



Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

St Matthew's Church

Wednesday 14th October 2020 at 19.45

Chair: Rev Richard Coombs, Rector of Cheltenham Minster with St Matthew

Richard welcomed everyone to the **Annual Parochial Church Meeting Part I** which, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, had been postponed from April 2020 and was being held on-line using Zoom. He acknowledged that this would make it impossible for some members of the congregations to 'attend', but the meeting had to be held by the end of October 2020. He explained how anyone could raise a question as the meeting progressed and how the on-line voting would operate - those wishing to vote against or abstain at any item should indicate at the time. Clare Salisbury and Rachel Hargreave would act as tellers.

Those 'present' were able to congratulate Michael Barrett on his recent award of the British Empire Medal in recognition of his service to the Community, particularly at the Minster and St Matthews.

Richard formally opened the meeting with a reading and thoughts from Lamentations 3: 21-23.

"The book of Lamentations is the response of the nation of Judah, and, in particular, the people of Jerusalem, after they have been sent into exile in Babylon. In chapter 3 an individual, perhaps the prophet Jeremiah, speaks of his own experience of exile which mirrors that of the people who have been forced into catastrophic defeat, poverty and exile. But in the midst of his lament and distress comes three of the most wonderful verses of hope and confidence....."

Despite the horrible devastation of the exile, 'Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.' Because of their sins, they deserve to be utterly consumed, wiped out as a nation but God, in his great love, mercy and compassion has not completely destroyed them.

We have endured almost eight months of Covid-19 and it's been a sort of exile; an exile from our usual way of life; an exile from so much of what we enjoy and take for granted; an exile from many of our friends and family; an exile from church for many of us. And we are going through this because we live in a fallen and broken world that is in exile from our true home in heaven. We are in exile but, because of the Lord's great love, we have not been consumed. The church has continued to function, yes, we have had to adapt and get ourselves on line and working in a very different way incredibly quickly but we've done it with the Lord's help and the remarkable gifts of our staff and volunteer team. Many people have been much more committed to church during lockdown and some people have joined us during this time, two people I know of have come to faith. The Lord's compassion has not failed us during the exile of lockdown.

Now, it looks as though our exile is going to continue for a while longer, it may be months, it may be years before we are back to something resembling normal, although many people are rightly saying that it will be a very new normal in all sorts of ways. How are we going to survive in our strange land of exile? By remembering that the Lord's compassion is new every morning and his great faithfulness. For us, the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, that means remembering that in Jesus God has proved his love and compassion even though we are going through very hard and testing times.

Every morning that we get up during our Covid exile we have a decision to make. Are we going to listen to the news and think about all the restrictions on our lives and plunge into despondency and depression, or are we going to remember the Lord and his great compassion and faithfulness in Jesus and all that he is doing in and through us in our time of exile?

In our Annual Report for 2019 there is so much to give thanks for. I do hope that you have had a chance to read through it. God was so faithful to us in 2019, the church turned a corner very quickly thanks to the Lord's faithfulness to us. His faithfulness to us in 2019 should give us great hope that he will be faithful to us in 2020 with all the new challenges that it is bringing.

In the last verse of this section, Jeremiah gives us a wonderful example of how to survive in exile: 'I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."' Even more than the end of exile in Babylon, even more than a return to the land, even more than a return to normal life, Jeremiah longs for the Lord.... This is the way to get through Covid exile, even more than longing for a vaccine, even more than praying for a return to normality, even more than looking forward to all the things that we will be able to do again when the virus is no longer a threat, Jeremiah encourages us to long for the Lord.....

If we are able to do that, then our Covid exile will have taught us a vitally important lesson, to desire the Lord himself more than anything that he gives us. In the words of our church mission statement, it will teach us to be 'Passionate about Jesus'."

He said that we had much to thank God for in 2019 not least a turn round in our finance and the funds being made available to refurbish the kitchen which was now being used to provide weekend meals for the homeless.

1. Apologies for absence were received from:

Holly Cupper, Rod and Caroline Pellereau, Tony and Kay Neville, Una Taylor, Alan and Janet Matthews, Luke Blackburn, Andy and Julia Sawers, David and Lisa Warren, Clare Chesworth, David and Margaret Towers.

There were 75 on-line attendees, many of whom were couples and two were licensed clergy who would not have a vote.

2. The minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 7th April 2019 were accepted as a true record.

3. There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

4. Reports

In addition to the customary committee reports, the Annual Report, which had once again been prepared for this meeting, was intended to show the fullness and richness of life at the Minster and St Matthew's during 2019.

i. **Electoral Roll** (*Annual report page 3*)

Electoral Roll Report for the year 2019 At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting last year, it was reported that there were 247 names on the Electoral Roll, with 17 of these people living within the Parish boundaries. This year the roll was amended only. There are 256 names on the new electoral roll with 18 in all living within the parish boundaries.

ii. **Church Property, Fabrics & Ornaments** (*Annual Report page 4*)

We are thankful that both Cheltenham Minister and St Matthew's Church are in relatively good shape and that there were no major issues in the Quinquennial report. Thus, it has been another year of keeping the two churches in good order and planning for future improvements. At the Minster, we have fixed a leak in the tower and some loose masonry as well as planning to replace the external doors and install some protective wrought iron gates for security. We have also made plans to move the Magnus Organ and replace the bollards. At St Matthews' Church, the landscaping of the car park was completed, the new kitchen approved and money raised to pay for it. The cycle rack was installed and the macerator pump in the North aisle WC was replaced. Both churches have had their gutters regularly cleaned by Gooch and there have been a myriad of other small (and some larger!) jobs ably carried out by our wonderful team of volunteers, mainly comprising Roger Abbott, Chris Pinnington, Roger Stephens and Henry Williams, whose dedication and expertise we are immensely grateful for. Thanks must also go to Peter Ormerod and Ken Syme for keeping such a careful eye on the Minster and all the members of the Building and Fabrics committee.

iii. **Deanery Synod** (*Annual report page 4*)

This report had been compiled by Chris Chadwick who had recently died. Richard Coombs expressed again our thanks to Chris for all he had done in the Parish Deanery and Diocesan Synod and our support for Debbie and the rest of the family. The full Synod met three times during the year. In June Synod met at Emmanuel and Catherine Berry gave a talk on Mental Health, followed by another on "Caring for Creation" by Revd Arthur Champion. In November at the Rock Andy Macaulay gave a presentation on their work. Later, Julie Ridgeway spoke about Diocesan finance, commenting that Cheltenham deanery had met its target. In February we heard a talk at Holy Apostles on The Resource Church by the Revd Andrew Blyth. This was followed by Revd Brian Dunlop on the proposal of an "Anna Chaplaincy" across denominations for Cheltenham and Bishops Cleeve. Please continue to support the work of Synod and Gary Grady, as the Area Dean, in prayer. If anyone has any questions about Deanery Synod, please speak to a member of the clergy or one of the lay representatives.

iv. Finance Accounts for 2019 (*Adrian Bowcher Annual report page 12*)

The most important matter for me as the new Treasurer this year was to have the income and expenditure in balance. One simply has to live within ones means or increase the income. The Vision Express appeal dominated the year from a financial perspective.

INCOME: There were two elements to the appeal. 1. To raise £40k for the refurbishment of our kitchen, with any surplus over the refurbishment costs being added to general funds.

2. To increase the regular giving to a level which covered our regular expenditure.

Total income for the year was £441k (£380k in 2018) which was a healthy £60k increase compared with prior year total income.

1. The campaign raised over £111k in lump sum donations with £89k collected in the year and a further £22k in gift aid not actually received in 2019 but will show in 2020 accounts.

2. Increase to regular monthly giving will show through in 2020 but pledges indicate an effective £50k increase in regular giving which will put the regular income and expenditure in a surplus position for 2020.

I am particularly pleased with the rise in regular giving and the widespread participation from the whole church family. Over 100 separate gifts were made to the one-off campaign and over 110 pledges made to the regular giving campaign.

EXPENDITURE: Total expenditure was £403k - a reduction from 2018 which totalled £429k. Largest costs were the parish share £137k (143k), staff £128k (£122k) and church building maintenance costs of £72k (£57k).

CASH. Cash balances at year end were £107k, up from £87k in 2018. Cash is held in HSBC or CCLA accounts only.

SYSTEMS. We improved functionality and security by upgrading the accounting system (SAGE) and moving it to the Cloud so it is constantly maintained and protected by SAGE themselves.

We have, for 2020, delegated many budgets to designated budget holders and a two-part authorisation system, albeit rather frustrated and delayed by the 2020 Pandemic.

The Treasurer proposed that Randall and Payne be appointed again as our independent examiners. This was agreed by the meeting with no dissent or abstention.

Richard thanked Adrian for all his work on our behalf as our church treasurer especially as his day job has been so demanding during the pandemic.

v. **Safeguarding** (Report from Julia Sawyer)

Richard Coombs reported that Michael Cupper had stood down as one of our Safeguarding Officers. He was thanked for the work he had done. Julia Sawyers had taken his place and now worked with Stephen Ayland on any issues relating to children and young people. Emma Abbey and Paul Collacott were responsible for any issues affecting vulnerable adults. Unable to attend and having tendered her apologies to the meeting, Julia Sawers' report to the Chairman was read to the meeting.

"I do want to mention children's safeguarding, especially in the light of the recently published IICSA report which made the national press. It is a horrible topic, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't mention it, rather we should be clear about what we are doing so that we can instil confidence in everyone. There are a couple of points I think it would be helpful to make, some of which give people a way to respond if non-Christian friends and colleagues engage them in conversation dismissing church as an unsafe place for children. (As some of my contacts do).

1. During 2019 - 2020, Michael Cupper resigned as a PSO and we should thank him for serving the church family in this role.

2. I was appointed in August 2019. We have reviewed and re-written parts of our safeguarding policy so that it is an accessible and practical document, everyone knows what they should do in safeguarding situations. This policy was agreed by the PCC in November 2019 as reported by the church wardens in their report to the AGM.

3. In terms of giving reassurance that we are alert to these matters, the following could be said:

i) We now follow the Diocesan "safer recruiting" practices for all who want to work with children and young people. Before we undertook DBS checks and informal interviews, this was great, but we now go further. Simon and Jayne have completed job descriptions for all the different volunteer roles, we ask people to complete an application form and we take up two references.

ii) Jayne and Simon have completed risk assessments for all the activities undertaken with our children and young people. We now take registers of all the children, young people and volunteers present at each session.

iii) I meet with Jayne and Simon individually once a term to give them an opportunity to mull over any safeguarding difficulties, to ensure the register of volunteers is up to date in terms of their DBS check and their training, to check risk assessments are still relevant and to pray for them specifically in relation to safeguarding.

iv) At Simon and Jayne's request I have run some training for all the volunteers. The youth was in the year under AGM review, - December 2019, the children's was in this year, March 2020.

v) This is not relevant to the year under review by the AGM, but since Covid-19 and the greater use of the internet and virtual interactions with the children and young people, Jayne and Simon have been very careful to ensure all their internet actions are considered in the light of safeguarding.

It's my view that we are in an even healthier place now than we were at the last AGM which is great. I think that some of the above information would be reassuring for the congregation if anyone asked about safeguarding."

Annual Parish Meeting

(At this point the Annual Parochial Church Meeting is “interrupted” by the Annual Parish meeting, the sole purpose of which is to elect Churchwardens for the coming year).

Richard Coombs began the Parish meeting by expressing his thanks to the churchwardens, Clare Salisbury and Bill Harvey for seeing the church through a very difficult time brought about by Covid-19. He thanked them for what they had done, were doing and will do.

Both wardens had agreed to stand for a second year and both were elected unanimously.

They in turn thanked Richard Coombs particularly for his leadership and preaching, for creating a staff team that works well together and for the way he tackled our financial situation so soon after his appointment. They also thanked the entire staff team for their work, particularly through the pandemic lockdown. They further thanked all the volunteers in the church who work together to make us what we are.

Richard expressed his personal thanks to the staff and volunteers.

Annual Parochial Church Meeting Part II

5. Changes to the Composition of the PCC

This item was held over, see item 9 below

6. Elections

The APCM, with its elections to the PCC and Deanery Synod would normally be held in April following the end of the last church calendar year. Because of the Coronavirus outbreak this year's meeting had been postponed and was held on-line only. The Chairman proposed that the PCC and Deanery Synod representatives be re-elected en bloc for the current year with further elections at the next APCM. This was agreed unanimously.

Richard Coombs thanked the PCC for its work during difficult times and Gill Sage who acts as secretary to the PCC for all that she does behind the scenes.

7. Rectors address (text of the Rector's Address Richard Coombs)

(Note that the Rector's address was accompanied by slides which are not reproduced here)

I hope that you will remember that back in April 2019, I presented a new vision for The Minster and St Matthew's and that was summarised by the aim to be Passionate about Jesus. In the annual report, you will have read of all sorts of ways in which the church has indeed become more passionate about Jesus and has responded to him in all sorts of new and exciting ways. I'm not going to go over that again, it's all in the report. What I would like to do is to give a brief strategic overview of where I think we might be heading in the next 6-12 months. I say 'might' because it's very hard to plan with any certainty at the moment.

As well as an overall aim to be Passionate about Jesus, we have four ministry priorities that we have been working towards. Discipleship, Prayer and Worship, Mission and Community.

1. Discipleship

It has been so encouraging to see numbers at our services and small groups growing over the last couple of years and holding up during lockdown. There seems to be a real hunger in our church to grow in our faith in the Lord Jesus and love for him. However, if we are going to survive the long haul of the pandemic we need to be really intentional in feeding ourselves and developing healthy spiritual disciplines. So, I would like everyone to be having a daily devotional time, everyone to be in a small group and everyone to connect with church on Sunday.

2. Prayer and Worship

For each of our three services, I would like us to have focus on growth. As well as serving our existing church members.

10am I would like to grow our young families

11am I would like to grow a new group of people who like a traditional style of worship

6.30pm I would like to grow our ministry to students and 18-30s

3. Outreach

We need to have a more intentional and co-ordinated approach to evangelism. It's been great to have Uncover, CE and Alpha courses and to have seen fruit from them. We've had other evangelistic events and we've started Saturday kitchen. But we need to be more organised. I'd like to form an evangelism team who produce an annual programme of outreach events and courses to which we can invite guests.

4. Community

We need to have more fun together as a church family. It's been very hard to do much of that during lockdown and when we come out we are really going to have to get to know each other again. So, I'd love to see an annual programme of church social events for us and for those who are outside our church. The aim will be simply to hang out together and enjoy each other's company again. This too will require some planning and organisation so I hope that we can put together a small team to make this happen as well.

The reason that we do all this is because we want to be passionate about Jesus, growing in our discipleship because we want to love him more; in our prayer and worship because we want to respond to his love for us; in mission because we want the world to know about his life and in our community life because we want to love each other better.

8. Question Time

A question was asked about the publication of PCC minutes. Gill Sage confirmed that approved minutes were posted in the church foyer, although this had not been done during lockdown. Gill also confirmed that anything with a sensitive issue might not be included in public minutes although this was a rare occurrence. Bill Harvey will work with

Richard Coombs and Gill Sage in the hope that draft minutes might be made available, avoiding the present 2 month delay, and that these might be circulated or made available electronically.

9. Agreement of postal voting for next APCM if on Zoom.

The Chairman proposed that this meeting should agree that if next year's APCM was necessarily held on-line then postal voting should be made available. This was agreed with one abstention and one vote against.

Closing Prayer

Reverend Clare Dyson closed the meeting in prayer.

DRAFT