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## Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 September 2022 at 7.30pm

Present:

Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair  
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden  
Tilly Elliott (TE)  
Lesley Gray (LG)  
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)  
Cathy Honeyman (CH)  
Dave King (DK)  
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

**1 Opening Prayer**

DK opened the meeting with a reading from 1 Timothy and a prayer.

**2 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Anniefrida Kadzura (AK), Gill Watson (GW) and Roger Courtney (RC).

**3 Conflict of Interest**

None declared.

**4 Approval of the Minutes of 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

The minutes were agreed by all present and formally approved.

**5 Matters arising**

**(i) Charity Commission - 'connected' persons**

5.1 PD reported that he had not yet sent in the relevant form to the Charity Commission notifying them belatedly about the PCC's employment of Daniella Danjumbo.

5.2 MJ explained that the Commission had asked for the PCC's charity registration number before they would deal with him, so would be aware that it should be

expecting the form from us. PD confirmed he would complete this as soon as possible.

**ACTION:** PD to complete form for Charity Commission

**(ii) Film company hire of church forecourt**

5.3 PD reported that, in the event, the film company had not used the forecourt but had paid the PCC anyway.

**(iii) Cost of living crisis: St Mary's News Article**

5.4 MJ reported he had written an article about how St Mary's might assist its less well-off members during the cost of living crisis. This had been published in the September issue of St Mary's News with details of how members could contribute to a Hardship Fund. He was aware some donations had already been made to that Fund. He suggested that further publicity would be beneficial. It was agreed that this matter would be included in the Sunday notices and MailChimp.

**ACTION:** TR and MJ to ensure publicity in Sunday Services and on MailChimp

**(iv) Children's Work**

5.5 It was agreed that this item required a fuller discussion which would take place before *Any Other Business* (see section 17 below).

## **6. Correspondence**

6.1 MJ reported that he had circulated to the PCC correspondence from two of the office staff about the damp state of the office wall and had requested that it be repaired. The Standing Committee had already accepted a quote of £2,120 for the internal work of decorating the office and installing insulation on some of the wall surfaces to improve comfort. If TR decided his office should be included, that would add around another £200. RC would shortly be contacting a contractor to obtain an estimate for the external works which is thought to involve bedding in a displaced flint and is expected to cost a few hundred pounds.

6.2 It was agreed unanimously that this work needed to be done for the comfort of staff, to prevent further deterioration and for health and safety. Costs could be covered by the Payne legacy (see below). The PCC's formal approval would likely be sought at the October meeting.

**ACTION:** RC to obtain estimates for the external work and seek PCC approval of the total repair cost in time for the October PCC meeting.

## **7. Safeguarding**

7.1 MJ said he had circulated a Diocesan newsletter with links to safeguarding guidance. It contained a new section on Spiritual Abuse and he encouraged PCC members to familiarise themselves with it, especially as it applied to church members

as well as clergy. It set out a spectrum of behaviour (healthy, unhelpful, unhealthy, coercive) with guidance on how to respond to each level. Examples of each type of behaviour included:

- *Healthy*
  - All individuals in the congregation are able to question, discuss and respectfully challenge messages that are shared and how things are done.
- *Unhelpful*
  - Being overly defensive when asked a question or being challenged respectfully
  - Not actively listening to a concern
- *Unhealthy*
  - Developing a pattern of defensive and aggressive responses to any question or challenge.
  - Creating a culture in which challenge and questioning are seen as threatening unity.
  - Regularly suggesting that anyone raising an issue is themselves the issue.
- *Coercive:*
  - A consistent pattern of controlling behaviour suggesting that questioning or challenge is an inability to be obedient to God and a reflection of a problematic personal faith.
  - Seeking to use Scripture or spiritual threats to close down discussion or silence an individual rather than to engage with the issues they are raising.

## **8. GDPR**

Nothing to report.

## **9. Committee reports**

### **(a) Finance**

#### *(i) Receipt of legacies*

9.1 TR reported legacies had been received from Molly Payne in the sum of £10,000 and also from another person in the sum of £50,000. The former was unrestricted with a proviso it should be spent wisely but TR was in an ongoing discussion with the donor's relatives about the latter (see also section 17 below).

#### *(ii) Financial Report*

9.2 PD referred to the Report on Analysis & Expenditure from AK circulated to the PCC which covered the year up to 31 August. This was recent work and therefore

did not include a bank reconciliation. This meant a number of items were not included. The PCC welcomed the excellent way this report was presented and made suggestions for further improvements, including simplification and the inclusion of budget figures and monies for the Israel trips. PD will discuss these with AK to ensure future Reports incorporate these. PD confirmed that while there had been some response to the appeal (around £1,500-2,000) the PCC was still likely to breach its reserves policy around the end of the year.

9.3 TR said that he had consulted with the Archdeacon about the provision of a Diocesan expert to assist us in simplifying our financial records as they are the most complicated he had seen in his clerical career. He felt it would be helpful if perhaps GW or someone else from the Finance Committee could meet with the expert, alongside PD. TR added that financial roles and responsibilities would be adjusted with a reconfigured Finance Committee taking on much of the work to ease burdens on PD.

**ACTION:** PD to ensure future Reports incorporate the agreed changes.

(iii) *Standing Committee - PCC Expenditures 2022-3*

9.4 MJ reported that he had circulated a progress report about the July Standing Committee and the minutes for the meetings in July and August. The Committee had identified a number of savings in July, mostly on smaller items, but it was disappointing that little progress on the larger items of expenditure, including cleaning contracts and the minibus, had been made due, in part, to a lack of up to date financial figures. MJ said the Committee would meet again at end of September to review progress and he expected it would then be in a position to make recommendations for the PCC's consideration and approval in October.

(iv) *Israel trip: Vicar's Statement*

9.5 TR explained that pilgrimages had been organised in 2015 and 2018 and a further trip had been planned for 2020. He had used an excellent guide and tour operator (the Operator) in Israel who arranged bespoke tours which were good value for money. The way in which he and the wardens had managed the bookings was that they had used the PCC bank account to collect monies received from pilgrims. The monies were then sent on to the Operator in two or three instalments because international bank transfers were far from straightforward.

9.6 TR said this same arrangement was used for the 2020 pilgrimage. That year they had asked, as before, for deposits with the first instalment due by mid-February. Pilgrims were advised that the deposit was non-returnable and that they should take out insurance accordingly; and they were informed of the deadline. However, in the event, Person A had not paid by the due date and TR had to make the transfer to the Operator to secure aircraft seats, hotels etc as the Operator was very strict. TR said that, rightly or wrongly, he and the wardens decided to pay the balance on Person A's behalf. Hence the wording in Alison Saunders's (AS) letter to Person A in late April/early May 2021:

“I understand that you were in danger of forfeiting your place on the tour due to a late second payment. St. Mary’s secured your place by paying the money on your behalf with the church taking on that financial risk.”

TR advised that Person A had subsequently paid their instalment.

9.7 TR explained that the Operator transferred the monies across to the agent in Israel and then the pandemic hit, resulting in the trip being unable to go ahead. As a result, the monies were tied up: the Operator had no access to it and could not return them to the UK for re-imburement.

9.8 TR said that another pilgrim then pulled out of the trip and requested a letter of cancellation so they could claim on their insurance. TR and the wardens then advised pilgrims the trip was postponed until October 2022. Person A was unable to make that date and requested a refund, as did around five or six other pilgrims. However, the monies remained tied up so TR and the wardens re-advertised the trip and used the first instalments of the new pilgrims to repay the requested refunds in full. TR conceded that in retrospect things might have been done differently and that there were lessons to be learned by all those involved.

9.9 TR set out the circumstances of Person B who had also recently requested a refund and asked the PCC if it would authorise this final repayment (around £1,200) subject to there being sufficient money in the restricted account.

9.10 There was recognition that TR had been placed under much stress and there was a desire not to add to that, but it was also felt that, as stewards and trustees, the PCC had a duty to ask a number of questions. In response to these:

- TR clarified that the trip was not arranged by the PCC. The pilgrims’ contract was with the tour operator in Israel although the PCC had in effect acted as a booking agent.
- TR conceded that handing over pilgrims’ funds to the tour operator in Israel while one pilgrim’s deposit was outstanding had, in retrospect, been an error of judgment; and should any future trips take place, he would put in place proper operational procedures to minimise risk to the PCC.
- TR had not taken any legal advice but had consulted with Ecclesiastical Insurance before making the refunds and he had not been overly concerned with the technicality that pilgrims had been told in advance that their deposits were non-refundable.
- TR and PD confirmed that there had been no overall loss to the PCC.
- TR explained that the PCC were told this issue was ‘not a PCC responsibility’ in May 2021 because the funds for the pilgrimage were restricted. He considered that since the PCC would have been aware of the trips from the publicity issued at the time, and several members had been on these trips and paid deposits to a PCC account, questions should have been asked at an earlier stage. He felt that he and the wardens had been transparent throughout and that the financial risk was minimal.

- TR had had several meetings and exchanges with the Archdeacon over a period of time regarding the refund claims.
- TR gave an assurance there would be no further refund claims. For example, if TR was taken ill immediately prior to the trip the contingency was for Cath da Costa (CdaC), who was due to accompany TR, to take over.

9.11 MG said that Person A had contacted her during the summer holidays. Among other things, Person A had said that they had appointed a lawyer and was expecting a refund. Person A wanted lessons to be learned from what had happened. In particular, Person A had advised MG that the PCC had acted as a tour operator which was illegal under Charity Commission rules. MJ added that he understood Person A had recently approached at least one other member of the congregation apparently mentioning that legal action had been taken or was about to be taken against TR.

9.12 TR replied that he would certainly seek professional advice should he arrange further trips. He emphasised that he had acted in good faith in the trips to date. Moreover, any church had to use its discretion concerning charity rules and minor contradictions could inevitably occur and any risk to the PCC was minimal. PD supported this view. Further, TR assured the PCC that he had not been taken to court over this matter nor was any such action pending against him as far as he was aware.

9.13 MJ said that he welcomed TR's statement, in particular that TR would do things differently should future trips be arranged. However, while he agreed that there were lessons for the PCC to learn in raising questions at an early stage, it was also the case that the onus was on the Vicar and Wardens to inform the PCC what was happening. The PCC had been advised in May 2021 that this issue was not a PCC responsibility. That statement was inaccurate. PCC accounts and actual monies had been used without the PCC's knowledge or approval. As had been indicated, St Mary's was acting as a booking agent. This had entailed actual financial risk as stated in AS's letter to Person A shortly before the May 2021 PCC. The subsequent dispute regarding refunds with Person A and other pilgrims was sufficiently serious to involve the Archdeacon. It was concerning that without the PCC's knowledge, the PCC had been drawn into a dispute involving financial risk of significant sums of money and reputational risk. He did not agree with TR's and PD's view that there was any discretion regarding the relevant charity rules. This was happening at a time when the members of the congregation were asking questions about the PCC's financial governance, when the PCC's finances were precarious and when we were appealing to the congregation in the midst of a cost of living crisis.

9.14 TE and MJ said that while they recognised that a number of refunds had already been made, they were reluctant to approve a further refund without obtaining legal advice. They said it was an open question whether the PCC was in fact liable and there could also be unforeseen consequences.

9.15 DK commented that as the PCC was not out of pocket, there was no reason not to repay Person B. MJ replied that the issue was not merely about ensuring no loss of PCC funds but of liability.

9.16 TR explained that there was no legal advisory service provided by the Diocese and that it would therefore be expensive to obtain commercially. He reiterated that he and the wardens had been transparent throughout and added that he considered repaying Person B was the moral thing to do in their circumstances.

9.17 PD advised the PCC that if they were approached, as MG and other members of the congregation had been, they should inform TR or himself at an early stage. MJ pointed out that PCC members could not know there was any issue if they were not kept fully informed.

9.18 TR proposed that Person B be refunded, provided that PD could confirm there were sufficient funds still available in the restricted Israel account. After further discussion, this was agreed, albeit with a degree of reluctance from some and with one abstention, subject to the proviso that Person B must be advised that the payment is without prejudice.

**ACTION:** PD to confirm funds are available to cover the refund and, if so, to arrange refund.

9.19 Finally, TR added that as he had nothing to hide, he was content for this discussion on Israel to be posted on St Mary's website with the rest of the minutes.

## **(b) Buildings**

9.20 RC's report was accepted by the PCC.

9.21 MJ said that RC had wanted the PCC's attention drawn in particular to the item about the New Hope Memorial Stone which RC felt could appropriately be reproduced as a notice in the service sheet one Sunday. It was agreed this would be best placed in MailChimp due to the web link.

**ACTION:** MJ to arrange inclusion in Mailchimp.

9.22 Regarding floodlighting, some members felt that expenditure was discretionary and wondered, in view of soaring ongoing energy costs, if such expenditure was advisable. However, in RC's absence, it was agreed that the decision about this should be left until the next meeting.

9.23 TR explained that he had consulted with a contractor regarding a significant upgrade of our audio-visual systems, including the replacement of the sound mixer and replacement of the two side aisles projectors. The new system would be significantly better in quality e.g. better able to deliver YouTube, livestreaming etc and easier to operate. It would need approval from the DAC despite the fact this was merely a partial upgrade but he did not envisage any problems of principle with

this. The cost would be around £51,000 which could be met from available funding<sup>1</sup>. This needed to be agreed to secure the system at the present cost in view of rapidly rising prices.

9.24 PD *proposed that the PCC approve funding and order the PA system. This was seconded by MG and unanimously approved.*

### **(c) Pre-School**

9.25 MG reported that Pre-School Committee met on 5 September and welcomed Anthony Gray as a new committee member and Adriana Komarova (AK) as the new manager.

9.26 MG said that two new members of staff had been appointed at the end of last term and AK had been busy over the summer ensuring that their DBS checks are completed and that they have done basic safeguarding training before the start of term. These two had a Level 2 qualification. Two others were due to be interviewed shortly who had Level 3. It is a requirement that there must always be someone on site with a Level 3 qualification. One of these people has applied to be deputy manager and the other a Level 3 practitioner. The hope is that if suitable, both will be appointed, taking Pre-School staffing levels back up to five (as they had last term, although two staff were part time). This allows Pre-School to increase the number of children offered places, adequately meet the increased adult to child ratios required for two year olds and ensure that the Pre-School would not need to close if one member of staff is absent for any reason.

9.27 MG reported that AK and the Committee were grateful for the provision of the new toilets.

9.28. MG also reported that Eileen Roby (ER) had offered to support the Pre-School after half term. Since ER is the Early Years leader at her school, MG considered she had much valuable knowledge and experience to offer.

### **(d) Climate Emergency Committee**

9.29 MJ reported that this Committee had not met but that he anticipated a report next time.

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<sup>1</sup> *Note:* The PCC had originally set monies aside in its Development Fund for enhancement of the AV system but these were temporarily 'borrowed' in 2020 to fund the cost of the Church Centre roof. There was an agreement with the Church Land Trust (CLT) that, once the AV system project proceeded, CLT would make a grant of up to £40,000 to the PCC General Account for the roof, thereby enabling the PCC General Account to repay some or all of the 'loan' it had obtained from the Development Fund. Thus, the costs of the new AV system would be met directly and entirely from the Development Fund.



### **(e) Missions**

9.30 MJ said he had not received any report from this Committee. TR asked MJ to request that the Committee update the PCC by the end of the year.

**ACTION:** MJ to request a report from Missions Committee.

### **10. Staff Pay Rise**

10.1 MJ reported that this had been discussed at the Standing Committee meeting of 31 August and he referred members to the minutes for the detail. In summary, a pay rise for staff could be considered in due course in the light of our efforts to increase congregational giving and cut costs.

### **11. Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy**

11.1 TR formally confirmed that the Lead Chaplain ceased to provide St Mary's 25% of his time from 1 September.

11.2 *Consequently, MJ proposed that the PCC cease payment of the corresponding proportion of his salary. This was seconded by CH and unanimously approved.*

11.3 TR commented that we had not yet received invoices for the Lead Chaplain's salary and needed to get on top of that.

**ACTION:** PD to liaise with WTCC about invoices.

### **12. Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership:**

12.1 TR reiterated PD's report in July that WTRRP had moved over to a voucher system. Consequently they would not be storing food any longer. He said that a formal agreement should now be put in place for their use of the Church Lounge and consideration given to what we might charge them as a charity so that invoices could be sent out.

**ACTION:** PD to ensure billing and arrange an agreement in liaison with RC.

### **13. Churches Together in Watford**

13.1 MJ said he had circulated Brian and Jackie Mee's report about Churches Together in Watford (CTW). In summary, at the joint AGM of CTW in Central, South and West Watford with CTW in North Watford and Garston on 12 July 2022, it was formally agreed to amalgamate into Churches Together in Watford, CTW.

13.2 The PCC expressed its thanks to the Mees for their report of the meeting and noted the amalgamation.

### **14. Holy Communion**

14.1 MJ reported that RC had sent him a note asking him to place this item on the agenda. RC had said that, some two months ago, he had taken communion three times at services organised by the Diocese, all of which used the common cup. RC therefore thought it would be appropriate for the PCC to express a view on

whether our services should revert in all respects to pre-Covid practice. RC had added that he was aware of members who are not attending because of the changed practice at Holy Communion. RC was also of the view that St Mary's should cease Zoom transmission in order to encourage attendance in person, and that the service should instead be available on-line.

14.2 This was discussed in some detail. TR summarised by saying this was a complex situation and anxieties had to be managed alongside the desire of others to return to a more normal state of affairs. He would trial offering the common cup at Wednesday Communion in the next weeks but would make it clear that communicants should not feel obliged to take it. The PCC was unanimous in its support for this approach.

14.3 Regarding the future of Zoomed services, TR said that it would be prudent to switch to livestreaming once the new AV system was installed.

## **15. Vicar's Report**

15.1 The Vicar's report covered a longer period than usual due to his sick absence in July. TR reported that he had attended the wedding of Ash and Edith David with other St Mary's members in June. It was a joyous occasion which took place shortly before the ordination of Ash, Phil Macaulay and CdaC. He considered the number of ordinands coming forward through St Mary's was something to celebrate.

15.2 TR said that more charitable groups were coming into the church and there was a real 'buzz' about the place on Tuesdays. He had recently had a conversation with Luther Blissett, the former Watford and England footballer now Deputy Lieutenant of Hertfordshire who wanted to work with St Mary's regarding a group of Ukrainian women who want to meet at St Mary's on Wednesdays.

15.4 TR had also spoken with the Royal British Legion, who have no Watford branch, about how the Remembrance service might be improved. The discussion was around the possibilities of a parade at St Mary's and a procession to the Town Hall followed by a lunch for veterans assisted by other groups.

15.5 TR also reported that concerts would be re-introduced but on Thursdays instead of Tuesdays as previously. Volunteers would be needed to assist and the possibility of TE's Connect Group acting in that role was discussed.

15.6 TR said it had been a great joy to him to conduct the wedding of Sam and Anita.

15.7 TR expressed his grateful thanks to Liz Allan and others who had taken part in the joint Heritage Day/Bike & Hike on 10 September.

## **16. Health and Safety Issues:**

None reported.

## **17. Children's Work**

17.1 With reference to Jenny Luckhurst's (JL) letter to the PCC (see July minutes), TR said that there was a possibility that the £50,000 legacy (see para 9.1 above)

might be used to employ a Children's/Youth Worker, most likely on a part-time basis. Before reaching any firm conclusions on this, however, he wanted to speak with the Sunday School Team and possibly with CdaC and others to do some 'blue sky' thinking. He hoped JL would be part of this process, which would inevitably take time. He would revert to the PCC with a firm proposal in due course.

**ACTION:** MJ to write to JL with an update.

#### **18. Any Other Business**

18.1 PD reported that some £432 had already been collected for Rev. Josh Brocklesby (JB). PD advised that as donations always came in late for these farewell gifts, the amount collected up to the JB's last Sunday could be rounded up, if appropriate, to the nearest £100. MG suggested a bring and share lunch could be organised.

The meeting closed at 10.30pm.

**Marcus Jones  
PCC Secretary**