



Annual General Meeting MEETING MINUTES

13 October 2019

Meeting Details

Meeting Name:	Annual General Meeting
Chairman:	John Bates
Date:	Sunday, 13 th October 2019
Time:	3pm until 4:30pm
Location:	Parish Centre

Invitees/Attendees

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was an open meeting for all parishioners.

They were invited to hear the Council report on the state of the Parish, including highlights from the past year and an outlook for the next 12 months.

32 parishioners were present at the meeting, including the following members of the Parish Council:

Name	Role	Present
John Bates	Chairman Health & Safety and Safeguarding	Yes
Fr Michael Spain	Parish Priest	Yes
Fr Bob Davies	Carmelite Community	Apologies
Kevin Murphy	Finance Committee	Yes
Sally Taylor	Evangelisation Activity Group	Yes
<i>Situation Vacant</i>	Liturgy & Church Activity Group	<i>n/a</i>
<i>Situation Vacant</i>	Outreach Activity Group	<i>n/a</i>
Kasia Misiewicz	Pastoral Activity Group	No
Nan Jacobson	Social Activity Group	Yes
Kathy Slattery	Youth Activity Group	Yes
Doreen Pooley	Mass Representatives	No
Joan Barham	Secretary	Yes

Agenda Items

Item	Subject	Presenter
1.	Opening Remarks	John Bates
2.	Parish Priest's Report	Fr Michael Spain
3.	Finance Committee Report	Kevin Murphy
4.	Any Other Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions Tabled in Advance • Questions & Comments from the Floor 	John Bates
5.	Closing Remarks	John Bates

Meeting Notes

Apologies were received in advance of the meeting from Fr Bob Davies and Maureen Connell.

1. Opening Remarks - John Bates

- John Bates welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- Fr Michael opened the meeting with a prayer.
- John thanked everyone in the parish who has supported the parish so well in the last 12 months and over the last few years; instructing people in their faith, working on planning of liturgies and keeping our church beautiful as well as the many good works carried out by our parish groups. Without their effort our parish would not be the parish that it is today.
- John then handed over to Kevin Murphy for the Finance Report.

2. Finance Committee Report - Kevin Murphy

- Refer to the "*Finance Committee Report*" and accompanying "*Financial Statement*" made available prior to the AGM in the Annual Report for information about parish finances.
- Before Kevin began, Maurice Carkett asked if copies of the meeting minutes from last year's AGM were available. He was told that they were made available to all parishioners just after the meeting last year and they have been available online via the parish website since.
- Brian O'Hanlon enquired as to how many copies of this year's Annual Report were made available as he felt that the quantity provided was not sufficient. He was told that the report was made available online via the parish website; that 35 paper copies were provided in the church porches for those not online, and that several of those copies were labeled "*Church Copy. Please do not remove. Additional copies available on request from Parish Office or via website at www.stjosephs.org.uk*". Brian said that at 11am Mass today there were no copies in the church and that there was nothing in the newsletter about papers being available. In response he was told that the note regarding AGM papers had been in the newsletter in the preceding two weeks and that sadly the lack of copies in the church meant that people ignored the red label. An offer was made to print him a copy which he declined. Joan suggested that next year the Annual Report could be emailed out to everyone directly once complete and that a specific note be included in the newsletter about availability of paper copies for those not online.

ACTION: Joan Barham arrange for 2020 Annual Report to be emailed to parishioners and for a note to be included in the newsletter about availability of paper copies for those not online.

- Kevin then provided his report on parish finances, talking through each of areas documented in the Annual Report on pages 6, 7 and 8; referring to the Financial Statement provided on pages 9 and 10.
- In conclusion he thanked all those who give up their time for the parish as well as members of the finance committee, Fathers Michael, Bob, Maurice and Matt, Helena Sullivan to whom he wished a happy retirement, Joan, Karen and Barbara from the Parish Office and Mary Forsyth.
- Kevin received finance questions prior to the meeting which he proceeded to answer, as follows:

Acoustic Issues

- **Charles Watters** – *Can you please confirm what work has been carried out to rectify the acoustic issues in St Joseph's church between 7 October 2018 and 3 July 2019 and what work has been carried out from 3 July 2019 to date? And what was the cost of the works carried out.*

The previous installation of acoustic tiles on the church walls and the front of the choir loft did not solve the sound problem and it was agreed that tiles needed to be put over the ceiling of the church to replace the previous asbestos tiles which had been removed during the roofing works. However such work could not be undertaken until the remedial work on the church roof was completed.

During the period from October last year to date, Fr Bob met with companies regarding an audio/visual system for the church and in July this year we received an estimate of over £54,000 from one firm, Cunnings Recording Associates, to install a visual/audio system. We have not accepted this estimate.

Following further discussions, which I believe included Fr Bob speaking with Charles Watters on the subject, the committee agreed that, as a first step, acoustic tiles should now be installed on the church ceiling before any further work was considered.

- **Charles Watters** – *Can you please confirm what further work has been identified as necessary to be carried out, when this is scheduled to be undertaken and the costs anticipated.*

An estimate for this work in the amount of £10,400 has been agreed but we have been waiting for the Diocesan Trustees to consider our request to proceed. At their meeting on Thursday, 3 October the estimate was agreed. This work is now scheduled to start mid-November.

Sale of the Infant of Prague

- **Charles Watters** – *Can you please confirm what the total net proceeds from the sale amounted to? And can you please confirm the amount taken these proceeds that has been credited to St Joseph parish's accounts and that this represents 75% of the net proceeds which St Joseph's parish is entitled to receive?*

The sale of the Holy Infant of Prague was completed at the end of May 2019. The sale proceeds after legal costs was £440,005.44. After deducting agents fees of £5,400 and 25% of the remaining balance to Diocese of £108,651.36, the balance due to St Joseph's Parish was £325,954.08. This amount has not yet been credited to St Joseph's account at Diocese.

- **Charles Watters** – *Can you please confirm what, if any, amount from the proceeds credited to St Joseph's accounts has been spent so far and what has been earmarked thus far, if any, for specific expenditure?*

No amounts have yet been spent by the Parish from the proceeds. A provisional list of future expenditure has been provided to Diocese which includes the acoustic panel installation and the replacement of a boiler (*both items now agreed by the Diocese*). Other areas include internal decorations in the church following water ingress from the old roof, mainly choir loft and stairwell, the marking of stair nosings and installation of railings recommended by the Diocesan Health & Safety inspection, upgrading laptops and a computer and extending the car parking area.

- **Charles Watters** – *What process is going to be undertaken to determine how the net proceeds credited to St Joseph's parish are spent and how is it proposed for parishioners to participate in and be fully involved in an open decision-making process?*

Expenditure of Parish funds is discussed and determined by the Parish Finance Committee. Parishioners will be consulted in advance before any major projects are undertaken.

In response to these answers, Charles said that this does not identify any open process to invite parishioners to comment on, or be involved in, how the £300k is spent. When asked by Kevin what he was suggesting, he replied that he was proposing a process by which the parish is told they have £300k and how do parishioners feel that money should be spent. Kevin replied that anyone is at liberty to contact the Finance Committee at any time on any, or with ideas for, proposed improvements.

Charles suggested that parishioners decide where the money is spent. Mike Carney interjected and said that it is the Diocese who decides. Kevin confirmed that any spend over £5k has to be approved by the Diocese. He went on to say that the Parish Priest is in attendance at every Finance meeting; no spend is approved without his permission, and in certain instances, without Diocese approval.

Note: *On many occasions hereafter several people began to talk at once which made it very difficult to accurately capture the various points raised.*

The subject of the Parish Centre/Hall was raised. Kevin reminded those present that the previous consultation didn't have many responses and didn't come out with a clear steer on any of the proposed options – Make, Do & Mend, Re-Model or Re-Build. At this juncture we could continue spending bits and pieces on it (as we have been doing) or we could consider a new build. The current opinion of the Finance Committee is that we should look at a new build. If we can get a plan done without it costing much money and then if we were able to find willing donors, then we could, and would, share with parishioners what the proposed plans are.

There followed passionate discussion on the Parish Centre/Hall. There was concern in some quarters that a decision appeared to have been made already without consulting the parish. Peter Freeman observed that if major finance is required for a project and in such circumstances the parish is consulted then most parishioners would be happy with that approach. Maura Fagan highlighted the statement at the top of page 8 in the Annual Report "*No firm commitment will be made until we have given parishioners full details and allowed adequate consultation time*".

Disquiet remained and Charles Watters referred to Canon Law and the Terms of Reference of the Finance Committee and the conditions under which it should operate. He also reminded us that Pope Francis calls us to be more synodal in *Evangelii Gaudium*. John Bates clarified that everything that our Finance Committee acts upon is approved by the parish priest. He does make the decisions but he does not dictate what happens.

Maura said that 99.9% of those present have never studied Canon Law and are not experts in this area, so having had a reply could we please move on. Charles highlighted that this is the one time of the year where questions can be raised and responded to and that parishioners should be allowed to do so.

Sister Christina spoke up to say that at the Annual General Meeting we should be looking at the whole life of the parish and spirituality should be coming into our discussions; not concentrating on one issue only and hearing one voice.

Maurice Carkett wondered how much had been spent on the Parish Centre and Hall, in recent times having replaced the flooring in the Parish Centre and done electrical work on both sides of the building. He said we haven't yet touched the kitchen which should have been done before the Memorial Wall was built. He continued saying that anyone who he himself has spoken to says we have a fine building here so let's keep it that way and tart it up.

Peter Freeman said that this building is a disgrace; no point in making a silk purse out of a sow's ear!

Brian O'Hanlon enquired if we had relative costs of rebuild/remodel versus a new building. Kevin replied in the negative as this is not one of the projects we are currently working on. Mike Carney reiterated his earlier point that whatever we propose the Diocese has to agree to it.

Charles Watters, referring to Kevin's earlier comment that the premises is old, said we have lots of old buildings and that age is of no consequence. Brian O'Hanlon (an experienced surveyor) has told Charles that the building is sound and serviceable. He queried whether we really needed a new building when the one we had was fine and what we would do with new one. He then highlighted the lack of a disabled toilet in the Parish Centre/Hall. It was acknowledged back in 2017 that we needed to install a disabled toilet and he said that two years on not having one was a stain on the conscience of our parish.

Sally Taylor thought that a new building would help us with evangelization. St James built one a few years ago with that very purpose in mind – it calls people from outside into a Christian setting and in turn into a Christian way of life. Yes, of course, it has to be sorted out financially but to have a building that is beautiful with good space/facilities is a place to evangelize and would be good for our community.

Kevin responded by saying we are looking to put a disabled toilet in the rear of the bar area, adjacent the existing toilets so it would serve both sides of the building. David Bentley has been asked to look at this and to cost it. However the principle here is whether we continue to spend money piecemeal on the building or whether we invest for the longer term. John Bates stressed it is simply not the case that we are not interested in installing a disabled toilet.

Charles stated that we rely on you to do this but you are defending the fact that it has not been done – this is indefensible. John Bates said his point was duly noted. Charles said it was not good enough. At this point Stephen Forster said – you've broken the law, carrying out major works without providing for disabled people; put it right and do so quickly. John said again that it does not mean we are not going to do it. Charles felt this was unacceptable.

Tom Tipler then stood up and said to the meeting – I have been a member of this parish for 53 years and from time to time come to the AGM. I see four people here today who serve the parish with a great deal of effort, goodwill and time commitment. I am appalled by the assault to which they have been submitted in the last half hour. I hope we will not have the wretchedness of the disagreement that we have in government. Let us put our head together and get a sensible and proper answer.

The meeting continued in the same tone and Tom subsequently left the meeting.

Kevin revealed that the balance of £325k available to the parish is "ring-fenced" at request of Bishop Peter. The Bishop is concerned that at any time in the future should the Carmelites move from the parish there will be considerable expense in separating the premises owned by Diocese or Carmelites. He is keen that funds are available for such works. There are things we need to get on with here and we need to spend money on which the Diocese has agreed to. The others projects need to be properly costed and put in order of preference for them to give consideration to. The Provincial has said there is no intention for Carmelites to leave the parish in the foreseeable future. Kevin hopes we produce sufficient reasons why the Diocese should release the ring-fenced money. We should give the Bishop our own views on what we would do if Carmelites did leave. This is something the parish should have contingency plans for. If we spend the money received from the Holy Infant of Prague on improvements to the parish and thereafter the Carmelites, for whatever reason, leave the parish we, the parish, would still need to provide the necessary funds for any property separation work or other expenses involved. In those circumstances the only assets available to us would be St Joseph's and Denham and we should think on that. We do know where the boundary lines are and we have the land registry documentation.

Sister Mary Christa stressed that we should do what we need to do now – use the money for what we need now.

Maurice Carkett suggested that given our earlier discussions perhaps the Diocese could pay for what we need done to the Parish Centre/Hall building.

Charles asked for clarification on the car park proposals. Kevin replied that what we are hoping to do is bridge the area between the cemetery and the trees, using a special material in the grass (grass crete) and the same on the other side of the Furniture Market. This would increase our parking capabilities. The company we spoke to hasn't come back with an estimate so we are now going to look at other firms. There has been no progress on changing the entrance and making the entry/exit via Priory Road. The practicality of this proposal was queried as it would increase the flow of traffic on Priory Road and could cause more congestion. Joan Barham shared recent (and regular) experience of how dangerous the current arrangement can be, particularly at school drop-off and pickup. When cars are coming on to Austenwood Common from Bull Lane, School Lane and Priory Road and then cars exit our car park via the entrance, whilst other cars may be trying to gain entry – it is not a safe situation for either motorists or pedestrians. Kevin commented that this is not something that we are unilaterally thinking about; it involves the residents, the local authority and the parish. A suggestion was made by Stephen Forster, supported by St Mary Christa, to install a barrier (one that rises up) at the car park entrance. John Bates said that we will look at all the possible solutions.

ACTION: John Bates to investigate installing a rise-up barrier at entrance to church car park.

- Kevin then handed back to John who invited Fr Michael to give his Parish Priest's Report.

3. Parish Priest's Report - Fr Michael Spain

- Fr Michael referred to what he had written in the Annual Report on pages 4 and 5.
- He asked for the parish to be more eco-conscious. There will be three or four things that will happen during the year but wanted to simply flag it up at this juncture. A simple example is that he lifted the lid of the dustbin to find a big green pepper that was only just about to go off...it could have been used up or being put in the compost and ended up in the garden. He talked of making small, positive changes.
- Last Thursday evening we had a meeting with the local residents who were well provided for with refreshments. He admires the people who are interested in developing and building relationships with the neighbours. The effort thus far has offset a huge amount of flack.
- Our Pastoral Area Confirmation Preparation Programme had a successful session last Friday where people of very different views running the programme agreed. It has been arranged with Fr Michael as main catechist with two others from other parishes supporting. The parents meeting is next week and things look promising. It is good to have the catechesis sorted out.
- Last Monday Christine Cornwell and Sally Taylor accompanied Fr Michael to NORES for a lecture by Fleur Dorrell (who is leading the process nationally) on why are we having a Year of the Word of God. It is a pity she is not standing here today instead of me. I am fortunate to have a few clear headed people around me to help me move forward with the Year of the Word – The God Who Speaks.
- At last year's meeting we had just returned from Adoremus. Following that we decided to have two hours of Adoration in the church once a month. It is not everyone's cup of tea but it is a source of blessing for many people, having quiet quality time, similar to what Fr Matt enabled with his retreat yesterday where people could centre their thoughts on spiritual matters.
- The Carmelite Chapter takes place next May. My six years are up as boss. Ahead of that, Fr John Williamson will be coming here in time for Christmas. There is a window after the Chapter where the "Mikes on Bikes" will cycle across America from west to east. We hope that what will come out of this endeavour is a Prayer Room for the school, where the children can have quiet time and maybe even the parents as well. This was suggested by the head, Mrs Lovegrove, when we went and asked what the sponsorship could be used for in the school.

4. Any Other Business - John Bates

Questions Tabled in Advance

Finance questions tabled in advance were addressed by Kevin Murphy as part of his Finance Report (see Section 2 above).

Questions & Comments from the Floor

Charles Watters said he had lodged questions with parish priest in advance of the meeting, having put the questions through via Joan Barham. These were to do with the voluntary donation for refreshments after the 11am Mass. He explained how it operated – likening it to the Widow's Pence – saying that it was similar to what St Teresa and St Aidan's do. Donations were collected in a saucer and the money was typically used by Maurice Carkett to purchase socks and underwear for the homeless. It is symbolic having a cup of tea and putting something in the saucer for someone less fortunate. This continued uninterrupted until we were approached to say we shouldn't be taking any money. Charles approached the Parish Priest and received no response.

The questions posed by Charles and Fr Michael's reply were shared and are set out below:

- **Charles Watters** – *Are we as parishioners not reasonably entitled to receive a proper written response from our current parish priest to matters and concerns we properly raised in those letters as parishioners?*
- **Charles Watters** – *When can we now expect to receive a proper written response from our current parish priest to the matters and concerns we raised about taking a voluntary donation for the homeless at Teas and Coffees after 11am Mass, which is a tradition we have carried on for over 20 years and would wish to continue?*

Fr Michael replied to Charles' email on 10 October simply saying "I will not change my mind on the current practice re. the 11 after mass coffees. Fr Michael".

Maurice Carkett said this was started by Agnes Johnson (RIP) and outlined again what had happened. He observed that it seemed a shame to stop this and that it was unnecessary. Someone commented that there was no plate at the 9am refreshments. There followed a fervent discussion on the whys and wherefores of what led to Fr Michael making his decision.

Malcolm Johnson was asked to outline what currently happens with clothing for the homeless. There is a Homeless Factory which sets aside slight seconds and any homeless charity can avail of the clothing. Every other Saturday we stock up three wardrobes in nominated hostels. On a Monday we have a list of where these are so our guests know where to go where they can have a shower and get clean clothes. This prevents what happened on occasions in the past when new clothing was provided and then was sold on at street markets. The London & Slough Run Trustees have agreed this. Furthermore, a very clear audit trail is needed for all donations – we need to be able to trace the money from source, into the account and then specify how it is used. Our accountant works for Deloitte and is very firm about this audit trail.

Fr Michael stood up and reiterated what he said to Charles in his email – he is not going to change his mind about donations after the 11am Mass.

Charles Watters said he considers that waiting five months without a response from the parish priest is unacceptable. This was duly noted.

5. Closing Remarks - John Bates

- John thanked everyone for attending and participating in the meeting.
- Fr Michael closed the meeting with a prayer.