

Minutes of a Meeting of St Matthew's, Harwell PCC held remotely via Zoom on Tuesday 5 May 2020 at 7.30 pm

Present

Jonathan Mobey
(Chair and present for items 1,
2 & 7-9)

Sid Gale

Jane Woolley (Secretary)

Tony Hughes
(Chair for items 3-6 & 10-15)

Pam Rolls (items 1-2 only)

Allan Macarthur

Eliza Wheaton

Rebecca Lewis

Andrew Keene

Michelle Walker

Gordon Gill

St Matthew's, Harwell and All Saints', Chilton PCCs were present together for Items 1-2. For the other items, only St Matthew's PCC members were present.

The items are minuted here in agenda order but they were in fact taken in the following order: 1-6; 10-15; 7-9.

1. Opening & Prayer

The Rector (Jonathan Mobey) read John 16: 5-16. In this passage Jesus is speaking to his disciples about his death and resurrection. Even though we are meeting remotely as a PCC, we are united by the Holy Spirit and our mission continues. Our meeting today is all about continuing that mission. We can only see a little way ahead. Perhaps more than at any recent time we are conscious of being at the mercy of events. However, we know that God is all-powerful and sees everything.

Jonathan then led the meeting in prayer.

2. Arrangements during/due to Covid-19 pandemic

Paper A (by Jonathan Mobey), Paper B (by the Children & Families workers) and Paper B2 (by Naomi Gibson) refer.

Jonathan Mobey asked for any comments.

2.1 Church buildings – no comments

2.2 Services

- Allan Macarthur said that viewing figures are available from Palm Sunday onwards when we started to publish the Sunday service online using YouTube. On average, each Sunday service is viewed via c.200 unique devices. It is likely that more than one person is watching via any given device. We can't tell who the viewers are but we know from word of mouth that some viewers are out of the parish and some are even outside the UK. The viewing figure for the Good Friday service was higher than the Sunday services, with no obvious explanation.
- Allan Macarthur said that viewing figures were very slightly higher for the initial services. This might be because to start with some people outside the parish were viewing our services because their own church had not yet started broadcasting but have now begun to do so.
- Allan relayed that 90% of online service viewings were on a Sunday; 60% of viewings were via a PC; 25% were via a smartphone and 15% were via a tablet. Some of those accessing services via a phone might be casting from the phone to a TV screen.

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- Gordon Gill said that he had viewed various online Sunday services in the Deanery. His view is that Harwell & Chilton's services are excellent. The way they are put together looks professional – with a variety of people appearing in them, the music is well presented and a mixture of indoor and outdoor settings used.
- Gordon Gill said that Harwell & Chilton's viewing figures are very much in line with St Mary's, Wallingford, which is church with a similar sized membership. Gordon said that, nationally, viewing figures for online services are many times higher than physical church attendance. Gordon also commented that an advantage of a recorded service such as ours is that people can view it whenever it suits them. This is likely to increase access beyond the regular congregation. Some churches use the alternative approach of livestreaming their services or use Zoom invitations to view live services. That approach limits the viewers to those who are available at that time.
- Pam Rolls said that it is encouraging that online viewing figures are holding up consistently at around c.200.
- Jonathan Mobey was asked about viewing figures for Pebbles, Kids Church and the Pebbles Family Services. Jonathan explained that these services are delivered live via a Zoom invitation rather than a recording on YouTube. The number attending online has been similar to the face to face attendance.
- Jonathan Mobey said that, looking to the future, he sees online services as supplementing rather than replacing physical church services. Online services can help reach those who are unable to leave the house or who are working on Sundays or who feel uncomfortable coming into a church building.
- Other PCC members reinforced their appreciation of the style, quality and accessibility of Harwell & Chilton online services (e.g. using 'outside broadcasts' not just indoor settings; including recognisably local locations and people; having the words to the songs visible so you can sing along; being able to watch from the sofa in your pyjamas, etc.)
- Some suggestions for improvement were to increase the number of Bible readings from one to two in order to have an Old Testament as well as a New Testament reading; ensuring the speaker is visible wherever possible (or that they are named if not); supplying a printed copy of the sermon to church members known not to have internet access; publicising the online services in future Harwell Helpers or Chilton Mutual Aid leaflet drops.
- Jonathan Mobey said that he is planning to send another email to the church community shortly and that he would ask for feedback on the online services from this wider group too.
- Allan Macarthur said that the online services have been quite time consuming to put together but the team is getting faster at it. Deborah Evans (Administrator) has been heavily involved.

Action: Jonathan Mobey and Pam Rolls to identify church members without internet access and supply a printed copy of the sermon to those who would like one

2.3 Children & Families work

Paper B refers. Jonathan Mobey said that the Children & Families workers (C&FWs) had also been undertaking some pastoral work among their constituency by telephone.

Pat Moseley said that it was great that the C&FWs have been able to keep all their work going via the use of technology. Other PCC members agreed. Jonathan said that he would feed back this appreciation and encouragement to the C&FWs.

2.4 Pastoral work

Pam Rolls reported that she and Jan Radford between them have telephoned everyone who attends Generation Gold, plus a few others. Hazel Benton, Joan Impey, Pat Moseley and Audrey Slater have also telephoned potentially isolated church members.

Pam Rolls reported that everyone they have spoken to so far seems in good heart. Many have good neighbours or relatives living nearby and have spoken highly of the practical help they have received from others. Quite a few have viewed the online church services. Others have been using Bible reading notes and accessing church services via TV or radio.

2.5 Staffing

Jonathan Mobey reported that Deborah Evans has taken to the Administrator role very well and is a pleasure to work with.

Jonathan invited questions from PCC members about the staffing arrangements.

Rector's medical work

Hazel Benton said that whilst it is admirable for the Rector to undertake extra medical duties, she felt that it would have been courteous to have advised the PCCs and indeed the wider congregations of this. Jonathan Mobey apologised for not keeping people informed and agreed that he should have made his absence on medical work more widely known. Pat Moseley agreed that informing the PCCs, even after the event, would have been helpful.

Rebecca Lewis explained that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had found there to be a fast-moving situation around the end of March and in the run up to Easter with Government and Diocese decisions constantly affecting the team's tentative plans. The Rector was making decisions about medical work around that same time and he did talk to the SLT about it at that point.

Gordon Gill commented that he preferred the Rector's low-key approach to communicating that he was undertaking extra medical duties.

Pat Moseley commented that he was glad that the Rector was contributing medically and wanted the Rector to know that people are praying for him.

Children & Families workers (C&FWs)

Rebecca Lewis said that she was delighted that the C&FWs are able to do as much as 15 hours per week each at the moment. Given that they regularly exceed their 20 hours per week in normal times, Rebecca felt that doing less for the time being is not a concern.

Jonathan Mobey invited Hazel Benton, as Chair of the Employment Committee, to comment. Hazel explained that she, Jonathan, Stuart Gibson and Jane Woolley had looked into the furlough option should the C&FWs express an interest in it. But when it became clear that the C&FWs preferred to carry on working as many hours as they could manage, then Hazel recommended that they be allowed to do so and continue to be paid in full, if possible.

Jonathan Mobey confirmed that the arrangement suggested by Hazel was in place at the moment but that he is reviewing regularly whether this is sustainable.

In answer to a question from Allan Macarthur, Jonathan Mobey clarified that furloughed workers are not allowed to undertake activity on a voluntary basis that would have been part of their paid role.

Jonathan Mobey invited Stuart Gibson to comment because it was he who had raised the question of furloughing originally. Stuart explained that he had raised the matter because he felt it was a question that needed debating and not because he was for or against it personally. Stuart confirmed that he was perfectly happy with the outcome.

2.6 Finances

Jane Woolley said that she felt that we could still write to existing funders of the Children & Families worker post to ask them if they would be minded to continue this funding. Jonathan Mobey said that this contact would need to be made by the Treasurers/Book-keeper because the identity of donors and the sums they have pledged is confidential.

Gordon Gill suggested taking a collection during the online services. Jonathan Mobey agreed that we could consider that. However the situation is delicate because some viewers will not be regular church members, plus some people's finances will have been badly impacted by the Covid-19 situation.

Tony Hughes asked what proportion of giving is collection plate income. Tony pointed out that if it's a minor amount, it might not be worth worrying about it when the issues might be delicate. Stuart Gibson said that plated income is c.15% of giving at All Saints' which he felt was fairly significant. Envelope giving was additional to that. Stuart said that the size of the impact depends on how long this situation goes on for.

Gordon Gill suggested writing to those in the envelope donation scheme to ask if they would consider donating in other ways.

Jonathan Mobey suggested that such questions should be debated in the individual PCC meetings.

2.7 Other activities

Tony Hughes and Hazel Benton respectively confirmed that Harwell Feast and Chilton Family Fun Day have definitely been cancelled for 2020.

Alex Reich noted that pastoral care of older church members was in hand. He wondered whether we could do the equivalent for teenagers and young adults who might also be suffering from social isolation.

Jonathan Mobey agreed that a lot of younger people are suffering from social isolation. However, we do not have a lot of young adults in our congregation and teenagers will be living with their families. Rebecca Lewis pointed out that safeguarding rules prevent us from making direct contact with teenagers.

Rebecca Lewis explained that Pathfinder sessions for 11-16 year olds are still taking place via Zoom. Those who attended YF but not Pathfinders have been invited to attend the Pathfinders Zoom sessions. Pathfinders translates better than YF to a Zoom format because Pathfinders is more discursive.

2.8 CAP work

The PCCs noted the proposal to offer online Money Coaching on a one to one rather than a group basis. There were no concerns about this proposal. Jonathan Mobey will feed back to Naomi Gibson about this.

Pam Rolls asked Jonathan Mobey to also express the PCCs' thanks for the heart that the CAP Money Course team have for their work, and to encourage them in it.

2.9 Future plans

Jonathan Mobey said that he would ideally like to livestream services when physical services are possible again.

Gordon Gill reported that he had been trying to encourage the Bishops in the Oxford Diocese to livestream services for years as part of Gordon's work for a charity that runs 60 care homes. The answer had always been that it was too difficult. But the Covid-19 response has now forced the issue.

Allan Macarthur commented that the technical challenges of livestreaming services are considerable and different to publishing a remotely compiled service on YouTube.

Chris Pollard commented that there are likely to be various intermediate steps before lockdown and social distancing are completely removed. It could be quite a strain on resources to offer both online and face to face Sunday service options. So we need to prepare for that now in some way. Yvonne Sanderson concurred. Jonathan Mobey agreed that there are quite a few possible lockdown exit strategy scenarios.

Jonathan Mobey remarked that he had been keeping an eye on what is allowed in Germany. They are now able to gather in church but are not allowed to sing! Some MPs are petitioning the Church of England to allow funerals in church again. Allan Macarthur said that he saw that the Republic of Ireland has opening churches in phase 4 of their lockdown easing roadmap. This phase also covers opening of museums and other public places.

Gordon Gill said that he had heard of one church with a normal seating capacity of 500 that had calculated that they could only allow 29 people in the building with social distancing.

3. Decisions requested of Standing Committee between meetings

The Standing Committee agreed on 27 March 2020 to continue to pay the church and church hall cleaner whilst these buildings are unused and without any cleaning taking place.

Rebecca Lewis emphasised that the Diocese is strongly advising that no one should be entering church buildings to clean at this time. Tony Hughes also emphasised the potential safety concerns for a cleaner if they were to be in the church on their own and/or undertaking unusual 'spring cleaning' type activity.

Gordon Gill asked if a deep clean might be necessary when the church re-opens e.g. to deal with bat droppings. Tony Hughes said that when he checked the church building a week ago it only needed some minor sweeping up. A professional deep clean would probably not be necessary. Jonathan Mobey is checking the Church Hall regularly.

4. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jan Radford.

5. Minutes of the meeting on 4 February 2020

The minutes of the PCC meeting on 4 February 2020 were signed as a correct record.

6. Matters/actions arising from the previous meeting, not covered elsewhere

The 2019 Annual Report has been finalised and signed off.

The 2019 Accounts have been independently examined.

Sid Gale and Gordon Gill have given the PCC Secretary their completed nomination forms for Deanery Synod.

All other actions related to the Annual Meeting are on hold due to the Covid-19 situation.

7. Treasurer

Jane Woolley reported that Phill Johnston had indicated to her in a text message in March that he could not continue as Treasurer due to other pressures on his time. Nick Clarke (Book-keeper) is aware of this. Jonathan Mobey confirmed that Phill had emailed him his resignation. However, it is Jonathan's understanding that Phill was happy to have remained Treasurer until the Annual meeting which was due to be in April. Since the annual meeting was postponed, technically Phill is still in post.

Jane Woolley acknowledged that it is not clear whether Phill intended to stand down as Treasurer and as a PCC member or only as Treasurer.

Action: Jonathan Mobey to contact Phill Johnston to check the situation

Jonathan Mobey asked people to let him know if they have any suggestions about who might be a suitable replacement Treasurer. Rebecca Lewis asked how much time the Treasurer role takes. Jonathan said that the Book-keeper handles all the day to day tasks – which are reasonably onerous. The Treasurer is more involved at the end of year when the next year's budget needs to be set and the year-end Accounts need to be checked.

Tony Hughes pointed out that the Treasurer role is important to some of the mooted fundraising campaigns.

8. Update on Finance actions arising from previous meeting

All the Finance actions have now been completed.

9. Income & Expenditure and Fund Balances report

Papers E and F were noted. The following matters arising were then discussed:

Envelope giving

Eliza Wheaton said that there are 6 people still using the envelope scheme. Eliza had previously asked members of this group in a letter to contact her if they would like to transfer to a less manual form of giving. One member did respond to confirm that they wanted to carry on using the envelope scheme. Eliza feels that it is unlikely that any of this group would react well to a request to donate differently.

Likely impact of Covid-19 on church finances

Tony Hughes said that expenditure on the quinquennial inspection might be delayed to 2021.

Jonathan Mobey said that any reduced expenditure e.g. on utilities is unlikely to outweigh loss of income from church hall, weddings, etc.

Fundraising

Jane Woolley suggested that we should still write to current donors to ask if they will support the C&FW post for 2021-2025. Other PCC members concurred.

Action: Jane Woolley to:

- Ask Nick Clarke if he would be willing to distribute a letter to current C&FW funders
- Liaise with Jonathan Mobey to prepare a suitably worded letter for Nick to use

Jane Woolley suggested that it might not be appropriate to ask the wider community for donations to fund the north aisle roof repair at the moment due to the impact of Covid-19 on some people's finances. It could come across as rather out of touch. Allan Macarthur agreed. Tony Hughes said that he has agreed with Jonathan Mobey what to put in the Faculty petition about how much of the work will be funded by fundraising and how much from PCC reserves. Tony pointed out that fundraising can still take place after the repairs are completed.

Jonathan Mobey suggested that any fundraising amongst the wider community should be restricted to CAP at this time because this is something that has particular pertinence at the moment.

Parish share

Gordon Gill wondered if we would need to dip into reserves to pay Parish Share due to a drop in income. Jonathan Mobey said that we had set a deficit budget for 2020 and so this would be the case anyway. Allan Macarthur pointed out that any use of (unrestricted) reserves would be due to a whole range of expenditure commitments, not only Parish Share.

Harwell Helpers fund

Jonathan Mobey explained that this is a new fund to help those in financial need due to the Covid-19 situation. Jonathan agreed to the use of St Matthew's accounting infrastructure by Harwell Helpers because it was too difficult for Harwell Helpers to set up their own bank account. Poverty relief fits with the church's remit and Jonathan is keen for the church to be at the heart of this community effort.

Jonathan Mobey also explained that he is a member of the Harwell Helpers Finance Committee and that he has been involved in decisions about operational and policy issues, e.g. how to distribute any funds to those in need. For instance, he recommended distribution in kind rather than in cash (e.g. food or topping up utility meter pre-payment cards) and this has become the policy.

10. Buildings Committee report

Paper G was noted.

11. North aisle roof - update

Papers G and H refer.

We have passed the DAC part of the permissions process - the DAC has given us the requisite Notification of Advice. We can now petition for a Faculty. Tony Hughes reported that he has been able to negotiate with the Diocesan Registry via the DAC Secretariat such that the Faculty will be processed by the Diocese in parallel with the Local Authority's planning permission process rather than the former waiting for the latter to be successfully concluded first. Hopefully this will mean that we will have all the permissions we need by the end of June. This raises the chances of completing the work before winter sets in.

Tony Hughes said that we have chosen a preferred contractor but we can't commission them until we have completed the permissions process – most probably July at the earliest.

In response to a question from Rebecca Lewis, Allan Macarthur clarified that this repair work is essential to prevent detriment to the church fabric. As such it falls outside any edicts to suspend non-essential works at this time.

12. Porch glass doors - update

Paper G refers. In summary, we are still waiting for one contractor to answer some queries about their quotation and for a quotation from a second contractor. Tony Hughes said that he will keep chasing them but he is not expecting any progress in the short term due to the Covid-19 situation.

13. Church Hall management - update

Jonathan Mobey confirmed that there is nothing to report as the Church Hall is closed for the time being.

14. Future dates to note

Tuesday 7 July - Combined PCC meeting.

15. Any other business

Jane Woolley was asked about the plans for Holiday Club. Jane explained that the planning team had calculated that the only time that Holiday Club could realistically take place over the summer was the originally planned week of w/c 27 July. Jane also explained that the planning team would need to make a decision by 1 June about whether to go ahead or not. This is in order to allow two months to gear up for it properly.

Gordon Gill reported that, as Lay Chair of the Deanery Synod, he has been involved in a group which has drawn up a Deanery Covid-19 continuity plan, which is something that the Diocese has requested. The group has also been looking into how many burial plots we have in the Deanery. Gordon relayed that the Deanery has not had any more than the usual number of funerals recently. Gordon has also been having regular Zoom meetings with all the stipendiary clergy in the Deanery.

Gordon Gill also relayed that he has been invited by Bishop Steven to join the Bishop's Advisory Committee on Didcot.

Jonathan Mobey closed the meeting in prayer at 10.00pm.

CHAIR

SECRETARY

DATE

DATE