

Parishioners' Open Meeting

21 January 2021 7.30pm

Present: Fr Simon, Stephen Ward (Chair), Deacon Geoff Cook + 18 at start of meeting

Apologies: Michael Allan, Ginny & Rupert Russell, Ron Haynes, Jeanette Milbourn

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be a true record. Fr Simon opened the meeting with a prayer, and the Chair invited him to layout out the current situation with regard to:

1. Mass arrangements and private prayer at the church

With an increase in COVID infections linked to the new variant Fr Simon decided that it was not reasonable to keep the church open for Mass considering the risks, noting that a lot of our parishioners, including many of the stewards, are in vulnerable categories. However, Bishop Alan Hopes wants a minimum of one Mass open for people to attend and, while we continue to encourage people to join via live streaming, the doors will be open for the Sunday at 11am Mass with clear instructions that people must clean the area where they have been sitting before leaving. There was a total of 15 people at this Mass on 17th January. Communication about the closure seems to have gone well with only readers attending as requested at the other Mass.

However, it was pointed out that, in line with the bishops' guidance and best practice, stewards should be in place at any public Masses, so if we are not doing that, are we opening in line with best practice? While numbers attending are low, this may not be an issue but if numbers increase it could become one. The Bishop wants the church to remain open to mitigate against complaints that it is closed when it's allowed to be open. However, people in the meeting felt it was the Bishop's place to deal with complaints that might arise from this.

With regard to private prayer, people are being asked via signage to leave a post-it note where they have sat to indicate that the space has been used and therefore needs to be cleaned. Numbers coming into the church for private prayer are currently very low, with only 2 people coming in since the church was closed. The Parish cleaner comes in to clean 4 days a week and is wiping down the benches as needed.

However, although we are allowed under current rules to be open for communal worship, it is not clear that we can remain open for private prayer. This may be an unintended omission however as the churches were allowed to open for private prayer during previous lockdowns.

Several parishioners voiced their agreement with Fr Simon that the church should be kept closed, particularly as numbers of COVID patients in our local hospital are still high.

Fr Simon is happy for people to text/email/phone to organise for people to come into the church for private prayer so that use can be monitored and cleaning done, and the Meeting supported this suggestion as well as the fact that the church has been closed. It was further

suggested that if people wanted to attend Mass they could contact Fr Simon in the same way. This might be a way of keeping the church closed while allowing some access and making a weekday Mass the open Mass might satisfy the Bishop's requirement to be open. It was also queried whether the Bishop had actually received any complaints that the church was closed and perhaps that this was an ungrounded fear.

Now that Masses are behind closed doors it was suggested that we should revert to having just 2 Masses on Sunday at 9am and 11am. This would be helpful to limit the number of readers needed, although pre-recorded readings can also be provided.

It was also explained that even if people have been vaccinated it is still possible for them to catch the virus, be a carrier of the virus and infect others, and therefore all our current provisions need to remain in place.

It was suggested that Fr Bob should not feel under an obligation to come to St Laurence's to say Mass for the time being - this might also help to protect Fr Simon.

While we are on reduced Mass attendance, CD DJ-ing can be done by the readers. If no can do it then we don't have music for that particular Mass.

Ash Wednesday – if the church remains closed, how can the Parish celebrate Ash Wednesday in a meaningful way. Mary-Jane O'Sullivan suggested that we might invite parishioners to think of and share creative things they could do as well as watching the live streamed Mass on Ash Wednesday instead of receiving ashes - for example, lighting candles, or finding a prayer to say together. This suggestion was supported by the meeting.

Confessions – if someone wants to go to confession is this possible in general and in particular during Lent. In general Fr Simon has been conducting individual confessions in the parish room with 2 metres distance and wearing a mask. He suggested that he could conduct an online Stations of the Cross followed by a penitential rite and general absolution. He has a suitable PowerPoint presentation could share it if this was done via Zoom.

ACTIONS:

From next weekend Mass on Sunday to be said only at 9am and 11am – **Fr Simon**

Suggest to Fr Bob to take a break from saying Mass in the Parish during this lockdown period – **Fr Simon**

Check signage is adequate in the porch indicating that masks should be worn, hands sanitised and social distancing maintained etc. and how to mark areas that need to be cleaned in light of how more infectious the virus is now – **Facilitation Group**

Make sure clear instructions are given to those at an open Mass that by attending they agree to take responsibility for cleaning the areas that they have used while we have no official stewarding in place and consider how this information should be shared while encouraging numbers attending to be kept to a minimum – **Fr Simon**

Put the question on how Ash Wednesday could be celebrated and made spiritually meaningful without public Mass to the Parish – **Fr Simon**

2. Review of Christmas ticketing system

Footfall for most Masses was disappointing but likely due to the late change in Government ruling on meeting up for Christmas, although the Christmas Eve family Masses were well attended. All Masses were more or less fully booked but there was a lower than expected turnout, with quite a few 'no-shows', probably due to people's changed plans. The process for booking tickets and managing attendance worked fairly well and could be used again if needed. The question was raised whether everyone felt that they had an equal opportunity to book into the Mass they wanted to attend if they didn't have the ability to book online. Stephen Warde confirmed that bookings had also been received via phone calls to the Parish Office. The Chair recorded thanks to everyone who had contributed to all aspects of preparing for Christmas, including church decoration, music, stewarding, children's liturgy.

3. Redecoration

The Meeting agreed Fr Simon that with the church currently closed, it would be a good opportunity to get the church interior re-painted. The choice of colour for the repainting can be discussed at a later meeting.

ACTIONS:

Get quotes for painting the interior of the church and pass to the Finance Committee – **Fr Simon**

4. Children's Liturgy update (Leonie Isaacson)

Leonie gave a brief update on how Children's Liturgy has been running at 9.30am Sunday Mass and asked for people to complete a survey she has created to gauge interest in whether this should be continued. The link to this survey was shared with the Meeting and can also be found in the newsletter and keep in touch email.

ACTIONS

Encourage people to record responses on the survey – **Fr Simon**

Ask Chioma if she could circulate the survey link among the First Holy Communion families
Leonie

Contact the Diocese to arrange training for people who might like to help with Children's Liturgy – **Fr Simon**

5. SVP update (Catharine Warren)

Catharine thanked the Parish for its generous response to the Giving Tree initiative. The SVP was able to fulfil all the hampers and gifts that it planned to and received donations in excess to their requests. They now plan to focus on an overseas appeal and ask the Parish to support the Sudan and South Sudan appeal again. They will talk about the appeal at the end

of each Mass this weekend and there will be information on the Parish website and Facebook page. A Just Giving webpage has been set up and there will be links and information on how to donate using this.

The Chair offered thanks on behalf of the Parish to the SVP group for organising this and helping us keep some of our usual Christmas preparations as a Parish going.

Fr Simon was grateful to the SVP for organising the Giving Tree online this year. He was pleased to see this ongoing tradition maintained, and said it is important to continue this work.

6. CAFOD update (Serga Collett)

Serga report that £157 had been donated to CAFOD from the making and selling of the Christmas masks and thanked everyone who had made and bought them.

CAFOD is now preparing for the next Fast Day appeal which is due to take place on 26th February with the collection on the weekend of 27th/28th February. There is a regional planning meeting at 10.30-12.30am via Zoom on 30th January. If you are interested in joining this, Serga can provide the invitation details.

CAFOD are also organising a Lent fundraising effort called 'Walk for Water'. The aim is to walk 10k steps every day of Lent – as an individual or as a team – to raise funds for CAFOD to support those who need to walk to get collect clean water. Alternatively for those who cannot commit to a daily 10k total, there will also be one single walk on Saturday 20th Feb. Fr Simon agreed that Serga can talk to the Parish about these initiatives after Masses in forthcoming weeks.

ACTIONS:

Arrange post-Mass CAFOD talks - **Serga**

Arrange for the Parish Donor Reference for CAFOD to go in the newsletter and keep in touch email so that this can be quoted when parishioners make donations to CAFOD and counted towards the Parish donation figure - **Serga**

7. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 23rd February AND
Thursday 25th March

AT 7.30pm via Zoom.

Fr Simon closed the meeting with a prayer.