

Parishioners' Open Meeting
20 September 2022 at 7.30pm
Hybrid meeting

Present: Fr Simon, Stephen Warde (Chair), Sarah Sykes plus 14 in person and 7 online

Apologies : Nora Darby, Ron Haynes

The minutes of July's meeting were agreed to be a true record.

1. Diocesan stewardship initiative

The Chair introduced Sandra Portas who is working part-time for the Diocese responsible for the stewardship initiative.

She has been employed since January 2021 on a part-time basis to introduce a stewardship initiative in every parish in the Diocese, which encourages people to really think about the giving of themselves to benefit the work of their parish whether it be in time, talent or money. She has a background in grant-funding applications to external bodies. The programme which she is introducing has been tried and tested for over 10 years in other dioceses in England.

Her job is to introduce parishes to the programme, usually through explaining it to a small team of parishioners who then take it out to the parish. She supplies all the necessary resources and training. She takes the team through the programme in details, share the tools and then they work together to prepare the materials tailored to each parish. The programme is introduced to the parish over the course of 3 weekends. A short talk is given at Masses usually in the Homily slot. The first talk is given by the parish priest, the second talk is given by someone for the parish finance team and the third talk can be given by either the parish priest or a lay leader where parishioners are asked to pledge time, talents and treasure. The talks are tailored to each individual parish. Parishioners are asked to reflect in a gentle way about the parish, our responsibilities within the parish community, the state of the parish in terms of needs, time and talents, plus financial. Scripts are provided for newsletter notices and thank you notes to give to those who have pledged. You can see examples of other church's experiences in running the programme. In particular, Sandra recommended checking out Our Lady of Annunciation, Kings Lynn YouTube channel (12 September). Sandra claimed that every parish who has run the programme (post-covid) has seen a significant increase in standing orders, gift aid and volunteering. So far 10 parishes in our diocese have run the programme. St Ives and Downham Market are currently in the process.

The programme takes about 3 months to complete after the talks have been given.

It was felt that, as a parish, we have already done a lot of work getting volunteers recently, so maybe this programme could act as a follow up to this work, possibly in Spring 2023. It was suggested that, although the talks usually take place during the homily slot, they could be given at the end of the Mass.

After discussion, the Chair thanked Sandra for her presentation and welcomed her to stay for the remainder of the meeting if she would like.

ACTION

- Put together a small group of people interested in running this initiative next year with Sandra's help and input. **(Facil. Grp)**

2. Parish news and Mass arrangements

Fr Simon said that over the next four weeks number of attendees at Mass would be counted. This will give an indication of how the return of people to Mass is doing. However, he does not expect the levels to be back to the pre-pandemic levels.

9.30am Mass at school – Fr Simon said that the school's new Head, Jenny McGee Wallace, has now started work with the new term. They have discussed whether Mass on Sunday should return to the school. They will look at the County Council's lettings policy and revisit risk assessment. A few points to note: the school no longer has a caretaker and therefore no key person for security opening/closing issues. Also the children's liturgy group has built back to good numbers, would this transfer to school? With one priest covering all the parish Masses on Sunday now, would the logistics of crossing between two sites be workable? Could we go to 2 Sunday morning Masses with the start time of the 9.30am Mass be put back to 9am? Whatever the final decision the 9.30am Mass will remain in the church for the foreseeable future.

Offertory – the question of restarting the offertory collection by passing baskets through the church was discussed, and there were no objections to it.

Energy costs: heating the church and helping people in need – James Dore (Treasurer) confirmed that the parish has plenty of funds to heat the church as we would normally do. Our normal annual cost is about £8,000. He assured the Meeting that even if this doubles, then it is still affordable for this year as well as going forward over a few years or until energy prices stabilise. We are currently on a fixed energy contract and won't have any imminent increases for another year. The costs are split with the church heating being paid through a business account, and the presbytery costs from a separate domestic account. A new heating system for the church is still to be considered and decided upon, including whether we should increase our use of solar panels. However, there is currently an administrative problem with reclaiming the feed-in tariff, which needs to be sorted with the power company.

SVP in need initiatives – the Parish SVP group's new president, Ciarán Ward, who recently took on the presidency after Catharine Warren's 5-year term ended, said that the SVP national campaign re the cost of living crisis is due to be launched by the SVP to help people through the winter, particularly if they are struggling with heating costs. He reported that locally they are taking things on a case by case basis. They have funds to help with contributing towards costs, providing gas bottles etc. He urged people to look out for the older people in the parish community.

There was some discussion about extending the Saturday morning coffee hub into the week, for a couple of mornings or afternoons, to provide somewhere warm and companionship. It was suggested that after 9.30am on Mondays and Thursdays, 10am-12pm could be a good time if there were no other regular bookings at this time. Additional volunteers would be needed for this. Karen R, Steve W and Roberta C said they would be

available on Mondays. We could also consider setting up a parish community fridge such as the one in Wyndmondham parish which opens twice a week. The local council is looking for places to set up warm hubs around the city and they have approached Fr Simon, but they were looking for a facility that could be open 6 days a week, which would not be feasible with several local groups using the room for meetings during the week. Additionally our First Holy Communion classes will be starting shortly monthly on Saturdays at 11am carefully timed to avoid the coffee hub.

Foodbank – the area where the collection boxes were based has been closed off by the office table in the Narthex, but food can still be dropped off there. Fr Simon suggested having a ‘Foodbank Sunday’ on which people are encouraged to bring something to donate.

ACTION:

- Organise the reintroduction of the offertory collection, but meanwhile ask the Welcomers at each Mass to ensure that collection money gets to the safe – **Fr S**
- Discuss SVP supporting an extension of the Saturday Morning Coffee hub – **Ciaran W**
- Consider reinstating a particular Sunday on which to bring in donations for the foodbank – **James D**

3. Synodal Pathway

The action group continues to meet on 1st Saturday of the month after the coffee hub at 11am, which is looking for more volunteers. They plan to start Faith-sharing and catechesis through Advent Kay, Roberta and Edward to lead this. The sessions are planned to start after 12.30pm Mass on Wednesdays, which was a time which worked well during the Synodal consultations. One of the ideas of what they might do is Lectio Divina based on the readings for the coming Sunday. Or discussions about the challenges around faith sharing and how to deal with them.

What else is happening with follow up from Synodal discussions in the deanery? Fr Simon is unaware of any central person co-ordinating this information. Helena J reported that the Deanery do not know what is happening next.

The filling of the post of pastoral worker is important to implement the synodal actions.

4. Social activities

10th Aug - The Chair expressed thanks to Nora Darby and all who had helped organise our Parish Feast Day celebrations. Lots of people appreciated the party, which was well attended with over 80 people coming to the party. There was a nice spread of people from all Masses and the Wednesday evening rather than a weekend party was successful.

24th Sept – Fr Simon said there will be cheese, bread, biscuits and wine available after 6pm to celebrate Fr Bob, who will say Mass and preach.

Family Fridays – take place on 2nd Friday of the month, 6:30-8:30pm. Helena said that she has set up this social occasion as an extension of Communion and Confirmation groups inviting full and extended families to enjoy a mix of arts, crafts, games and chat. The list of meeting dates are on the noticeboard on the front of the church.

Radio Maria – is celebrating its 3rd birthday at the end of Oct/beginning of November. They have a new priest Director, Fr Toby Lees, a Dominican based in London but in Cambridge

two days a week. Radio Maria staff recently met with the SVP group to reach people who would like a DAB radio in order to listen to Radio Maria. There was also a new Radio Maria magazine available at the meeting for people to take away to pass around friends and family.

5. Parish Groups

CAFOD – Serga reported that the planned 60th birthday celebrations had been cancelled due to lack of volunteers. However, the Laudato Sii Masses will all take place this weekend. Serga explained that the Parish is fabulously generous with donations, but we desperately need time, and appealed for anyone who would like to volunteer to support the Harvest Family Fast Day (7th Oct) as an appeal reader or collector, please get in touch. The talks about the world food crisis will take place on 1st/2nd Oct and the donations will be collected on 8th/9th Oct.

A short discussion followed about whether to run a 5min slideshow before Mass and whether we should also make an appeal for the Pakistan disaster flood appeal. It was decided against both.

SVP – Ciarán W reported that the group will arrange for the Giving Tree to run in advent with a tree in the Narthex. An online version will also be available.

Tech Group – Martin Avery reported that the group continues to meet monthly. They are continuing to explore options for replacing the CD player. They are looking for something easy to use and reliable. They are in the process of buying an uninterruptable power supply for the Parish Office. It has been on order for a long time, so it will be chased up. There are plans to replace the projector and screen in the Parish Room. They are currently getting quotes. They are also exploring ways of improving communication with parishioners so we can help them know what they can do with the website, possibly through a Q&A SESSion in the Parish Room, using the screen to demonstrate the website. They already show those who are housebound on how to use the online streaming but would like to expand this teaching. Ways of managing data in the office are being explored. CCTV is getting old and needs updating and improving.

6. AOB

Karen Rodgers reported that on Tuesday mornings, a group of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers enjoy meeting in the Parish Room.

7. Next Meeting

Thursday 24th November at 7.30pm