**Annual Parish Meeting**

**St.John Fisher, Chorleywood**

**for the year ending 31 December 2020**

**Thursday 4th March 2021**

Participants: Fr Shaun Church, Fr Damian Ryan, Carolyn Opie, Alan Opie, Anne Lorrimer-Roberts, Yasmin Lakin, Maureen Fields, Toni D’Urso, Caroline Holly, Jackie Ingham, Patsy Tyden, Jo Whelan, Francis Holly, Malcolm Golin

**MINUTES**

1. **Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Led by Fr Shaun Church

2. **Approval of the minutes of the APM held on 2 March 2020**

These were received nem. con.

3. **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous

meeting.

4. **Parish Priest’s report – Fr Shaun Church**

Fr Shaun’s report is attached to the minutes and available on the parish website.

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Questions and comments:

Malcolm Golin reported that the choir had wished to acknowledge Patricia O’Sullivan’s leadership and commitment to the St John Fisher choir and had thus presented her with a gift from the choir members. He also reported that the choir had continued to practice weekly via Zoom during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Maureen Fields proposed a vote of thanks to Fathers Shaun and Damian for their wonderful work in keeping us together and functioning as a parish in these difficult times.

5. **Senior Leadership Team (SLT) report – Anne Lorrimer-Roberts**

Since the last Annual Meeting we only managed to hold two meetings face-to face prior to the start of the COVID-19 restrictions, and since the end of March 2020 we have met fortnightly via Zoom, which has been a powerful tool to help us to continue to work together. As your SLT we have continued to embrace the principles of the Divine Renovation movement to develop a culture within our parishes that encourages people to become missionary disciples throughout these difficult times and we lay members of the SLT have been privileged to be able to support Father Shaun and Father Damian in this endeavour, often acting as a sounding board for them and by providing constructive feedback on proposals under discussion.

Key tasks undertaken in the past year are as follows:

1. In Lockdown 1 we established a support network for vulnerable and isolated members of our parish communities to request assistance with shopping, etc. or just to access a friendly ear or face via phone or video for a chat. Initial access to the network is via the lay SLT members who then ask for assistance from a team of volunteers specially set up for the purpose. A number of people have contacted us, but generally the service has not been as well used as anticipated; partly because Father Shaun and Father Damian already made regular telephone contact with the most vulnerable and isolated people in the parish, and possibly because parishioners may already have had established support networks at their disposal.
2. After the first lockdown in 2020 and once places of worship were given permission to reopen, the SLT established a group of volunteer stewards and cleaners from across all three parishes and drafted rosters to ensure that initially Our Lady’s could open safely for private prayer for our three communities.
3. Each SLT Parish Representative has also been part of the ongoing task forces for our respective parishes to oversee the preparations and ongoing health and safety requirements for the opening of our churches for public worship in order to comply with the COVID-19 lockdown rules in operation at any particular time. This has ensured that our churches are COVID-safe environments and can operate as normally as possible for private prayer and the public celebration of Mass and other services. This also has meant working with parishioners to ensure that there are adequate volunteer teams of stewards and cleaners available for Sunday Masses and at other times such as Christmas and during the mini lockdown in November. The task forces continue to meet on an ad hoc basis to deal with the various COVID-related circumstances which affect our communities.
4. The SLT members have supported our priests in their work of establishing an online community to ensure that our parishes continue to flourish whilst we are unable to easily meet face-to-face. In this respect we have provided Fr Shaun and Fr Damian with feedback and encouragement on the establishment of our Mass live-streaming service, bible study groups and now Kairos.
5. Finally, the SLT has also been active in supporting the continuation of the parish sacramental programmes such as First Communion, Confirmation and RCIA. It was a delight to bring these programmes to final fruition in the autumn of 2020 once churches were allowed to reopen for public worship.

The coming year will undoubtedly continue to bring new challenges as the impact of the pandemic is still far from over in terms of the blight it imposes on our daily life. However, as infection and death rates fall, and the vaccine rollout continues apace we can hopefully return to a more normal life as a church community, particularly in our ability to join together for worship and in our ongoing parish mission.

Much still needs to be done which has been hold during the pandemic; for example, the development of further new lay ministries to support our priests. We expect it will be a busy time for the SLT and the parishes once restrictions start to lift and we will continue to serve you as your SLT to the best of our abilities.

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Questions and comments:

Fr Shaun and Fr Damain recorded their sincere thanks to the SLT by whom they felt very supported, their gifts and wisdom helping so much to maintain the work of the threee parishes.

6. **Joint Parish Pastoral Council (JPPC) report - Yasmin Lakin**

Yasmin Lakin presented the report of Maggie Stacey, who was not able to be present, as

follows:

The JPPC met three times this year in what has been a year of unusual circumstances. The role of the JPPC is to link with the SLT and the parishes in a strategic overview to benefit all parishes. At each of the meetings there were reports from activities that were established in the previous year and are continuing to function e.g. Alpha and also from new initiatives that were set up as a response to COVID such as the on line Bible Study and Lectio Divina prayer group.

It was decided that as the year was fraught with difficulties the members of the current JPPC would extend their period of service for another year as this would give an opportunity, hopefully, for the group to further its strategic work. As part of the Divine Renovation/ parish renewal initiative, the three parishes conducted a survey in 2019 looking at the following 3 areas of parish life.

- Welcome

- Faith

- Evangelisation

We received 375 responses across all age ranges and varying lengths of time in the parishes from just a few months to over 10 years.

Some of the key points that came out of the survey include:

* Most people felt welcomed in their parishes, but this did not appear to be linked to participation within the parish or knowing other parishioners.
* Faith is important to parishioners but many were not happy to speak about their faith to others.
* A large proportion of parishioners did not answer the questions on evangelisation. Where this question was answered 41% felt they had no idea about evangelisation. Of those who did answer the question, some felt it occurred in a variety of ways, but most stated that it occurred within the family rather than outside the home.

Although parishioners felt generally welcomed, exploring new ways of encouraging parishioners to become more active in parish life should bring a greater sense of belonging within our parishes. Although faith is important to people, we need to explore ways of working together as a community, and speaking and encouraging each other about our faith so that we feel confident to speak to others about what Jesus the church means to us in our lives.

The parishes as a whole, seem to be less confident in evangelisation. As this is what every Christian is called to do, we need to have a better idea of how to incorporate this into our lives. Fr Shaun and Fr Damian have preached on this at Sunday Mass over the past year and have worked hard to initiate programmes for developing, exploring and growing in our faith. All of these areas, welcoming, faith and evangelisation are starting to be addressed through Alpha, discipleship groups, and prayer groups.

A key piece of work that has grown out of the work on developing a mission statement completed by the JPPC last year (2019 – 2020) has been the setting up of an on- line mission called Kairos. This hopes to further develop the key message of our parishes to Encounter Jesus and Serve Others by growing in our faith and connecting in our community. The opportunity for us to interact as a community has been challenging this year due to the Covid pandemic. However, the installation of livestreaming and the use of zoom have enabled much of this work to continue which has been well supported.

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Questions and comments:

Fr Shaun wished to record his wholehearted thanks for the work of Yasmin, Maggie and

the JPPC.

7. **Finance report - Carolyn Opie (Chair of Finance Operations and Premises**

**Committee, FOP)**

The Finance Operations and Premises Committee met four times in 2020; in person in February and then via Zoom in April, July and October. Membership of the committee has remained relatively stable other than receiving the resignation of Kieran Johnson in April 2020. I am very grateful to Kieran for his hard work and thoughtful contributions over his five years on the Committee.

Premises is obviously a standing agenda item. The nature of the building has meant that there is always a regular stream of maintenance to complete. During 2020 we have considered and addressed a number of issues:

* The church suffered a break in during late August. The crime was reported to Hertfordshire Constabulary who investigated the scene and recorded the crime. Damage was suffered to the rear patio doors and 2 key safes. We will submit an insurance claim for the repairs.
* To protect access to the rear of the church, a new wooden fence was fitted. Also, the external store cupboard door was replaced.
* The oak tree in the garden suffered serious damage during the storms of late August. Emergency repairs were completed which are being claimed on insurance. We also reduced the crown of the oak tree and size of the hazel tree.
* The parapet walls above the flat roof over the rear of the Church were capped with lead to try to address continued leaks into the church.
* The Fire Warden system was introduced for Weekend Masses and has been incorporated within the Stewards’ responsibilities during Covid.
* The rental agreement with our tenants was renewed. We are incredibly fortunate to have kept our tenants for four years now and are extremely pleased that they have signed a further lease.
* The annual H&S Inspection was completed in October. The ratings for St John Fisher were the first in the Diocese to be assessed as all GREEN with no recommendations.

Looking to the future, and as finances allow, we are considering these work requirements:

* Repair of windows and external decoration.
* Monitor roof leaks.
* Monitor possible insect infestation to the church ceiling.

Cleaning of the church has been reviewed and we agreed to increase Danny’s hours by one per week to allow for some of the bigger tasks to be tackled on a more regular basis. Unfortunately, as soon as this was agreed, Danny was placed on furlough as the first Covid lockdown hit. As the Church closed at the same time this wasn’t an issue and the extra hours have been useful since reopening.

A Covid task force set up to work towards reopening the Church included two members of the FOP. Careful consideration was given to the Diocesan guidance and a plan drawn up to reduce the seating and ease movement around the Church. Beyond supplies of hand sanitiser and face masks, and replacing towels in the bathrooms and kitchen with paper towel dispensers (which were under consideration before lockdown anyway) the Church has had little financial expenditure as a result of reopening under social distancing requirements. The seat covers used at Christmas, which enabled us to have two services in very quick succession, were paid for by a generous donation from a parishioner.

At each meeting of the FOP the quarterly accounts are considered along with the budget for the year. As you would expect during 2020, income has been significantly impacted by the closure of the Church due to the Covid pandemic. Both envelopes and loose plate are down by around 75%, although the loose plate figure on here is masked slightly by some one-off donations received during the summer. We are incredibly fortunate that around 60% of our offertory income in normal times is through standing order and most of this has continued to be received. Some parishioners also switched to standing orders while we were shut and we are extremely grateful to them. This means we are in a better position than a lot of the parishes within the Diocese. Our non-assessable income is also lower, with reductions in Mass Offerings and Easter and Christmas Offerings as well as repository income. Specific donations will always vary from year to year depending on fundraising initiatives; in 2020 we received an overwhelming response to the livestreaming appeal and between the three parishes raised enough to buy and install the equipment and pay the running costs for around three years. We also received the last of the Parish share of the Growing in Faith campaign which goes towards the reordering of the Church and paying off the loan we took to fund that. There were no Parish activities during the year and no second collections since March 2020.

While some of our expenditure was reduced due to the pandemic; staff were furloughed for a few months, we haven’t used Supply Priests and travel expenses are lower, and activities such as Alpha have moved online which reduces the costs, the majority of the running expenses of the Parish have continued. Our Priests still need to be supported, the building still needs to be heated, cleaned and maintained and the office continues to support us. The Diocese has provided some assistance; it has negotiated a delay in payment of the annual insurance premium – but we will need to catch up this year – and significantly for St John Fisher, they have not been charging interest on our outstanding loan balance, and this saved us around £1,000 in 2020. But there isn’t much more they can do as they need to keep everything running at their level too.

We have also been fortunate to have kept our tenants throughout the year and they have just signed a new lease. This means that we have been able to continue to repay the loan albeit at a reduced rate compared to the previous year. We repaid £26,500 in 2020 compared to £36,000 the previous year. This left a balance of £48,000 at the end of the year and if we can continue to make our minimum payment each month, we should repay it completely by mid-2023. Our Annual Financial Return to the Diocese was submitted on time at the end of January 2021 and was approved with no queries.

The current year does have some challenges from a financial perspective, although I will say again that we have a level of core funding through standing orders that puts us in a better position than some Parishes. But at our current level of opening, with one service a week and reduced capacity, we are averaging around £5-10 a week coming in in addition to the standing orders. And that compares with around £200 per week pre-Covid. It is unlikely that we will be able to significantly change the way we operate much before mid-June when assuming everything goes to plan, the Govt hope to lift all social distancing restrictions. Even then, I think it would be sensible to assume that it will take time for some people to feel comfortable to return to attending Mass. So I think we have to plan on a significantly reduced income this year and that will affect next year to some extent as well because of Gift Aid claims.

I don’t want to cause alarm with this; I do think we are in a reasonable situation financially to be able to get through. We have a sensible although not excessive sum in the bank account and we probably have just about enough income with standing orders to cover the absolute essentials. We were hoping to do some work on the building in terms of external redecoration etc which may have to wait. We do have the option to pay less off the loan, although I’m trying to avoid that as we pay interest on it – but it is a short-term measure that is available to us.

I’m happy to take any questions on the accounts now, at the end of the meeting or over the next few weeks.

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Questions and comments:

Fr Shaun expressed his heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Carolyn for her fantastic work with the parish finances, and her prudence and diligence working together with Kerry which had maintained such a healthy financial position for St John Fisher. He also expressed his thanks to Alan Opie for all his very hard work in maintaining the building and the fabric of the church, and to Alan and Carolyn jointly in respect of their formulating and implementing an ongoing plan to make St John Fisher Covid safe and open.

8. **SVP report – Maureen Fields (Chess Valley Conference President)**

**Current Membership**

Full members: 16 Auxiliary members: 5

**Ongoing Work**

**Visits** – During the first and this present lockdown visits have not taken place however, we have kept in close touch through phone calls with those we normally visit and have been able to give additional help, such as shopping when needed. This has been greatly appreciated.

**Material assistance given through the year**: We received a referral to help a homeless person with securing rented accommodation. This person was able to find a job but unable to pay the money needed upfront for a months rent. We paid this on his behalf in order that he could secure the accommodation.

We also supported a family with payment of their rent arrears.

In November we bought and arranged delivery and installation of a cooker for a person with mobility problems who moved into new accommodation. Very recently, we have helped a family needing items of furniture, a bed and table and chairs and arranged for these to be delivered.

In May we donated £203 of food to the Food Bank at Three Rivers Council.

We work with a local Food Bank which runs from the Methodist Church in Mill End and have donated Tesco food vouchers to be distributed to those that need them. This is ongoing.

**Community Lunch**: Our very successful Community lunch has not been able to run since the first lockdown in March. However, during July in order to use food bought and stored in the freezer before lockdown 2 SVP members cooked individual family meals and delivered to the Food bank for distribution to families.

We hope to resume our Community Lunch when we can, following Government guidelines.

**Catholic Worker Farm**: Due to the closure of churches earlier in the year and the difficulty of collecting items for the CWF needed items have been bought by SVP members and delivered to the CWF.

**Support for Vinnie Packs for the homeless:** Help was given by SVP members for the packing of Vinnie Packs in the Autumn when this was allowed however, due to the restrictions most of the packing took place in 14 Secondary schools with young people giving up their time for this. As the homeless were given accommodation during lockdown, the demand for Vinnie packs was reduced across the country but remained high in the London Area. Chess Valley made a donation towards the Vinnie packs, which is organised by National SVP.

**Twinnage:** We funded a new project in Kerala, India in July. This was to purchase a mobile mortuary unit for the area. This may seem a strange request however, there are no mortuary facilities locally and families have to travel long distances to pay their respects and to bury family members. This causes much hardship for poor Catholic families who want to be with their loved ones and attend their funeral. The project cost was £720 payable over 2 to 3 years.

A donation of £1500 was given to the Sudan Appeal (you will see this appeal in this week’s newsletter as parishioners can give their individual support to this), £500 for each of the following areas; Baby feeding and pre-school meals, to support Medical Centres and Water tankers for local areas.

We continue to support 4 students. We have committed to a 4-year term to sponsor a Higher Education student, vocational training for between 1 to 4 students (depending on the length of the training) and school education for 1 student. Sponsorship is paid annually.

**Finance:**

We have been unable to organise any fundraising event during the past year.

**Income & Expenditure:**

In 2020 Chess Valley SVP spent a total of £4214 on our ongoing projects and one-off aid assistance.

Members donations and your regular donations via the SVP boxes and in other ways generated an income of approximately £4437.

If you wish to make a donation towards the work we do this can either be done through the SVP boxes in each of the parishes, sending a cheque payable to Chess Valley SVP to The Treasurer, Chess Valley SVP c/o Our Lady Help of Christians or making an online donation. Details of our account are available on the Our Lady Help of Christian’s website, Parish Groups, Chess Valley SVP.

A big THANK YOU for all your prayers, donations and practical support enabling us to do this work. Please continue to pray for us and for the people whom we serve.

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Questions and comments:

Fr Shaun wished to convey his admiration and thanks for the incredible variety of work carried out by the Chess Valley Conference of the SVP helping so many people in difficult circumstances. He felt very proud that our parishes should have such a thriving SVP group reaching out to the needy in so many areas of life.

9. **Youth Ministry Leadership Team (YMLT) report - Toni D’Urso**

Last year has certainly been different and we haven't been able to do as much as we would have liked, so there isn't too much to report.

Unfortunately we lost 3 members of our YMLT for various reasons, nevertheless we have 2 replacements.  At the moment we still have Fr Damian as our lead, together with Margaret Simon, Belinda Calen and myself.

We were able to have one online catch up with some of our existing young helpers from the Youth Alpha team.  It was our first zoom meeting with good fun, catch up, prayers and praise.  We've only managed one meeting so far due to their other commitments

and possibly the fact that they're all zoomed out.  Hopefully we'll be able to arrange another get together in a couple of months.

Last year's Confirmation programme went ahead and last October 32 young people were confirmed by Fr Shaun at Our Lady's across 3 Masses.

We then started planning this year's Confirmation programme and 39 young people have signed up.  Our first meeting with the young people themselves was via zoom on the 1st of February.  This again is a new experience and brings with it it's own challenges and safeguarding issues, but we have a great team of 8 hosts, together with an additional 2 floaters filling in when needed, also one more willing helper awaiting the DBS check.

Hopefully as restrictions are lifted, or at least eased, we will be able to plan a more social get together with our young people.

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Questions and comments:

Fr Shaun communicated his gratitude to the YMLT and Fr Damian for their work in providing opportunities for young people to grow in their faith.

10. **AOB**

Caroline Holly raised a question relating to the possible restoration of the piano: Caroline Opie confirmed that although a discussion had been started regarding the development of a special projects fund for such projects, its initiation had been effectively halted by the pandemic. It was, however, anticipated that, in due course, such a fund would be set up. Caroline expressed doubts as to whether money spent on the piano would be wisely spent, but would leave such discussion until it was more appropriate.

Francis Holly, speaking as a member of the Social Committee, hoped that monies might be raised for a Special Projects fund through social events, but Fr Shaun felt that it would be nice for social events to be, in the main, social rather than orientated to fund raising: with the passage of a relatively short time the large loan would be paid off leaving the parish in a better position to consider expenditure on special projects.

The meeting closed with Fr Shaun’s thanks to all who had attended and contributed reports.