

## **Parishioners' Open Meeting**

**21 Sept at 7.30pm**

Present: 14 plus 4 online incl. Fr Simon Blakesley, Deacon Geoff Cook, Seminarian Peter Ho, Stephen Warde (Chair), Sarah Sykes (Minutes)

Apologies: none

1. Minutes and Matters arising – the minutes of the last meeting were approved, there were no separate matters arising.
2. Parish & Diocesan News

The Chair welcomed Peter Ho to the meeting. He is a 4<sup>th</sup> year seminarian and is here to experience parish life. He will be with us until Christmas. He has another 2 years of study ahead of him.

Fr Simon reported that the Bishop has a new priest secretary, Fr Peter Wagnanski. We are still waiting to hear when we will get a visitation by the Bishop.

Our first Holy Communion classes will be starting shortly. Inscription Mass is taking place on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September. 65-70 children are due to sign up.

We are required by the Diocese to conduct a count of those present at Mass over the next four Sundays. This used to take place during October, but the numbers were skewed to a certain extent by people being away during the half-term break. The count will now take place during the last 2 weeks of September and the first two weeks of October. The count for last weekend totalled 570 people. In comparison to last year which was 540 and pre-covid it was 650 (2019), we are pleased to see our attendance is getting nearer to our pre-covid attendance.

On 30<sup>th</sup> September, Sr Gemma Simmonds will be leading an afternoon of teaching about the Synod and in particular reflective listening. The Meeting held a short discussion about what time this will finish. It has currently been advertised to finish at 6pm, but it was felt that a 5.30pm finish would be better in order to allow time for those who plan to attend the 6pm vigil Mass to make pre-Mass preparations, and for those not staying to leave the car park free for those arriving for Mass.

3. Building update

Jim O'Sullivan has been exploring options for a new heating system for the church building. He has received 5 quotes from 3 companies. Having consulted with the Finance Committee, it has been decided that we will offer the job to Dunphy, a leading specialist in church heating. Their quotation included the uninstallation and removal of our current system. As part of the new installation, we will have 19 new radiators installed into the church. The new system will be programmable so that particular temperatures can be set for particular times of the day. We are currently awaiting Diocesan approval and then an installation date will be agreed. It is hoped that we can get the installation completed before the winter months.

We have also received some quotes in connection with installing more solar panels on the church buildings. Fr Simon suggested that an inline installation of panels (ie panels replace roof slates) would be preferable. It is hoped that this can be progressed within the next 6 months.

Other maintenance – the water heater in the kitchen has been descaled and the water boiler in the sacristy, which had been leaking badly, has now been replaced with a hot-water-on-demand model.

Bench cleaning – Steve Warde reported that all our pew benches have had their backs cleaned, sanded and oiled. We had a good number of volunteers and the job was completed in just over an hour. Thanks were recorded to all who volunteered.

**ACTION:** Jim and Finance Committee: move along the heating proposal.

#### 4. Support for couples

Paolo Mannu and his wife Una proposed that we organise an evening where couples could come together for some social time. A similar event had taken place Newmarket Parish, and Paolo and Una who have been volunteering in this area of ministry for a while, suggested that we run our event on the Saturday before Valentine's Day. They would organise for a meal to be prepared for couples to come and share and where they would have some time and space to build friendships with others at similar stages of life with the background of a shared faith. The Meeting was supportive of the idea. The evening will be aimed at those who are married or in a long-term relationship. It will be advertised in the newsletter. Also invitations will be sent out to groups such as the parents who are supporting children in their Confirmation preparation.

**ACTION:** Paolo and Una: organise couples session.

#### 5. Pastoral Assistant proposal

Members of the Synodal Pathway Action Group (SPAG) have been developing a [job description](#) for this role. They have read through a few examples from other dioceses, taken advice from the Margaret Beaufort Institute, Cambridge and consulted with a parishioner who was in this role in another local parish and prepared a draft description for discussion. The hope is that whoever takes on the role will expand and enable parishioner involvement and engagement in the Parish.

#### Discussion

Sarah Sykes posed the question whether it was important for the person hired to come from our parish. Steve pointed out that this had been covered in the person specification where it lists that it is desirable that the person is able to attend Sunday Mass at St Laurence's with sufficient regularity to build the personal relationships and understanding of the Parish needed to support the role. Fr S pointed out that this would ideally mean that the postholder should vary attendance across different Sunday Masses to meet the different Mass communities. Karen Rodgers felt there needed to be more clarity in the document, in particular with reference to whether Sunday would be expected to be a working day. Kay Dodsworth felt that the most important thing is that we should get the right person, someone who is the right fit for the parish. Fr Simon also said that we should bear in mind that whoever is employed may end up working with another priest with different

experience and abilities. James Dore suggested that we could consider a contractor relationship instead of an employer/employee relationship. However it was thought that the diocese may not support this approach. Roberta felt that being the preferred attribute of 'available to attend Sunday Masses regularly is desirable and why this is so' should be covered at interview stage but doesn't necessarily need to be spelled out in the job description. Geoff Cook thought that the person specification was perhaps a bit unrealistic and asking too much of the role holder. Ron said this was in line with other aspirational job requirements and that there could be the option in the future of employing a second pastoral assistant as the parish grows. Edward Acton felt very positive about the proposal and hoped that we will proceed to recruit quickly.

**ACTION:** SPAG Group and Fr S: start recruitment process for Pastoral Assistant before next meeting.

## 6. Proposal for a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)

The Chair gave an introductory presentation on the idea of setting up a PPC at St Laurence's, summarising [this proposal](#). This would give us a more structured team for organising and managing Parish life than we currently have through the Parishioner Open Meetings supported by the Facilitation Group. The meeting was supportive of the ideas and agreed that they should be presented to the Parish for comment and debate. Thanks were given to those who had researched and put together the proposal.

### Discussion

It was felt that having a structure where people felt that they had the authority and responsibility to act, and could see how their contribution fits into a structured team, would be beneficial to encouraging people to take part in parish life. It would also be useful if it makes it clear that there will be a regular change of membership and indicates the time commitment needed. Fr Simon would also like to encourage a wide cross-section representative to the parish. Jeanette M suggested that voting people into the positions might achieve a diversity. However, it was thought that this would be difficult to do as people don't know each other well enough to make informed vote because we are such a big parish. Steve W mentioned this might not be a problem, the problem will be to find enough people to fill the posts.

**ACTION:** Chair, Fr Simon: communicate proposal to Parish. Aim for full discussion at next Open Meeting.

## 7. Adult Education and faith sharing

Kay Dodsworth shared that the bible study group are coming to the end of a block of teaching within the next couple of weeks. They will take a break and then re-start in the new year. Roberta Canning mentioned the possibility of doing another Sycamore course. This is currently under consideration. It was felt that it would be quite useful particularly for those who are looking into joining the Catholic Church.

## 8. Social Activities

Feast day celebrations: The Chair thanked all who attended and helped run our Parish Feast day party, which had been well attended and was an enjoyable occasion.

Children's activity day: Jeanette Milbourn suggested that we could revive the children's activity day that had run in past years on the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent, perhaps in conjunction with the children's liturgy team. She agreed to contact the team and discuss the idea with them.

Coffee Hub – continues to be an important informal social gathering for the parish.

## 9. Parish Groups

SVP – Ciarán Ward reported that there is an East Anglia SVP Festival taking place in Newmarket on 1<sup>st</sup> October from 12noon. There will also be Mass at 11am. If anyone is considering joining the SVP or would like to know more about the SVP in general, that this would be a good opportunity to learn more.

Mass for the Anointing of the Sick on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October at 3pm – all are welcome and if anyone can help with lifts or serving refreshments after Mass, please get in touch as soon as possible.

Other news: the group continue with their usual support work within the parish. There has been an increase of people asking for money at the presbytery. The group are developing a leaflet that can be given to people asking for help with information about what help is available and where they can get it. Thanks were expressed for donations received of both money and goods.

CAFOD – Nora Darby reported that the parish group is looking to recruit new members and find new leadership for the group since Serga stepped down, perhaps 3-4 people taking on this on rather than one person. Meanwhile, the Family Harvest Fast Day is being organised. Envelopes for donations will be available next weekend. Any help with this is most welcome. The new donation point recently installed in the porch can be used for people to donate to CAFOD, but James Dore suggested that a separate hand-held machine would also be needed for the fast day collection.

Justice & Peace – Ron Haynes reported that the group have been promoting the Season of Creation which culminates on the Feast of St Francis. They are planning a nature walk on 24<sup>th</sup> September. The Stargazing Evening was very quiet. The group is also thinking about its plans for Advent, and on doing a presentation on *Laudato Sí* part 2 (currently being printed) which, among other things, looks at climate change issues.

Tech Group – Ron H reported that the church CCTV is no longer working. It's hard drive storage needs to be replaced. The group will arrange to do this. They are also looking into sourcing laptops that can be reconditioned and passed on to people who need them via the SVP.

James D mentioned that the donation machine in the porch can be used to donate to the general offertory, 2<sup>nd</sup> collections, SVP and CAFOD. It's currently battery-operated, but a permanent energy supply will be installed.

## 10. AOB

Parish newsletter – Nora Darby mentioned that the newsletter a couple of weeks ago was printed with very small print because there was so much news and this made it very difficult to read. Sarah Sykes presented a [sample redesign](#) of the newsletter which used colour to highlight information and make the newsletter a bit more engaging to look at and split the notices into three categories so that the reader isn't presented with a page of text. The sections were:

Notable and New – for when a notice first goes into the newsletter, or there's something to particularly take note of.

Parish Groups and Meetings – this section covers notices on parish life and activities.

Other News – information of interest and not necessarily taking place in the parish.

Also added was a section for 'Forthcoming Funeral' dates (so that people can see more than a week ahead when funerals are scheduled to take place) and 'How to arrange baptisms'. Space was gained by making the area taken up by the list of the week's Mass times a little smaller, which meant some notices from the reverse page could be moved to this page.

The Meeting expressed general approval of the ideas shown, and agreed that, in conjunction with Reece, a new design could be drawn up and presented at the next meeting.

It was also mentioned that when submitting a notice that the sender should state how long the notice needs to stay in the newsletter. And if there are any long-running notices, they can run for a few weeks, come out, and be re-entered later. This would help free up space particularly when there are a lot of new notices on any given week. Ron H would like, at some point, to design a webform which would help with this.

**ACTION:** Sarah: Discuss design ideas with Reece and support implementation.

Rotas – Nora Darby emphasised that more people are need to be Eucharistic ministers in particular, but welcomers and readers are also welcome.

School display in the porch – Ursula passed on a message of thanks from the school governors for the school display area in the porch. They have received positive comments about it and felt that it was a great support of the school for Education Sunday. In the future, displays of work shown at the school will hopefully make their way down to this display area.

## 11. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 21 November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Parish Room and online