

**Parochial Church Council of St Mary's, Watford**  
*Minutes of the meeting held on 21st September 2020 by Zoom*

**Present:**

Revd Tony Rindl – Chair (TR)  
Revd Josh Brocklesby (JB)  
Roger Courtney (RC)  
Peter Dean (PD)  
Cathy Honeyman (CH)  
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)  
Abi Idris (AI)  
Victor Kitange (VK)  
Pat Moore (PM)  
Alison Saunders (AS)

*Minutes taken by RC. All present agreed that the meeting could be recorded to assist preparation of the minutes.*

1. **Opening Reflection and Prayer** TR read Matthew 19: 16-30, the story of the 'rich young ruler'. He then prayed that in its discussions the Council would hold to the values of the Kingdom of God and seek to make decisions that would bring glory to God's name.
2. **Apologies** These were received from Ivor Jones, Jane Carter and Joanna Cooper. It was noted that Iman Rafatmah had resigned from the PCC having moved away from Watford.
3. **Approval of the Minutes of the meeting on 24th August 2020** RC proposed that they be accepted as an accurate record. MG seconded and this was agreed *nem con*.
4. **Conflicts of interest** No conflicts of interest were notified.
5. **Matters arising**
  - **Cleaning contract.** PD reported that the cleaning contract that had operated prior to lock-down had been renewed. Although at that time there had been discussion of the need for extra cleaning of the stone floor, with the church being open for only limited periods this was not considered necessary at present. The use of a 'fogging machine' for disinfecting all surfaces up to a height of around 2m was being investigated. This could be relevant to the Pre-School area also. It would cost £4-500. TR commented that this should be taken forward, with RC seeking advice on its possible impact on the new flooring. PD would investigate further.
  - **Card machines and text giving** PD said that the installation of a card machine was currently on hold. The text giving facility was still available but he did not think that it had been much used. JB said he would arrange for information about means of giving to be available on the church's Website.

**6. Correspondence** There was no correspondence to report.

**7. APCM and associated matters** TR noted that the delayed APCM would be held by Zoom after the 10.30 service on 11<sup>th</sup> October. There was a need to elect up to four new PCC members; he had approached two potential members but others should be sought. There was also a need to find a successor to AS as Churchwarden. Nomination forms and guidance on their completion would be made available in week of 28<sup>th</sup> September.

PD noted that a link to the 2019 Report and Accounts should be provided on the website and the congregation informed. JB undertook to arrange the link.

AS commented that normally the APCM would confirm nominations for Stewards but in present circumstances this did not seem appropriate. Instead, she assumed that all current Stewards would continue until the next APCM.

**8. Reopening of the church.** TR noted that, thanks particularly to the work of AS and PD, the church was now open each Wednesday and Saturday from 12.00 to 14.00 for private prayer with the mid-week Holy Communion service being shown in the church on Wednesday. A formal risk assessment document had been prepared, with inputs from all involved; PD noted that this was still in the process of being finalised. In response to a question, AS said that attendance at the mid-week service was around five.

TR had conducted two funerals in the church and had felt comfortable in doing so. JB's ordination service on 26<sup>th</sup> September would be the next event in the church; this would include live music from church members (in a manner compliant with diocesan advice) and so would provide guidance on how worship might be reintroduced in due course. He expected that this might be Holy Communion mid-week and on Sunday mornings. The ordination service would be recorded and would replace the on-line 17.30 service on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September.

The Council noted this report and expressed its thanks to all responsible for bringing the church back into use.

## **9. Committee Reports**

**a) Finance** PD referred to his report, previously circulated. Income from the congregation was running slightly ahead of budget expectations but with no income coming from collections total income was below budget. Expenditure continued to be well below budget but the gap was diminishing now that the church was returning to use. As previously, some caution was needed because some expenditures might only have been deferred.

Pre-school income had held up because of Herts CC funding but expenditure on staff was below budget because of the departure of the Deputy Leader.

The Pre-school had now taken on an apprentice who in due course could gain qualifications and fill the vacancy. A grant of £1500 was being sought to support that appointment. Enrolment was, though, down on previous years. AS commented that she expected more children to enrol at half-term and again in January. MG noted that a change in funding arrangements meant that parents could benefit from a free place only after their child had turned three, and so some were delaying taking up a place until then.

The Council noted the report.

### *Brightwell Rd*

PD went on to note the developments concerning the house in Brightwell Rd that he had included in his report. Essentially, following a visit the agent had recommended comprehensive refurbishment of the house in order to secure a significantly higher level of rental income. However, this was likely to require the tenants temporarily to vacate the property. They might not wish to do so and in that case the house might be offered to them at a market price. David Brown, with whom the agent had corresponded, did not think that the refurbishment proposed was the right course of action.

TR commented that he agreed with David Brown's views. He also noted that at a time when one of the causes of homelessness was rising rentals, it would not be appropriate for the church to be seeking a substantial rise in rental income from the property.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The internal surfaces and furnishings of the house were indeed 'tired' but the tenants had been reluctant to clear rooms in order to enable redecoration and renewal of carpets etc. They were not likely to agree to vacate.
- The cost of £35k plus VAT for the works estimated by the agent was similar to the figure put to the PCC several years previously. But it was not the whole story – there would be the agent's management fee for the works and the loss of income while the house was vacated. These elements might add another £10k to the sum. It was not clear that the increase in rental would recoup this expenditure in a reasonable period even if the church had that sort of sum available to spend.
- Some smaller works would need to be carried out in order to maintain the property in sound condition but these were independent of the comprehensive refurbishment.
- Any sale would need to be at full market price in order to comply with Charities Commission requirements. There was no question of discounting the price because the tenant had occupied the property for some time.

- The house at present did not contribute to the mission of St Mary's; it was classed in the accounts as an investment. Realising its value through a sale would need to be preceded by the development of a strategy for the use of the funds. This would provide proper justification for the sale.
- With current uncertainties, this might well not be a good time to sell anyway.

Summing up, TR said that the Council did not favour the agent's proposal. The preferred way forward, at least for the immediate future, was to continue with the present policy of maintaining the house in reasonable condition while accepting that this did not maximise rental income. In due course, this might be reviewed when future investment needs became clearer.

- b) **Buildings** RC reported that the main works on the Church Centre roof had been completed and the scaffolding had been removed. He was waiting for a final sign-off by the architect. Some small supplementary works, such as replacing the floodlights, remained to be carried out. Development of the 'manifestation' (ie design) on the sliding door had continued through interactions with the architect and glass designer. The architect was now turning his attention to (a) replacement handrails at the north porch steps (the originals had been removed and lost during the refurbishment) and (b) providing access to the gearboxes for the clock dials in a manner which satisfied current H and S requirements. The latter task stemmed from the last quinquennial report.

TR commented that the new door had facilitated arrangements during the funeral that morning.

PD added that he understood from Total Building Services, who maintained the church boilers, that the main church boiler had now been found to be capable of operation and had been successfully operating for a week. This was very welcome news since it appeared that we would not need to incur the cost of replacement.

The Council noted the report and welcomed the information about the church boiler.

- c) **Staffing** AS commented that a member of Pre-school staff had unexpectedly needed to quarantine because the requirement had been introduced while she was abroad. In this exceptional case, it had been agreed that the church would continue to pay her as normal. It had, however, been made plain to staff that this was not a precedent. PD was asked to confirm that he had informed Richard Watson of the Council's decision about the index to use in calculating cost-of-living increases for staff.

**d) Deanery Synod** There was nothing to report

**e) Missions Group** AS said that updates on the various bodies supported by the church were planned for the next issue of St Mary's News. Seeking these had raised the question of future link responsibility for the Bonnievale pre-school in the light of Jayne Fish's intended move from Watford. PM commented that it seemed that it was merging with some other pre-schools in the area but there had been no recent communication. TR added that it may be that the link had come to a natural end, as often happened when a contact with real passion for a particular mission activity left.

**10. Vicar's Report** TR again expressed his appreciation of the work of AS and PD in enabling the church building to reopen and in many other aspects of the operation of St Mary's. The Monday morning staff meetings continued to be lively and constructive occasions. This was likely to be AS's last PCC meeting as Churchwarden and so it was appropriate to express huge thanks to her for her dedicated service over the years. The Council warmly endorsed this appreciation of AS's service.

**11. Health and Safety / Safeguarding Issues** There was nothing to note.

**12. AOB** There was nothing to note. The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October.

**13. Closing Prayer** The meeting closed at 8.50pm with JB leading the Council in the service of Compline.