

ST PETER'S, TIVERTON

Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 20 August 2020 at 2 pm by Zoom

Present: Mary Seaton (in the chair), the Revd Robert Gordon, Christopher Burford, David Catchpole, Helen Fensome, Gill Heard, Kate Henshall, Jean Jenner, Deborah Lal, Averil Long, David Ricks, Richard Stenlake, Vicki Stuckey, Keith White and William Zarrett.

Apologies: Rod Hilton, Catherine Makepeace, Jennifer Palmer, Chris Shields and Roy Webber.

The meeting opened with prayer.

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 23 January 2020 were approved and signed.

2 Matters arising from the minutes

Deanery questionnaire response (minute 9): MS reported that the parish submissions had been put together with great care and forwarded to the Deanery. It had been a useful exercise for all the parishes and mission communities involved, though its long-term significance had been rendered uncertain by the decision of the Diocese not to use it.

3 Panoramic review of the life of St Peter's during the period of the lockdown

RG reviewed the developments which followed the announcement of the lockdown on 23 March. The implications for families in general and for the Christian community in particular had been immense. Church services had already stopped the week before, but although services stopped, the church did not. In a way quite unforeseen and unplanned the church said, 'Our buildings may be closed, but we're still here.' Suddenly we were meeting and worshipping on the telephone and online.

But Sunday services were not our first thought: our immediate priority was to care for the lonely and the vulnerable. And here the signs of a caring community were impressively clear, for enquiries as to who might need help were greeted with the response that the care was already being provided. And in that vein we also could not but honour Jean Parkinson, who slept out for CHAT and raised over £3,000. CHAT have worked harder than ever throughout the pandemic to support some of our most vulnerable neighbours, especially through the food bank.

RG continued that it had been especially good to share worship and other events by phone or by zoom with friends at St Thomas's and St Andrew's and in the Exe Valley Mission Community, and to witness friendships growing. There had also been the shared online flower festival, and the *Give a Little* fundraising effort which was such a success. Work had continued with a view to obtaining the Chancellor's approval for our reordering

project. Our health and safety officer, Mark Heritage, had provided important help towards the safe reopening of our building for private prayer and Sunday worship. And recently our bells rang out once more, a sure sign to the town that we are still here.

So Covid has altered many lives. It has also taught us a lot about what is really important. As we work to establish a 'new normal', we must make sure we do not forget the lessons we have learned:

- We can live without eating out and foreign holidays, shopping days and going for a drive. We can even live without museums, art galleries and live music (just!) But we cannot live without the love and companionship of family, friends and neighbours.
- We live in a beautiful and (so far) relatively safe corner of England, and for that we are truly thankful.
- We need to give proper recognition to the often undervalued staff of the NHS and care homes, emergency services and key workers in other industries.
- We understand that health and wealth are inextricably linked, but we need to know that health trumps wealth every time.
- We have always known that the church is the people not the building, but the truth of that has been held before our eyes with renewed clarity. As we move back into our church building (and prepare to move thoughtfully towards the implementation phase of our long-awaited reordering project), I want to keep in mind that the moments of obvious joy in our telephone and zoom services were created, not by the precise details of the liturgy or the quality of the music, but by hearing the voices of friends and seeing their faces.
- In a world of uncertainty, where nothing lasts forever and all our plans are subject to change, we are truly blessed to know that 'neither death, nor life, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'

4 Safeguarding

MS reported on a safeguarding training session mounted by the Diocesan Training Department, which she and Sue Beale had attended. It was concerned with the leadership of teams within a church, with special attention to the safeguarding of all members of the congregation but particularly of those who are young, vulnerable or disabled. It had been underlined that a welcoming church needed also to be wary and watchful, aware that appearances can be deceptive, attentive to any sense of unease that newcomers might cause, and careful not to suppress doubts. The same applied to appointments of employees, where recruitment policy needed to be very focussed on safeguarding issues.

The suggestion had been made that the clergy might help to highlight safeguarding principles and practices at some appropriate time, e.g. Mental Health Week. Thus an informed awareness in the whole congregation could be achieved, the role of our safeguarding representative could be highlighted, and support reinforced by being included in intercessions. The importance of a general awareness of who should be informed in confidence when any qualms about safeguarding issues were being experienced, i.e. Catherine Makepeace, was crucial.

5 Worship

- 5.1 GH, chair of the worship committee, reported on developments in worship at St Peter's in the days since the lockdown had drastically curtailed all previous plans. She drew attention to the Conference Call service on a Sunday morning, and latterly the Zoom facility also. It had been rewarding to hear and see friends, not only at St. Peter's, but also from St. Andrew's, Chevithorne and the Exe Valley Churches. She expressed the gratitude of our whole community to Robert and Steph for organizing both opportunities, which have proved very popular, not only with our own congregations but also with new participants.
- 5.2 The Greenway Chapel had been opened for private prayer on Mondays (11 am till 1 pm) and on Thursdays (1.00-3.00 pm). Several church members had volunteered to oversee these times in accordance with Church and Government guidelines.
- 5.3 The Holy Communion Service at 11.00 am on Sundays has resumed, and we continue to take all the necessary precautions to make the building as safe as possible for everyone. The hope has been throughout that the experience of worshipping together in Church once more would encourage us all to appreciate and feel God's unfailing love.
- 5.4 Music was an issue in the post-lockdown situation. A number of different organists had helped us following the illness and death of Andrew Curtis; the appointment of a successor was necessarily 'on hold' until more musical activity became permissible. The most recent development was permission for small groups to sing in church.

KH drew attention to the existence of a library of music resources which are currently available and which might be used to bring some musical features into our worship. She also suggested that live streaming of our services in church for wide availability might be considered, bearing in mind the position of St Peter's as the civic church of Tiverton. WZ observed that developments of this sort, operated through a video enhancement of the current sound system, could be implemented without any requirement of a faculty. RG undertook to explore possibilities.

6 Finance

WZ, chair of the Finance Committee, reported on the financial situation as at 31 July.

- 6.1 The Patronal Day 'Give a Little' Fundraiser had been conspicuously successful as the congregations and friends of St Peter's donated generously, with just over £8.4k collected to date, inclusive of Gift Aid. This amount allows us to meet the budget for Fundraising for the year of £5.5k and to recover some of the income lost due to the closure of the church. The online giving portal would remain in place as noted on the church website for those still unable to attend services and who are not giving in some other manner or by cheques payable to St Peter's PCC which may still be posted to the church, for the attention of Bill Zarrett. (<https://givealittle.co/campaigns/282252db-c039-4998-bd5b-1de53556fc8d>).
- 6.2 As a result of the Fundraiser, income through July was only £580 below the amount budgeted for that point in the year. It must be noted, however, that the Sunday collections were approximately one quarter of their normal amount, since not all of us are able to attend. As the year proceeds, we will continue to fall behind for this income source, which serves to emphasise the importance of continued giving.

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- 6.3 Expenses have been below budget by approximately £12.3k for the same reason. We have not had the expense of a Parish Administrator or a Director of Music, plus expenditures for Fabric Maintenance and Repair, always the largest items of expense, are £5.5k below budget as work scheduled for the first half of the year could not be completed. As several large projects will commence in the next month or so (trimming of trees, building of security fencing around the boiler room), much of this 'saving' will soon be spent.
- 6.4 The value of our reserves and investments fell by approximately 20% during the worst of the downturn due to the Covid impact, reflecting the performance of the market in general, but as of the end of July, the value of £1,440,929 is only £30k below the 2019 year-end figure. Thus, most of the 'Covid loss' has been recovered. This reflects well on the investment management strategies of our investment advisers, the CCLA (the CBF Church of England Funds).
- 6.5 As directed by the PCC, St Peter's has continued its regular monthly payments of approximately £4.2k to the Diocesan Common Fund.
- 6.6 In sum, St Peter's has not been able to cover its expenses from operating income for years and has relied on investment income to reduce the loss each year. This year, even when including investment income, the budget anticipates a loss of nearly £32k. The actual loss will likely be somewhat less since our spending on maintenance of the fabric of the church will not have been completed as planned. Nonetheless, funding for St Peter's will continue to be an issue for the years to come.
- 6.7 In discussion the following suggestions were made: (i) that facility for fundraising via the website and card readers *in situ* might be extended, thus for example drawing in casual visitors to the church who would like to contribute to its well being; and (ii) that, with a specific project in mind, a thermometer/graph/balloon registering progress towards a defined fund-raising goal, might be displayed as an encouragement to give.

7 Fabric

DR, chair of the Fabric Committee, reported on developments during the period of the lockdown, during which the Fabric Committee had not met formally, and the Tuesday working group has been 'on hold' except for regular inspections of the church and churchyard, by a single person. A few minor maintenance tasks had been undertaken with due attention to safety, e.g. roof clearance and removal of dead birds from the base of the vestry chimney.

- 7.1 The most significant item of concern had been vandalism to the heating chamber building on the Chorle. Entry into the chamber has been gained by breaking through the timber louvres in the north wall; the space above the hot air duct, between the chamber roof and the church wall is also being occupied. Both these locations give a dry place to congregate. No damage inside the heating chamber has been found as yet.

Guarding is now required, as injury to any intruder would be the parish's responsibility legally. It is also an insurance requirement. With Standing Committee approval, a brief was prepared and quotations sought from two firms of engineers. One sensible price was received from Moorish Engineering in Howden Road in the sum of £2.8k, and this has been accepted and an order placed with them.

- 7.2 The damaged stained glass window in the south west corner has been replaced as the contractor, Bob Tucker of *Heritage Stained Glass*, is able to work on his own.
- 7.3 There are other works outstanding which have been delayed by the pandemic, the most significant being the works to the churchyard trees and the masonry maintenance works required at roof level. As yet we have not been able to establish firm dates for these works but they are promised for this year. Other smaller projects are all on hold for the time being but none critical and all will be looked after when circumstances allow.
- 7.4 With the coming of winter and the ongoing problems with vandalism there is a requirement for improved floodlighting at the west end of the church. Improved lighting may allow our existing CCTV to operate more efficiently. A scheme for roof and high level LED floodlights is to be developed that will illuminate downwards for security reasons, not the church itself. The existing floodlight, mounted on the nave roof, will continue to illuminate the clock face of the tower. Professional certification of electrical installation works, required for insurance purposes, means that these works are beyond the capacity of the Tuesday group, so quotations will be sought.

8 Reordering

- 8.1 DR reported that the completed design for the reordering project was submitted to the DAC in late January 2020 for their February meeting. Two members of the committee revisited the church after this meeting and published their comments to us by letter on 13 February.

On the whole their comments were very favourable but they presented a list of 10 observations for our consideration. Most were of a minor nature and agreement was reached easily and amicably with all but one. We are required to move a narrow block of pews to a location immediately to the east of the new south porch, to frame the open area of the new font location, in front of the Greenway chapel and to help retain the “collegiate” feel of the corporation seating in the south aisle. (These pews will actually be replacing those removed previously (in the 1960’s?) where half the reading desk now stands just inside the south porch.)

They also required us to commission an additional specialist academic study into the provenance of our pews, before any are removed, for historical record purposes. This study has now been completed by Jo Cox of *Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants* and the study has been submitted to the DAC.

- 8.2 With these matters agreed, the DAC gave us their approval, on 14 May, to proceed to petition the Diocese for a formal Faculty. Having to work within the restrictions of lockdown, this process was more complicated than usual as design documents could not be displayed in church but had to be available on our parish website. The statutory period for advertising our proposals ended on 3rd July.
- 8.3 During this period we received three letters of complaint, via the Diocesan Registrar, all concerning the future of the Newte library. In short, our response was that unless a suitable alternative location was found for the library, and the DAC approved the removal of the books from the church, the conversion of the library space into an office/meeting room could not go ahead.

The Newte library is an unused resource. We believe that in the last eight years only one person has made use of the library, an Exeter University PhD student. Her research was into literacy in Devon in the past and she made reference to examples of old parish libraries in her studies, without making use of the actual information contained in the library.

We are also concerned with the storage of the books in church as condensation has been found on the bindings in winter and a better stable environment for their storage would be more suitable, in a proper archive.

We still await the outcome of Diocesan Registrar's deliberations but our architect is certain that, at worst, our faculty may be qualified regarding the re-use of the library space.

- 8.4 The architect will complete his working drawings during September. This will allow an application for building regulations approval to be made and documents will be sent out to obtain construction tenders from a selection of approved contractors. This process has been slightly delayed by the ground works investigations and structural engineers' final designs taking longer under lockdown restrictions. All necessary information is now to hand and the final drawings are being revised and completed.
- 8.5 A Project Management Group meeting with the architect has been arranged for 24 August to look at material samples and alternative finishes, especially the new stone flooring.
- 8.6 In discussion assurance was given that the PCC will have before it in October a full breakdown of the distinct component parts of the reordering plan, with costs attached to each of those parts. It will then be possible to take a decision about which of them we will take forward to implementation.
- 8.7 Arrangements for the regular cleaning of the church in the post-reordering era were raised by JJ. The team of volunteers who have made themselves responsible over the years for this could probably not be taken for granted in that future time. She suggested that it might be necessary to put into the annual budget an allowance for the hiring of cleaners.

9 The delayed Annual Vestry and Parochial Church Meetings

- 9.1 These meetings which were to have been held in April will be take place in church after the main morning service on Sunday 27 September. As usual the agenda will include the appointment of churchwardens, the election of up to 3 representatives on the Deanery Synod, and the election of representatives of the laity on the PCC. The official Parish Governance rules of the Church of England determine the number of such representatives by reference to the number of persons on the electoral roll (currently for St Peter's: 114), namely 6 for the first 50, 3 for the next 50, and 3 for the additional 14.
- 9.2 Instructions from the Diocese concern the choice (by us) and appointment (by the Bishop) of churchwardens, and the time span of membership of the Deanery Synod and of the PCC. Specifically:
- Churchwardens are to be chosen at an APCM that must take place before 31 October 2020, and their current term of office extends until (at the latest) 31 January 2021, the date set for admission to office by the Bishop.

- Representatives on the Deanery Synod remain in post, i.e. on the Deanery Synod and *ex officio* on the PCC, until 30 November 2020, so newly chosen representatives hold office from 1 December 2020.
- Members of the PCC who are currently in office continue thus until the conclusion of the newly timed APCM, i.e. for us 27 September 2020. Newly chosen members of the PCC take up office immediately after the APCM.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3.07 pm.

Signed:

Date: