

ST BEDE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH – CROXLEY GREEN

NOTES

Parish in Council Meeting – via ZOOM Tuesday 3rd November 2020 at 7.00pm

PRESENT

Fr John Wiley, Rob Phipps (Chair), Fabian Hiscock (Co-Chair), David Reilly (Finance), Ursula Bartlett (Minutes), Paul Bartlett, Louise McKenna, June Jones, David Marston, John Charnley, Colin Conboy, Michael Lowry, Michael Hamilton.

1 OPENING PRAYER

Fr John opened the meeting with a prayer.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Phil Hendrick, Catherine McMahon, Sujit Peris, Julia Bunting, Michelle Hussey.

3 COVID-19 / PDC (Parish Development Committee)

Ursula gave a brief account of how we are addressing the Covid-19 situation, and explained that the PDC felt it was time to hold a full Parish in Council Meeting; providing an opportunity for everyone in the parish to become involved in parish matters, if they so wish. This was publicised in the Newsletter and in E-Alert emails.

Fr John has been celebrating two public Masses each weekend, and thanks to our volunteers, we are fully Covid-19 compliant. Michael Hamilton expressed thanks to all who have enabled us to achieve this.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM NOTES OF LAST MEETING – Tuesday 21st January 2020 (not listed on Agenda for this meeting)

No matters arising. It was generally acknowledged that the majority of the items in the Notes from our last meeting had been superseded.

5 FINANCIAL REPORT

David Reilly gave his report.

He advised us that Paulus Kam has taken up the role of Bookkeeper and has received training recently from the Diocese. He thanked Paulus for volunteering to undertake this important work.

The provisional figures on OPAS (Online Parish Accounting System) to 30th September 2020 - which are likely to change as more data is input or corrected - are:

Assessable income: £30,684 (2019: £40,066)

Non-assessable income: £9,024 (2019: 15,850)

Expenditure: £42,417 (2019: £51,814)

Deficit/surplus: -£2,709 (2019: £4,102)

Bank balance: £18,365 (2019: £26,088)

Fundraising

As recommended by the Diocese, we have set up a Virgin Money Giving Account at no cost to the Parish. There are links from the 'Home' page and 'Donate to Our Parish' page on the parish website, kindly set up by Alan Kerry from the Baptist Church. Single payments can be made or monthly donations set up. Virgin Money deduct a 2% platform fee, plus a 2.5% payment processing fee, but the donation page invites the donor to cover this cost in addition to the donation.

The Diocese also recommended setting up a system to enable card readers to be used in Church. However, the set-up cost was £1,320 (after a time-limited £300 subsidy from the Diocese), plus annual costs of £186. We have asked the Diocese a number of times whether there are further transaction charges, but have received no response. At present, it is difficult to envisage a sufficient short-term increase in donations to cover the costs and we have decided not to proceed at present.

Gift Aid tax refunds

The Assessable Income figure includes a tax refund of £1,743. David informed us that he does not have the details of which year this relates too. Our claim under the Gift Aid Small Donation Scheme for 2017/18 of £1,705 was rejected by HM Revenue & Customs. After an exchange of emails with the Diocese it appears that the Diocese made an error with the claim and is now trying to rectify this.

New printer

A new printer, which prints in colour and scans documents, is needed for the Parish Office.

The Diocese has recommended a Toshiba printer that is suitable for rapidly printing a high volume of sheets. The cost includes a charge per sheet printed. This covers ink, servicing and technical support. To compare this cost to a printer perhaps more suited to the Parish Office, David explained that he had looked at a Canon printer designed for small and medium businesses. Using a simple spreadsheet, he calculated that the cost over a five year period would be £1,135 for the Toshiba, as opposed to £503 for the Canon. David invited views from those present, as there may be advantages in opting for support accompanying the Toshiba. Those who expressed a view thought that the Canon printer would be the better option. Rob suggested that Ursula should make the decision, as the primary user of the printer, in conjunction with David. This was agreed. Ursula asked if anyone would be able to assist with queries if the Canon printer were purchased. Rob and David Reilly volunteered.

Grateful thanks were expressed to David for his efficient work with the parish finances.

6 FR JOHN'S REPORT

Fr John expressed his gratitude to the volunteers who have come forward and made it possible for us to celebrate public Masses. He added that we now need to decide our course of action in the light of the second period of lockdown, due to begin on 5th November.

At this point we addressed the matter of re-introducing the 'Opening of Church for Individual Prayer', in view of the fact that the Government has ruled places of worship must close, except for providing the opportunity for private prayer. A brief discussion followed, and it was decided we would trial the opening of the Church for Individual Prayer only, with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at the following times:

Saturday 7th and 14th November – 4pm to 5pm

Sunday 8th and 15th November – 10am to 11am

We will review the situation following these first two weekends, and adjust the arrangements accordingly, depending on attendance levels.

Fr John assured us that all Mass Intentions booked in for dates that fall within the lockdown period will be included in the Masses he will celebrate in private each Saturday and Sunday. These Mass Intentions can then be repeated on a future date, post lockdown, when the families will be able to attend Mass.

Ursula will contact the Volunteers to advise them of these arrangements, and find out whether the Stewards are willing to carry on with their roles for the open sessions. She will also contact the regular Mass attendees to ensure they are aware of the situation.

The matter of St Bede's Confirmation candidates was raised. As we were unable to appoint a Confirmation Catechist for 2020, several of our young people had been referred to Our Lady's in Rickmansworth, with a view to joining their preparation classes.

Fr John advised us that 36 young people had recently received the Sacrament of Confirmation at Our Lady's; 8 of these from St Bede's. He added that he had attended one of the three ceremonies, at which the majority of the St Bede's candidates had been Confirmed. Fr John expressed his gratitude to Fr Shaun and Fr Damian at Our Lady's, for accommodating our young people and inviting him to attend.

Looking ahead to 2021, Fr Damian plans to hold Confirmation preparation classes on-line, and has indicated that they would be happy to welcome candidates from St Bede's to join. Ursula expressed her feeling that we should accept this generous offer, as we do not currently have a Confirmation Catechist, or anyone in mind who might fill this role. We will invite candidates to register their interest towards the end of the year.

7 PROPERTY & GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Annual Health & Safety Inspection by Precision

Ursula advised us that this annual inspection, which had been postponed from the summer, took place on Monday 26th October 2020. She and Paul joined Fr John, to meet with Chris Horsfall from Precision and Louise Mahon from the Diocesan Property Department. The report issued by Precision is considerably shorter than in previous years, but there are still several issues to be addressed, including items such as Fire Protection information, safety signage, first aid supplies, carbon dioxide detectors, safety lighting, etc. Ursula reported that, with the assistance of Rob, a good number of these issues have already been addressed. She expressed grateful thanks to Rob, whose competent DIY skills and dedicated willingness, have saved the parish hundreds of pounds.

The matter of asbestos was mentioned. This is permanently listed in our Precision Report, as there are certain areas around the site where asbestos may be present. The floor tiles in the belfry loft are specifically mentioned, as these are showing signs of damage. This damage occurred a couple of years ago, during the installation of the new central heating. Colin Conboy, who has significant knowledge of such matters, expressed his feeling that the level of damage would not present a risk, especially as the area in question is used for storage only, and is accessed only a few times a year.

Thanks were expressed to all had worked on ensuring that our Health & Safety requirements are met.

Church Lighting

Rob advised us that he had checked the exterior lighting along the route from the fire exit to the car park, following reports that there had been no lighting present after 6pm Saturday Mass the previous week.

He had found that the bulbs in all 4 sensor lights needed replacing, and had rectified this. However, the level of light appeared to be inadequate, so he has installed some temporary lighting to provide a safe level of light for those exiting church after 6pm Saturday Mass.

Rob explained that he had replaced two emergency light fittings that had not been working. One in the church and one in the Hall. He is gradually introducing energy-saving LED bulbs where possible, which will save the parish money. Thanks were expressed to Rob for all his work on the lighting.

8 SAFEGUARDING

Ursula gave a quick update, in her capacity as Parish Safeguarding Representative. She advised us that all DBS checks are currently up to date. However, there seems to be some overlapping between the Diocesan Safeguarding Department and the Property Department; in particular with regard to Covid-19 and Hall Hire. She will continue to check for any information that comes through, and pass this on as necessary.

9 FIRST HOLY COMMUNION 2020

Louise gave a brief account about the continuation of the First Holy Communion Programme, and eventual First Communion Masses during the weekend of 17th & 18th October. Louise and June prepared and delivered the preparation classes, and Ursula co-ordinated the administration and Covid-19 precautions. Rob provided technical support, Paul assisted with stewarding, Michelle Hussey prepared the First Communion certificates, and Stephen Hussey provided organ music at the Sunday Mass. The beautiful floral decorations around the church were created by members of the Flower Team: Louise, June, Nathalie Bowley and Pat Hiscock.

Each of the Masses was a very beautiful occasion, and we received some very positive and complimentary comments from the parents. Thanks were expressed to all concerned.

Plans for 2021

We have a volunteer who has offered to lead next year's First Communion classes. June and Louise now wish to step down, but they have kindly agreed to remain part of the 'Catechetics Team', in an advisory capacity. Louise's background in education and wealth of experience of religious education teaching, plus June's exceptional creativity, will be a huge asset.

Thanks were expressed to Fr John. In addition to the actual First Communion Masses, he celebrated Mass after each preparation class, for the children and their immediate families. This arrangement worked very well.

Thanks were also expressed to Louise and June for all their hard work and dedication.

10 CONFIRMATION

This topic was covered in Item 6 – Fr John's Report.

11 OUTREACH IN THE PARISH

We have discussed the matter of keeping in contact with parishioners who are elderly, housebound or sick, at recent PDC meetings. With a second Covid-19 lockdown about to begin, this is now even more important, and essential as part of our Christian ethos. The question of Data Protection was raised, and the general view was that concern for people's wellbeing is more important. It was felt that initial contact with anyone should come direct from the parish office. The PDC will take this forward.

Food Bank

Whilst discussing those in need, Michael Hamilton gave a brief update on the local Food Bank. He explained that food stocks were very good and they have a healthy bank balance, thanks to generous donations. Demand for assistance has increased by 50%, compared to last year, and as Christmas approaches the demand is expected to increase even more. There has also been outreach to local schools, to support free meals for children.

Thanks were expressed to Michael for his valuable involvement with the Food Bank, as a representative for St Bede's.

Parish Nurse

David Reilly advised us that the Churches in Croxley Green CIO has recently appointed a second Parish Nurse, Ruth Owunsu-Ansah, who is trained in mental health support. She will work for 5 hours per week, alongside our existing Parish Nurse, Cathy Scarborough.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Advent and Christmas

Colin raised the matter of lockdown affecting our Advent and Christmas worship. Rob responded that some ideas have already been discussed informally. We will definitely aim to mark the Christmas season with some special celebrations. It may not be permissible to sing carols, but we can have music, readings, and make the most of visual effects.

Rob will also organise some music play lists for the forthcoming open sessions for private prayer.

Church Cleaning

Ursula advised us that she would arrange for Lynn Newman (Hall/Church Cleaner) to continue with her duties, as the church will be in use during lockdown.

Counting

Ursula will check that the Counters are willing to carry on, given that we have a Covid-19 Risk Assessment in place for them. Continuity with the banking will reduce complications with the monthly bank reconciliation.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This was provisionally scheduled for Tuesday 19th January 2021.

14 CLOSING PRAYER

Fr John closed the meeting with a prayer at 8.50pm.