

St Matthew's Church Harwell

Minutes of the Annual Meetings held on Sunday 24 April 2016 at 11.50am in St Matthew's Church

The Chairman, Revd. Dr. Jonathan Mobey, welcomed everyone to the meeting, which followed the morning church service, after a short break.

The attendance was 41 at the start of the meeting, although this had roughly halved by the end.

Apologies for absence received: Joan Impey, Georgina Greer, Janette Roberts, Philip Roberts, Pam Rolls, Joan Sutton.

Annual Parochial Meeting

Jonathan Mobey thanked Christina Wood and Mel Gibson for serving as churchwardens for the past year.

Jonathan Mobey informed the meeting that **Mel Gibson** and **Christina Wood** have been nominated and seconded in writing to be elected as churchwardens for the next year. There were no other nominations and they were elected unanimously.

Signed as a true record:

Chairman:

Secretary:

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Election of PCC Members

Jonathan Mobey reminded the meeting who had served on the PCC during 2015-16.

St Matthew's PCC can have up to 12 elected members.

Monika Buxton has come to the end of her 3 year term and is not standing again, making a total of 7 vacancies. Jonathan Mobey thanked Monika for all her past work on the PCC.

The Secretary had received nomination papers for the following four individuals for election to the PCC:

Michelle Walker
Martin Gibson
Sid Gale
Juan Bowerman

Jonathan Mobey proposed that all these individuals be duly appointed to the PCC, and this was approved unanimously.

Election of Joint PCC members (JPCC)

Jonathan Mobey explained that the JPCC for the Benefice comprises the incumbent, any ordained ministers or licensed lay workers, the churchwardens and the PCC Treasurers from each parish, plus two other PCC members from each parish as appointed at this meeting. Recently, the latter members have been the PCC Vice-Chair and PCC Secretary. The following resolution was passed in order to avoid having to vote on this every year in future:

Resolution	<i>That the two additional members of the Joint PCC shall be the PCC Vice-Chair and PCC Secretary</i>				
Moved	Chair (Jonathan Mobey)	Seconded	-	Passed	Unanimously

Election of Sides persons

Jonathan Mobey proposed the following to serve as sides persons for the coming year. These names were agreed unanimously.

Nicola Barclay-Watt	Wendy Sinclair	Georgina Greer
Peter Barclay-Watt	Liz Hill	Juan Bowerman
Gill Gay	Ruth Slatter	Debbie Davies
Anne Cox	Mike Pepper	Kevin Davies
Graham Cox	Elaine Shrimpton	Matthew Davies
David Pyke	Tony Twigger	Ryan Davies
Jim Sinclair	Jean Twigger	Margaret Spindler
Madeleine Gibson	Elizabeth Gill	

Appointment of Independent Examiner

Jane Moreton has agreed to be the independent examiner for the PCC's 2016 financial accounts. Jane was proposed by Lizi Bowerman and seconded by Anne Cockburn. Her appointment was unanimously accepted by the meeting.

Receipt of reports

The following reports had been made available two weeks before the meeting, in hard copy and on the church website, and were formally "received" by the meeting:

- Minutes of the 2015 annual meetings

- The PCC annual report on 2015, including the Fabric Report and the Electoral Roll report, adopted by the PCC at its March meeting and signed by Revd. Dr. Jonathan Mobey as chairman.
- Financial report and Accounts for 2015, approved by the PCC at its March meeting
- Deanery Synod report February 2015 - February 2016

Jonathan Mobey asked if there were any queries or comments arising from the reports. There were none.

Jonathan Mobey thanked the PCC Secretary for putting together the annual report.

The minutes of the 2015 meetings were then signed by the Jonathan Mobey and the PCC Secretary as a correct record.

Jonathan Mobey reported that the church electoral roll was revised during 6 - 26 March 2016. The number on the roll in March 2015 was 131. The number on the revised roll as at March 2016 was 118.

Thanks

Jonathan Mobey thanked God for all those who help out with all sorts of aspects of church life e.g. running services, cleaning the church, running groups, those holding official posts inside and outside the parish. Jonathan did not name everyone individually because there are so many involved.

Vision for our church

Jonathan Mobey explained that the PCC has agreed that the vision for our church is to grow the church wider (in number), deeper (in maturity) and closer (in relationships). Jonathan reminded us that the book of Acts chronicles the initial growth of the church.

Jonathan emphasised that God grows the church, but people also play a role in 1) preparing the ground; 2) planting a seed; 3) watering it. We do this as a church when we give loving service to the community in which we live, share the good news of Jesus, and help one another to mature in faith.

Our church buildings play a role in enabling us to do these things. At the moment, our main church building has limitations in terms of accessibility, flexibility and comfort. For instance, we have tried to use it to run Alpha and Marriage courses but it hasn't been suitable due to temperature and seating flexibility issues. We do use the meeting room in the downstairs extension for meetings and courses, but sometimes it is too small and sometimes there are double bookings.

The main church building **could** be a really good venue for Fledgelings, and for other community events such as barn dances and harvest suppers. There is great potential to use the main church building more widely – as it once was in centuries past. Many other churches have opened up their main church building to wider community use and our Acting Bishop of Oxford is in favour of this.

The PCC has been reflecting on these things over the last couple of years and has concluded that improvements should be made to the church heating and seating. An improved heating system would provide better levels of comfort and have lower hourly running costs. There are pros and cons of having pews, but undoubtedly they are not as flexible or comfortable as many of us would like.

Underpinning these issues is consideration of how we should be using the church building and whether to widen its usage. Nevertheless, there is a case for improving heating and seating just for current worship use purposes.

Improving heating and seating would undoubtedly involve a lot of time, effort and money, but God has given us this building and we must consider how to make best use of it.

Discussion

Jonathan Mobey then invited the meeting to respond to what it had heard, and to ask questions. The questions (Q) and points (P) made are listed below, together with Jonathan's (JM) response.

Q. Have we explored whether we would we get permission to remove the pews?

JM: No, but many churches in a similar situation have done so successfully. Our pews are not of great quality or historical note.

Tony Hughes added that over the last ten years we have made various applications to take out some pews and we have never had any problem getting agreement to this.

Q. Is there a plan to remove the rood screen?

JM: The rood screen is a very ancient part of the church and it is unlikely that we would be able to remove it, even if wanted to. We might possibly be able to relocate it, though. The PCC has not discussed the rood screen. It has mainly been considering the nave. We are in the process of applying for permission to take out the choir stalls in the Chancel and replace them with chairs. We would then use that as a small semi self-contained area behind the rood screen.

P. I find the pews difficult to access as a visually impaired person and with my guide dog and there are only a small number of places that I can sit comfortably. As such, I would support improving the seating to make it more accessible and comfortable.

P. Wheelchair users and people with pushchairs experience similar issues with pews. At my last church, we had chairs and reserved the end chair in each row for anyone with a pushchair so that they could park it next to them.

P. I would like to see the building used a lot more widely, have seating which could be configured flexibly, and heating that is effective in the winter.

P. Sometimes I can't come to church because of the cold as it exacerbates the symptoms of my illness. I've also heard some elderly people say that the cold in church makes their arthritis worse.

Q. Might we want to sell the church hall in order to raise funds to improve the heating and the seating?

JM: We already have enough money to improve the heating and the seating, courtesy of several legacies which we have been fortunate to have received recently. We can also apply for grants if we are improving accessibility. So we would not need to sell the church hall to fund seating and heating improvements. The church hall expenses and income are now roughly equal so keeping the hall isn't a drain on church finances. Having the church hall also avoids clashes between activities which go on in there and those that take place in the main church building. However, we can keep in mind the option to sell the church hall if we ever wanted to make more radical improvements to the main church building e.g. extend it further, add a balcony, etc.

Q. What consideration has there been so far as to what the seating configuration would be, how it would affect lines of sight, etc?

JM: We haven't made any floor plans of seating configurations yet. Current seating certainly doesn't always have perfect sight lines e.g. if you are behind a pillar, or near the front in the side aisles. We could potentially arrange chairs so that there is no longer a central aisle (apart from for weddings or funerals), as the centre of the building has the best sight lines. We could also arrange chairs in curves, or even in a circle, so as to have services "in the round".

Q. I am more than happy to have chairs not pews, but what would we do if there is a clash between a weekly group using the church building and, say, a funeral? Also, many people value ad hoc access to the quiet space inside the church.

JM: The priority clearly needs to be services, and to provide a quiet space for people to just come into the church is valuable. In reality, the additional uses for the church building would mainly be for church-related activities such as courses and meetings. These would predominately take place during evenings and weekends. The exceptions would be if we were to run any regular daytime coffee mornings or Evergreens-type events for older people. The clash with funerals is the main issue because of the relative lack of notice we have for these. But we could reserve certain days of the week for funeral bookings, and maybe even use All Saints', Chilton for funerals. We can offer the Chancel as a space which would be quiet for much of the time, and we could even have separate access to it via the Priests' door. My feeling is that funeral usage and quiet space usage requirements are not showstoppers for widening the use of the church building.

P. If we use the main church building more widely, we would need to ensure that we can still schedule any maintenance required. Even at the moment, it is quite difficult to schedule maintenance tasks that take longer than a day to avoid clashing with something else. So that is just another factor to bear in mind.

P. If we do remove the pews, it would be useful to understand if people would prefer a carpeted or an uncarpeted floor. For example, this has implications for the installation of the hearing induction loop. Carpeted flooring also results in a different ambience to uncarpeted flooring.

Q. I think we need the congregation to really get behind the idea of improving the heating and the seating. For this to happen, I think people need to understand the likely costs involved, especially if we need to ask the congregation to contribute funding.

JM: Yes, it's important to have a good level of support from the congregation, and not just for raising funds. As mentioned earlier, we do actually already have funds set aside from legacies for this sort of purpose. Changing pews for chairs would cost c£40k. The cost of improving the heating would depend on what sort of heating system we went for – both in terms of capital costs and running costs. Capital costs could range from upgrading the existing radiant heaters (c.£10k) to installing wall mounted electrical radiators (c.£40k) to installing a gas fired boiler and water-filled radiators (c.£80k) to underfloor heating (c.£160k). The latter three options would involve heating that is on continuously at least at a low level to maintain the fabric of the building at a minimum temperature, boosted when in use. If improving the seating and the heating is the right thing to do, God will provide the resources, and individuals in the congregation will catch the vision and support it financially.

Q. Might we employ a caretaker to move chairs around for different events, or will event organisers be expected to move chairs themselves?

JM: Certainly we would need to be clear on this. For most of our events, the arrangement is that the organiser sets up and clears away. I can't quite imagine that we'd have so many events going on that we could justify employing a caretaker, at least not initially. Some churches employ students or new graduates for specific ministry roles e.g. as apprentices. If we ever did that, then we might be able to include caretaking as part of that job. But I don't envisage this in the first instance.

At this point the meeting had been running for about an hour and Jean Barton proposed an adjournment so that people could get home for lunch.

In conclusion, Jonathan Mobey said that his sense from the meeting is that there is general support for improving the heating and seating in church, albeit that the attendees are not fully representative of the congregation. Jonathan asked if anyone objected to this conclusion. No one indicated that they did, and one attendee who had not spoken thus far spontaneously commented that he for one was definitely in favour of the initiative.

Jonathan then asked for a non-binding show of hands of everyone present to indicate whether or not they supported the principle of improving the heating and the seating in sorts of ways and for the sorts of reasons outlined. All but one present indicated their support.

Any Other Business

There was none.

Close

The meeting closed with prayer at 1.05pm

Signed as a true record:

Chairman:

Secretary: