have Eucharistic ministers available to give out Communion so that he can remain on the Altar.

General Discussion

The wearing of face masks was discussed, in particular, in relation to the new government directive coming into force on 24th July. It is clear that this only applies currently to customers in shops and is not something we are currently required to do in the church. Fr Simon agreed that the wearing for face masks should be encouraged and that the Diocese has bought supplies so that if people do not arrive with a face mask and it is needed one can be supplied. We should, however, be aware that the wearing of face masks for people who lipread is very isolating, and difficult for those who have claustrophobic or certain health issues. The wearing of masks for children under 11 years of age in shops is not required. We would therefore use these guidelines if we were to insist on masks. While reading from the lectern and while receiving Holy Communion masks can be temporarily removed.

A number of scenarios were discussed:

If we went to 1 meter social distancing to increase capacity: we would gain between 20 and 25 spaces depending on the mix of groups and individuals. Masks would be mandatory but this would make it difficult for people with breathing problems etc. Perhaps one Mass could be a mask only Mass.

Could an area of the church be set aside where there is 2 meter spacing and the rest of the church be at one meter? Could one side of the church be set at 1 meter intervals and the other side at 2 meters?

Jim O'Sullivan said that both these situations would be difficult to manage and steward. It would require an even balance of people. The environment needs to be a unified one to be best for all.

Could those not wearing masks be seated in the balcony? Those with breathing difficulties might find balcony access difficult.

From the Chat: could a non-mask group be seated in the Parish Room?

From the Chat: social face coverings should not be used for more than 2-4 hours consecutively then they should be washed before being used again.

If we start get full could the Parish Room be used as an overspill area?

Although it is possible with plenty of notice for the Tech Group to set this up, at present no capacity calculations have been made on the Parish Room. We may be able to accommodate 10-15 people but it would require an extra steward on duty, extra cleaning

(already considerable) of the area where many potential surface may be touched, the stairs would need to be blocked off, the chairs currently removed from the church are being stored in the parish room so there is limited space available. If we needed to do this it could in theory be done but would need planning well.

ACTION: we should step up the encouragement to wear masks with the view that it might become compulsory as numbers increase with good period of notice and clear instructions.

A side issue about quarantine periods with the increase in travel was briefly mentioned It is not something we are controlling. It is up to individuals to follow government guidelines and to self-isolate if required.

Doors and windows: the Narthex door should be propped open during Mass and if possible, depending on traffic noise the porch doors can be left open to encourage good circulation of air. Windows should also be opened. If the doors, for whatever reason, are closed then stewards should prop open the doors before the end of Mass for the quick exit of the congregation without the doors having to be held/touched by multiple people. This is something to also be born in mind moving forward into the colder months.

ACTION: update steward's instructions with regard to opening the doors and windows. Purchase stay bars as necessary to keep the window open at a suitable depth.

Protocol for handwashing for Eucharistic Ministers: ministers should make sure that after they have received Holy Communion and put their masks back on that they should then wash their hands before going to give communion to the rest of the congregation.

ACTION: brief Zoom training for Eucharistic Ministers to make sure all are following the same protocol at every Mass. All should complete this before going on the altar.

Contact details: some people are unclear about this – how often they have to give the information, what it is used for, that it is optional, that details will be held temporarily and destroyed if not needed. Jim O'Sullivan suggested that a pre-Mass announcement should be reliably given at the start of each Mass explaining not only about the contact information being collected but also the basics of how things will work during the Mass (ie how Communion will be dispensed, how they should exit at the end of Mass, that no singing is allowed, that people should leave the building promptly at the end of Mass). Although people will get used to things eventually, people are still gradually returning and will not have heard the instructions may be given at earlier Masses.

Contact sheets left at the end of Mass in the pews should be collected at the end of Mass and disposed of along with any newsletters left behind.

ACTION: draft text to be read at the start of each Mass covering the above points.

Remember those joining the Mass via the live stream: although we have a congregation in the church now, the celebrant should still remember to include those attending at home for

example by greeting them at the sign of peace and saying the St Alphonsus prayer at Communion.

Tithing: to make it easier to make donations to the church now that the usual collection basket is no longer passed around during Mass, treasurer, James Dore, has acquired a card reader for electronic donations. He proposes to trial it at a few Masses positioning himself in the car park with the machine. Distancing would be maintained through use of a table and wearing a mask. He asked that an announcement is made at the Masses where he makes this facility available. Standing orders have increased significantly over the lockdown period, and gift aid can more easily be collected from these types of donation. Jim Scally looks after the gift aid for the Parish and makes regular appeals in the newsletter, on the website and in the Parish magazine.

ACTION: add to pre-Mass announcement at relevant Masses.

Virtual Coffee and Chat: is this continuing? If it does then please could we also promote this more as it is a good way to catch up and keep the St Laurence's community alive. It is planned to continue after the 11am Mass at 12.20pm to give people time to travel home and join.

ACTION: add to the pre-Mass announcement

2. AOB:

Fr Simon would like to install a patio area in the garden outside and level with Parish Room so that in good weather we could use this area to socialise and possibly put a marquee over it with a space heater on colder days. This proposal was met with general approval although space heaters are not good for the environment, so are not a welcome idea. The next steps would be to get costs and 3 competitive quotes. This proposal would have to be considered against other spending proposals already agreed such as the redecoration of the church.

Fr Simon closed the meeting with a prayer.

3. NEXT MEETING: 11TH August at 7.30pm via Zoom

