

Parishioners' Open Meeting
4 July 2023, 7.30pm

Present: Fr Simon, Deacon Geoff, Stephen Warde plus approx. 12 parishioners in person or online.

Apologies: Sarah Sykes (minutes from the recording), Ron Haynes, Leonie Isaacson, Jeanette Milbourn, Mary-Jane O'Sullivan

Minutes of the previous meeting have been uploaded to the website. One correction was received that under the CAFOD update, the Family Fast Day in July is actually a Family Fridays meeting at which Serga as CAFOD rep has been invited to participate.

1. MATTERS ARISING

i) The Chair reported that following James Dore's announcement that his and Joanne's tenure as Joint Treasurer is due to end shortly, parishioner Riq Willetts has volunteered to take on this role, along with Mary Ann Leonard who is under training with Joanne. The handover to the new team will take place in August.

Fr Simon said that it is good practice to have this role covered by more than one person in case someone is incapacitated or has to resign, so that there is someone else who is up to date with the financial situation and procedures of the parish. He also added that the Diocese policy for recording financial matters is to use Excel spreadsheet, and a spreadsheet has been designed to make populating it for the Parish Financial Report to the Diocese as easy as possible. The Financial Return is done on a 6 monthly basis. He also noted that since we've returned to collection money through basket collection, what we receive has seen a marked increase. Jim Scally continues our Gift Aid officer. James has meanwhile volunteered to join the collection counting team and is investigating purchasing a dropbox safe in which to put the collection money, so that it can be left somewhere quickly and kept securely until it is counted, without the main safe having to be opened. Thanks were given to James and Joanne for their work, in particular the support given to Parish Groups CAFOD and SVP, including the management of the Alive in Faith money which we receive from the Diocese.

Alive in Faith – Fr Simon mentioned that it would be good to get an idea what continued donations are being made to Alive in Faith and to check whether we were still receiving regular shares of this.

ii) Website development – still on our to-do list but no further news on this point from the last meeting.

ACTION:

- Check with the Diocese re our Alive in Faith contributions and whether we are due to receive a portion of this back to the parish and how much that might be – FR SIMON

2. PARISH AND DIOCESAN NEWS

Parish

i) First Holy Communion - Fr Simon reported that there were 7 Masses in which children made their First Holy Communion. These took place at the normal Sunday Masses as well as a couple of additional Saturdays.

He will announce in August and September that the First Holy Communion course will begin again in September. There is a good, but small, team of volunteers who run the course – Paula Hawkins and her sister, Fenoula. Jim Infield, Sr Rose Rollins, and Elsie Chi returning for the coming year.

He would also like to see post-Communion catechesis for the children.

The Chair asked for a brief review of how the change from the school preparing the majority of the children for Communion to church volunteers preparing all the children had had any consequences. Fr Simon felt that it had been a positive experience, although it may have reduced the links between the Parish and the school.

Fr Simon also reported that there is a slight drop in intake at St Laurence's School so that class sizes are around 30 rather than pre-Brexit levels of 45. He has invited the Head Teacher to speak at Sunday Masses to promote the school and encourage applications to attend.

ii) Confirmation - Mass is due to take place tomorrow. The music is being supported by some of the 5 Alive musicians from OLEM. Bishop Peter is looking forward to joining us.

iii) Restoration of receiving from the Chalice – Fr Simon said that we have a decent number of Ministers, and a few are waiting to be trained. He hasn't had negative feedback from people worried about it. He is encouraging the ministers to stand at a 90 degree angle to the church so that as the queue is being formed that people can get passed if not taking wine. There was some discussion about the etiquette of taking and receiving the chalice.

Diocesan

There was some discussion about the problem of how best to offer a Catholic presence in Northstowe and how this may relate to the shared church facility at Bar Hill. Deacon Geoff, who has been involved in church plants in new build areas, including Cambourne, said that Northstowe will eventually be the largest town in Cambridgeshire, however there is currently no plan to provide a Mass Centre or communal worship area. It was unlikely a similar solution would emerge to that in place at Cambourne, since this has not been included in any planning and the costs would be high (around £3 million). Jane Matthews commented that at one time she had attended church on what was then the Oakington Barracks. This land is now part of Northstowe. Fr Simon said that he would be interested to find out more.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF LAITY - Michanne attended the meeting this month, the last meeting having taken place in May 2022 – our parish rep at that meeting was Helena Judd. Michanne reported her impressions of the meeting. Going forward, the main topics for discussion were:

Retired priests - people were worried that due care was not being given to them, but there is now a welfare officer for retired priests who can notify the Bishop of any problems, and who regularly checks in with the priests. The welfare officer comes from a Citizen's Advice background and is well trained in all aspects of claiming benefits. Fr Simon pointed out that the Diocese (including the Dependent Priests Fund) cannot afford to pay care home fees for retired priests who may need such care.

Synodal Process – the development of this is ongoing and the Bishop made it clear that his role was impartial, and that continued input from parishes is welcome.

Schools – the Bishop discussed the position of inter-church schools and academies such as St Bede's in Cambridge, All Saints in March. He would prefer that schools are Catholic if we are to continue to support them..

Finally, the Bishop made it clear that he is not interested in being popular or being “anyone's pal” but is in place as the Bishop to work for the good of the Church. The next meeting is 11 November 2023. He suggested that the meeting be held in Newmarket rather than Norwich to make it easier to travel to from across the Diocese.

3. CHURCH BUILDING

Jim O'Sullivan gave a brief summary of the companies that he has approached for quotes for providing a new heating system for the church. Once we have these quotes we can discuss the detail of what could be provided and how much it would cost.

Stephen Warde informed the Meeting that there will be a request in the newsletter for people to send in small building works that need to be done around the church buildings. These will be collected and a push for work – tidying and repairing – to be completed during the next few months. He also thanked the CWL for the new cushions made for the benches in the Parish Room, and mentioned that the bookcase in the Parish Room has been tidied up and been moved upstairs. Some oil has been purchased so that the wooden benches in the church can be re-oiled.

ACTION:

- Jim and Finance Committee – push forward heating plans
- Stephen – tidying/maintenance list and organising oiling of benches.

4. PASTORAL ASSISTANT (PA)

Kay Dodsworth summarised the progress on the thinking about employing a Pastoral Assistant. The idea, which came initially from the Synodal process, is to employ someone to help develop the pastoral support in the Parish and Parish life generally. The thought is that we might initially advertise the post for 2 or 3 years. A selection of job descriptions were looked through to see if we could tailor one for ourselves and give us an idea of the kind of work a PA could be expected to do.

The following is a list of priorities devised by those involved with SPAG (Synodal Pathway Action Group):

- Give assistance to Fr Simon in identifying the needs of individuals who need particular pastoral care and monitoring those needs and how they are being addressed
- Give support to Parish groups and activities and give encouragement to new initiatives
- Give support to those providing catechesis and organise development/training for them.
- Identify other groups in the Parish (e.g., parents or residents of new build areas) where we might want to create new support activities, and make this happen
- Links with other parishes, ecumenical outreach.

Next steps are to produce a full draft job description and person specification, which can enable more detailed decisions on how to go forward. If someone is appointed, we would ask them to set out a work plan based on our priorities which could then be reviewed. It is likely that we would identify a group of people within the Parish to help with the management of the PA, supporting the Parish Priest – exact details need to be agreed. The role of a PA will need to be distinguished quite clearly from that of the Secretary.

DISCUSSION

Michanne advocated that whoever is employed should have strong social media skills. She said that most young families don't get their information through reading newsletters, but through interacting with social media platforms. We don't currently have a strong social media presence although we do have a Facebook page which is periodically updated with news, but the communication needs to come from the Parish Office.

Karen was concerned that we drill down properly into the detail of what we want.

The PA will need the following skills and qualities: Empathy, the ability to deal with different kinds of people and in different contexts, be a self-organiser, take initiative as advised by the Parish Priest and parishioners, and have pastoral and theological training.

Would the PA be expected to provide some administrative support? Fr Simon expressed a wish to have his workload managed within the parish in a similar way to how his Canon Law work is managed. Nora pointed out that Reece only works part-time and perhaps a full-time parish secretary is needed.

The Chair asked that the job description be further developed and be ready to be actioned in September, pulling together some of the ideas from this discussion. This should also include a person specification.

We need to be clear about whether we want the PA to be involved in outreach to the villages and nursing homes or more administrative support. There won't be time to do both well.

The person must be an active, practicing Catholic

The Chair offered thanks to all working on this.

Action:

- SPAG working group – job description and person specification for next meeting.

5. ADULT EDUCATION

The planned discussions sessions around prayer (following on from the Sycamore group earlier this year) had happened, although attendance had been very small.

Roberta and Kay would like to run some more discussion group sessions in the Autumn, most likely around the theme of the Instrumentum Laboris document that has been prepared for the Synod. There was support for this idea.

Action:

- Roberta and Kay – Adult Faith sharing plan for the Autumn.

6. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

We had a social in June which was very nice. Thanks to everyone who helped and who came.

Parish Feast Day will take place next month. 6pm Mass followed by bring and share and food to bbq.

Action:

- TBD – organise the St Laurence's Day social

7. PARISH GROUPS UPDATE

SVP

Ciarán gave a short summary of recent events organised by the group: Senior Parishioners Lunch – thank you to CWL for organising this and other parishioners who helped on the day, Coton Garden Centre trip and Walsingham Pilgrimage (2nd July) all ran very successfully. The help of non-SVP members was very welcome and much appreciated.

SVP are supporting several vulnerable families, as well as various people who need to access health care services either by helping to cover travel costs or by accompanying them. We are providing lifts to Mass and taking Communion to people at home and we are also supporting members of the traveller community. Over the last few weeks there has been an SVP presence at the Saturday Coffee Hub from 10-11am. Members are available for a chat or to offer advice and help.

SVP at OLEM have reached out to offer help with our activities and asked for reciprocal support from our conference. We may be helping them with a recruitment drive in the near future.

Back to school – SVP have a shoe fund to help families provide shoes for children. They are in regular contact with the school who have advertised this help in the school newsletter.

An Anointing of the Sick Mass will be planned for sometime in the autumn.

Fr Simon mentioned that he is grateful to the SVP for supplying him with Tesco vouchers to give to those who come to the door asking for money. There is a steady flow of people coming for help and it is not easy to distinguish those in genuine need.

Stephen Warde suggested a verbal announcement about the shoe fund at Mass and putting information on social media.

CAFOD

Serga mentioned that the JustGiving page had been left open for any late donations for our fundraising walk to Bangladesh. There haven't been any recent donations so this page will be closed next Monday (17th July). We have raised just shy of £1500 and our steps took us as far as India.

Laudato Sii Masses are taking place over the weekend of 16 and 17 July. Environmental theme and signing. A bring and share lunch with a bit of gardening after Mass on Sunday

Family Fridays meeting is coming up.

Serga announced that it was time for her to stand down from her position as CAFOD rep. She has held the position for a number of years and feels it's time for new blood. She is going to be busy focussing on her Makaton teaching and would like to work encouraging access to our church and faith for those with special educational needs or disabilities as brought up by the Synodal Pathway discussions. She thanked several parishioners who have

helped over the years at various events and hoped someone will step forward to carry on the work. The Chair offered thanks on behalf of the Parish for her hard work.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 14 September at 7.30pm

(NOTE: Subsequent to meeting – this is moved to 21 Sept owing to room-booking clash).