

Parish Open Meeting 9 June at 7.30pm via Zoom

Present: Fr Simon, Steve Warde (Chair), Geoff Cook, Sarah Sykes (Minutes) + 9 = 12 present rising to 15

Apologies: Catharine Warren, Christine Knight

The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be an accurate record.

1. Parish news update

Fr Simon reported that the 2 Confirmation Masses in May and June had gone well and that the First Holy Communion Masses were due to take place this month on Saturdays to help with social distancing and not getting over full Masses on Sunday. The children prepared at school will make their First Holy Communion at 10am and 3pm on 12th June and the children prepared in the Parish will do the same on 19th June at 11am and 3pm.

The numbers have been a little lower for those prepared in the Parish as parents opted to wait until next year, when hopefully in-person teaching will again be available. This will better suit their individual children's learning styles and maturity levels.

There was some discussion about travellers and catechesis including how to engage them in the sacraments, and that we should be mindful that we have cultural differences in approach, but we should respect our difference as the traveller community is an integral part of our Parish. Fr Simon added that Sr Tamsin Geach, one of the Dominican Sisters, has been appointed to help with catechism and outreach to the traveller community across the whole Diocese.

The re-wiring of the presbytery is progressing and should be complete within a week or two.

Deacon Mike Smith is due to return to the UK on Monday (14th) but will be self-isolating for 10 days before returning to St Laurence's.

2. Mass arrangements

Changes to date:

- Processing to receive Holy Communion has restarted. Stewards are supervising the procession at the busier Masses to ensure that people go up single file – even if there are 2 ministers at the steps of the altar – bench by bench from front to back and return to their seats by the side aisles. However, ministers continue to take the host to those who are attending Mass outside the main body of the church.
- Stewarding is no longer needed at weekday Masses. When the current rota expires a mix of the work of the parish cleaner and parishioners cleaning the areas where they have sat will be sufficient, which will roughly equal a daily clean. At weekends, a wipe down after the Vigil and 11am Masses is important.

- Those who travel together to Mass, even if they are not part of a household bubble, are now allowed to sit together.
- Test and trace slips will continue to be available for those without mobile phones.

DISCUSSION

Jim O'Sullivan felt that the recent changes were working well and although the Communion line is working, Jo Wager asked that there is a reminder from the altar by the priest about new movement around the church

11am Mass remains the busiest of the Sunday Masses with 14 people turned away most recently.

Helena Judd asked whether a return of altar servers and the Offertory procession might soon be possible. Fr Simon felt that with regard to the Offertory procession, this is something for the future. Also, we need someone to coordinate and train the altar servers. He hopes that someone can be co-opted for September, although some altar servers have started at a couple of the Masses.

The Meeting was happy with the changes that have come into force so far, and we will continue to move forward with these as well as keeping in mind further changes for the future.

- Social distancing in benches: the latest guidelines allow for people to come closer than 2m but not necessarily as close as 1m. However, the changes mean we could rejig the seating arrangement to allow 2 couples at either end of a bench, or a group of 3 plus 1 person in a bench. However, the spacing is still too tight to fit 3 individuals in a bench. Seating people in this new pattern would increase the church capacity to between 8-10 people depending on the mix of groups.

DISCUSSION

If we move to these new seating levels, it will be important to have stewards at the fuller Sunday Masses because people will need to be seated as efficiently as possible.

Helena J asked if the new distances mean that we can now use every bench rather than every other bench. Unfortunately, this is not yet possible because our benches are less than a metre apart and if someone is sitting or kneeling the distance between people in front or behind is reduced further. Some churches have managed this problem by using staggered seating so that you don't sit 'in front' of anyone. However, it was felt that people move into space even when asked to stay in a particular spot. The new spacing is something that could be introduced for the busier Masses initially. Those who are not comfortable with closer spacing can then attend a less busy Mass.

Poor and non-mask wearing is still worrying for those who are clinically vulnerable and there was a plea to make sure that windows are open. A poster showing how to properly where a mask has been sent to the office and this will be on display shortly.

Other ways to increase capacity were suggested such as holding an outdoor Mass, or as an overflow area with a sound relay into the garden and/or car park? Possibly a speaker outside the door.

Fr Simon felt that a garden Mass would not be something that would solve our logistic problems as we can fit fewer in the garden with the correct spacing than we can in church. And that using the garden as an overflow area also has its problems. For example, access is not easy as it entails people having to walk through both the narthex and parish room, where we already have additional seating. And this extra seating is often used by traveller families who use the garden area to allow their children space to run around during Mass. Access from the side gate is also problematic due to security issues.

Overall, despite the concern with the difficulties of mask wearing, the majority of the meeting felt that the changes in spacing are acceptable, particularly as we want to gradually move back to normality for as many people as possible.

We also have the 5pm Mass on Sundays which still has plenty of capacity. If we continue with this Mass through the summer, we should try to promote it as an alternative to the busy 11am Mass.

Mary-Jane O'Sullivan proposed that we could plan for a weekend or two with a more limited number of Masses at some point over the summer in order to give Fr Simon a bit of a break.

- Coffee after Mass : We would like to start to plan to reinstate coffee after 11am Mass on Sundays. For now, this would have to take place outside with a maximum of 30 people. Christine Knight is happy to organise a rota for which a minimum of 7 people would be needed. If anyone want to volunteer, please contact Christine.

DISCUSSION

The logistics of people leaving the Narthex and Parish Room at the end of Mass and others gathering for coffee in the garden need to be carefully considered and planned, particularly as using side access is not currently practical due to rough sleepers, syringes and trip hazards. It may be more practical to have coffee in the car park rather than the garden.

- Coffee Hub – Jo Wager proposed that the parish start an outreach project aimed at reaching people living in the area of St Laurence's, and also providing an opportunity to bring the Parish together as we come out of pandemic restrictions. She proposed that from Saturday 26 June we set up an area in the carpark from which to host an outdoor coffee morning. Setting up 10am after morning Mass with tables and chairs in the carpark, and opening 10.30am-12.30pm for free tea/coffee and a biscuit, aiming to clear away by 1pm. A table will be placed in front of the passage entry to the kitchen with only volunteers going in/out of the building. There are currently 4

people interested in running this, but more volunteers are needed with 3-4 people per session needed to serve and clean. Seating of up to six people per table, serving Traidcraft tea and coffee, perhaps with individually wrapped biscuits and sugar to reduce handling.

DISCUSSION

After, general discussion of how this would be run, the Meeting was in favour of the initiative including a leaflet drop letting the neighbours know what we are doing and that all are welcome.

- Community sponsorship of refugees – webinar

The idea is that the Parish provide sponsorship for a refugee family. The webinar explaining the what is entailed is taking place on Monday 14th June at 6pm. The Chair asked if anyone would like to attend and report back at the next POM. Steve Warde volunteered, but asked if anyone else would like to join him.

3. Parish group updates

SVP: the group continues to meet fortnightly online through Zoom and is responding to a variety of requests from friendly contact to financial assistance to foodbank voucher requests. Members will also be delivering the Parish magazine, *The Pilgrim*, to parishioners who are not coming to Mass and who would prefer a paper copy to reading it online.

NEXT MEETING

13th July at 7.30pm using ZOOM.