

Parishioner's Open Meeting 20 October 7.30pm
Present: Fr Simon, Deacon Geoff, Chair Stephen Warde
Parishioners at the start of the meeting: 18 rising to 21

Apologies: Christine Knight, Serga Collett

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as a true record of the last meeting.

1. Updates following the last meeting

Children's Liturgy: Jim Infield reported that there have been three sessions of children's liturgy at 9.30am Mass since the last meeting, and that they sessions have gone well. He offered thanks to Martin Avery and Andy Diston for providing the music for these sessions. He reported that there had been good engagement from the whole congregation and that the children have not been shy to put up their hands to answer to questions. The use of a roving mic has helped. Jim asked for feedback or questions from the Meeting.

Catharine Warren said that she had enjoyed the sessions. She felt that it was good to have a new approach, and that Jo Cullen, an older member of the Parish, had told her that she had enjoyed seeing the children taking part at the Mass.

Jim and Mary-Jane O'Sullivan had attended via livestream and got a good impression that it was working well and that, although children weren't visible, it was obvious that there was a good deal of interaction.

Five volunteers are currently leading the sessions in pairs, so it would be nice to have another volunteer to round up the volunteers to three pairs of two. Further feedback is welcome particularly in these early stages as the team develop the best way of putting these sessions into practice.

The Chair expressed thanks and congratulations to the team who have got this up and running and Jim appreciated the support of the Open Meeting.

Building update: James Dore reported briefly that a quote for work on the presbytery heating has been accepted and someone was coming to start work on this in a couple of weeks. Also, a couple of quotes for the roof work have been received and will be progressed.

2. Current and future Mass arrangements, and Christmas planning

Following the appeal for stewards we have had several new volunteers and held an update meeting for all stewards and updated our guidelines to reflect changing rules and the strengthening of our own procedures.

It was noted that stewards had noticed that the QR and track and trace cards can be a bit time consuming and cause a delay for getting people into the church. It is planned to update the QR codes in the porch and place one in the outside noticeboard, which should help the flow of people entering the church wanting to register through scanning the codes with their phones. It should also be remembered that the track and trace paper forms and the St

Laurence QR code can be completed once seated in the church. Other ideas were to create a numbered register, include the Track & Trace Form in the newsletter.

Fears that we are getting lax on ventilation of the church as the days/nights grow colder were reported. The church needs to be well-aired to stop the spread of droplets. We have more recently had the windows open at the front of the church only as opposed to having all windows open. This should fulfil the ventilation requirement while hopefully not being too cold, but please wrap up in anticipation of this as we progress towards the winter and colder days.

It was noted that paper forms are, on the whole, more popular than scanning QR codes. It is therefore important to have a good supply of working pencils. A plea was also added that as well as pencils, that newsletters were available for those attending the last Mass of the weekend.

Ron Haynes suggested that for those who didn't have access to smart phones, that a key fob could be designed and produced which could be used to scan the QR codes.

It was also suggested that people could be encouraged to take a couple of track and trace slips to complete at home ready for the next Sunday.

Fr Simon asked whether the Parish would be happy for the 5pm Mass to become a permanent fixture and added to the Parish's record in the Diocesan Yearbook for the coming year. It was felt that there is a good number of people who find the timing of the Mass convenient. It may appeal to shift workers and young people, and as we continue to turn people away from Masses earlier in the day, it makes sense to make 5pm Mass a permanent addition if Fr Simon can cover the increase in the number of Sunday Masses.

Christmas planning

Fr Simon proposed that as the family Mass on Christmas Eve is usually oversubscribed in the normal run of things, this year he would like to have two Masses in its place – one at 4pm and one at 6pm. He would plan to draft in more support from Blackfriars to cover up to 7 Masses over Christmas eve and Christmas Day, as a priest should not say more than 3 Masses a day. Masses will still need to be kept to 45mins max in length, and congregational singing will not be allowed. The consequence of this is that many elements of our usual celebrations will be different.

To manage the anticipated demand for places in church, it was suggested that the Masses over these two days should be ticketed, with 80% of the available seating being booked by parishioners online and 20% of seating being kept as a first come first served on the night. This would help manage expectations and plans for attending Mass, especially for families with younger children.

It was felt that if you had reserved a seat online, then you would need to have arrived and be seated at least 10 minutes before the start of Mass, so that the stewards would have time to seat those turning up without a ticket. If people arrived later than this, even with a pre-booked place, then entry could not be guaranteed.

Extra volunteers to steward these busy Masses would also be needed.

Fr Simon agreed that it would be possible to use the Parish Room as an overflow area, as a one off occasion. He would also inform the police that we may be busy on the evening of 24th and people may congregate outside the church.

Extra mics would be needed in the Parish Room (and the live stream set up on the screen) and outside (for early evening Mass) for these areas of overflow: no more than 20 outside. Planning for extra Eucharistic Ministers and Readers is also needed well in advance. There was also some discussion of the need to make people who are as yet unable to attend in person feel more involved in the Masses - not just at Christmas, but generally. One way would be to include some of them as recorded voices in readings. Other suggestions are welcome. Fr Simon said that he would be happy to have a mix of live and recorded readings. We should also put together a provisional plan for the possibility of full lockdown over Christmas.

For those parishioners who are part of the traveller community, Fr Simon said he would pass the message via contact, Shaily at the Cottenham drop-in centre to try let them know not to turn up en-masse for the Christmas Masses with the expectation of being able to attend when we are having to keep the social distancing laws.

Fr Simon would like to continue the tradition of the Carol Service on the last Sunday of Advent, and it was suggested that it could be held as a virtual event. This would have the benefit of people being able to sing in their own homes, which they would not be able to do in the church.

There was also a general discussion on introducing more live music into Mass in general and in particular at Christmas. However, on the few occasions that there has been some live music in Mass, it was noted that members of the congregation had joined in, particularly at the Alleluia when a well-known tune was sung, despite continuing announcements (via Martin on the prepared music CD) that singing is not allowed. A plea for an upgrade to the current CD player was made, and that it be one not only with a better sound quality but with a user friendly display and easy to operate. If we do have live music it must be music that the majority of the congregation do not know and therefore will not sing along to.

Fr Simon has also been in touch with Stephen Chapman who co-ordinates the altar server ministry, but he is unable to return for the time being. Can a parent be approached to organise this? Fr Simon was hoping to ask Steve as his daughters have been and are altar servers. Their role needs to be reclarified and make sure they can socially distance: what would an altar server be able to do? Carry the cross, manage the CD player, ring the bell? Who will coordinate the servers – maybe one of the older altar servers?

ACTION:

Contact traveller community: Fr Simon

Find extra readers, stewards and eucharistic ministers: Facil. Group

Plan how altar serving might be re-introduced to Masses: Fr Simon, Facil group

Purchase a new CD player with better quality sound, display and remote: Tech team to research and recommend.

Set up a booking system for the Christmas Masses: Reece

Work out how altar servers can safely and usefully be part of Mass again: Facil. Group, Fr Simon

Contact local police so they are aware that there may be larger numbers congregating in the area: Fr Simon

Consider ideas to involve those attending remotely more directly in the Masses: Facil. Group and future POMs

3. School update

Joint head of St Laurence's Primary School, Veronica Harvey, reported that the school is fully open and everyone is attending as normal. A welcome back to school Mass had been held in the church with year 6 pupils present and the rest of the school joining in via Zoom. The children are working and playing in bubbles. School and church have agreed Mass times at the school for school bubbles in the run up to Christmas and the plan is to also have a Penitential Mass for the older children during Advent. Zoom is also used for school assemblies. However, there are some limitations in the usual running of school activities and this has meant that the Mini Vinnies group and CAFOD club have not been able to restart and it unlikely that they will re-opened before the Spring but the school has been organising collections for Foodbanks.

The children who had been planning to have their First Holy Communion in May have now all done so over the start of the new term, and teaching for the next group of about 20 children has started.

To help strengthen the links between school and parish, Veronica suggested that parishioners consider an 'adopt a class' scheme where parishioners could be linked to a class which would then include them in their daily prayers for example. Fr Simon suggested that for those adopted parishioners there could be a prayer session between them and the classes on Zoom.

The school nativity plays are planned to go ahead as usual but again without live singing. There will be music but the children will be learning to sign the words rather than sing them. Bubble Masses will also be held at the school.

Co-chair of the Governing body, Mary-Jane O'Sullivan said that the governors have been very impressed with the way the school has managed re-opening and day to day running of the school and offered thanks on behalf of the governors.

ACTION:

Arrange with the school for an invite to partner a class to be put in the parish newsletter

4. Parish groups update: SVP update

Catharine Warren reported that the group were planning how to safely manage to run the giving tree initiative within the COVID regulations. They plan to start the scheme in mid-November and to offer the opportunity to choose a gift online. They will need to receive the gifts earlier than usual so that there is time to quarantine and distribute the gifts before

Christmas, therefore the return date for all gifts will be 6th December. This will also give time for those who are still shielding to be able to order a gift online and for the SVP to arrange collection.

Pilgrim Update: Nora Darby reminded the Meeting that the next edition of the parish magazine would be published on the first weekend of Advent, and encouraged everyone to send in articles by 6th November.

5. Chair of the Parish Open Meeting

The current Chair, Stephen Warde, said that the current term of the position of POM Chair is up and the Meeting should either appoint, or reappoint, a new Chair. Despite the announcement of this at the last meeting there had been no volunteers as yet for this. Fr Simon then asked Stephen if he would consider continuing in position for the moment and see if someone might step up in the spring/summer. Stephen agreed to do this, although he expressed that it is good to have a regular turnover of people in this position.

ACTION:

Put a note in the newsletter after Christmas advertising the fact that a new Chairperson is being sought: Facil. group

6. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 1st December at 7.30pm via Zoom. Meeting details would be sent out in the usual way in the Parish 'Keep in touch' email and the newsletter.