**MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING SATURDAY 21 JANUARY 2023**

Present: Fr Celestine Onwuekwe; Alfred Wheater (Chair); Kate Fox (Secretary); Catherine Wellingbrook-Dodswell; Robina Debnam; Gerard Walbank; Josef Edel;

In attendance: Siobhan Evers

**The Meeting opened with prayers.**

**1. Apologies for absence:** Linda Wheater; Sheelagh Chapman

**2. Minutes of the Meeting held 26 November 2022:** These were approved and signed as a true record of the meeting.

**3. Matters Arising not covered by the Agenda**: There was nothing significant to report.

**4. Treasurer’s Report:**

The Financial Statement had been circulated prior to the meeting and copies were available on the day. Kate presented this on Sheelagh’s behalf with additional information and updates from Alfred.

We are obviously facing increasing costs with a priest in residence and with the cost of electricity and oil soaring. We have no control over the supply of electricity as that is arranged through the diocese. The income we are currently receiving doesn’t cover the regular outgoings but fortunately we built up reserves during Fr Richard’s tenure as he wasn’t drawing a salary and wasn’t living on the premises. Now that most of the costs of refurbishing the priests flat have been covered Sheelagh hoped to be able to work out for the next meeting what the monthly deficit is and perhaps, we will then have to consider an appeal to the parish to increase their giving at a difficult time for all.

Regarding the cost of electricity, Sheelagh has investigated further with the diocese by contacting Anne-Marie Stokkereit as we have no control over what is taken out of our bank account. Anne Marie suggested we deal direction with IFM (the provider) as they do not have anyone inhouse that would be able to advise. She agreed that the usage looked high, especially for the church, when comparing with some of their other properties. She has looked at a very large church of 500+ which holds mass 3 times mid-week and twice at the weekend, and is seeing electricity and gas charges together which are only a fraction of the £621 figure that we are seeing. It will make a considerable difference if this matter can be resolved.

Recent guidelines issued by Brentwood have suggested we should have a rota for counting the collection after each Mass but suspect we won’t find any additional volunteers over and above Alfred and Matt Foster who do a sterling job. Alfred added that the current system was working, and additional manpower and lack of banking facilities meant we had to manage as best we could. Sheelagh is facing difficulties in banking our cash and something that could discussed at the next meeting.

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**5. Buildings – Sale of the Thaxted Church**

Alfred briefly reviewed the recent history of trying to move this forward and recalled an e mail dated 8 February 2022 from Stephen Myers who passed on the information that the view of the Council of Priests was ‘overwhelming in allowing the parish to sell the Thaxted building’. However, it now appears that the College of Consultants (Canons) had to be involved – they might meet in January but if not their next meeting was 23 March. This had not previously been mentioned and there seemed no way to contact those involved. The Council discussed what appeared to yet another obstacle causing unnecessary delay; the expense in regard to council rates at £6000 pa for Our Lady’s House; the loss of income from renting that property and that we were not allowed to terminate the electricity supply at Thaxted entailing another unnecessary expense. Rent from the refurbished property was estimated at £1200 pcm and would add significantly to the income of the parish. Alfred added that after 5 years he was frustrated by the total lack of response and support from the diocese – as were all those present. Father Celestine asked him to persevere and deal directly with Fr Kevin Hale once more to try to reach a conclusion.

**6. Liturgical Matters**

**Saturday Evening Vigil Mass:** There was a full discussion and exchange of views regarding the possibility of this service and Robina raised question on behalf of some parishioners who could not attend. Several significant points were put forward by Fr Celestine.

1. A mass could be held in Thaxted, because as far as the diocese were concerned we were still known as Great Bardfield & Thaxted Parish, so no special permissions were required.

2. To hold a vigil mass in Great Bardfield would not be straightforward as the first question the diocese would ask was ‘is there a need?’ On the previous occasions this was trialled the numbers did not support the need – a minimum of 20 regular attendees - and Fr John Timmins had to desist.

3. To move forward Fr Celeste wished to explore venues other than Thaxted Parish Church (St John’s) and members who lived in Thaxted would make some initial enquiries although it would not be so easy to find a venue on a Saturday evening. Following their findings Father could move forward the proposal. If the mass were held at St John’s he suggested 6.30 which would follow their brief Angelus service.

4. Cost needs to be taken into account – although not preclude the hire of a venue – we were paying £100 per month when the Lady Chapel was used for Saturday mass by Fr. Richard, but our financial situation is now more critical.

**Confirmations:** Alfred gave an update provided by Linda. The programme commenced on 8 January with 6 Confirmandi – 4 aged 14, 1 aged 17 and 1 aged 21. She will be holdings 12 x 2 hour bi weekly meetings after Sunday Mass, some of which will be held in her home for convenience and to which parents of the younger members have given approval. Linda is of course DBR checked etc. The Confirmation service will be conducted by the Bishop on 10 December 2023. Before this date there will two more meetings to review training and discuss the main points.

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Robina said she had been asked to raise the possibility for the retreat (mentioned at the November meeting) to be held at Abbotswick. Fr Celestine said the cost would be prohibitive.

**Order of St Stephen**: We were pleased to be informed that Luke Balcombe would be enrolled in the order at mass on 29 January 2023.

**First Holy Communion**: There was only one child, Hugh Ridley, who was taking instruction at St Thomas More School with the service being held at Saffron Walden church.

**Children’s Liturgy**: Robina said that apart from Hugh, not man children attended but she would continue with related activity the first Sunday in the month.

**7. Health & Safety:** There had been no further requests from Safety Toolbox, but the site would continue to be managed. An outstanding item was the need to terminate the power supply to the Thaxted building – until such times the building still came under the remit of Safety Toolbox and would remain as a ‘red’ item on the system.

**8. Any Other Business**

**E mails:** Kate would hope to check these at least once a week though more frequently if possible.

**Evangelisation**: Fr. Celestine asked members to consider ways in which to reach out to people and encourage their involvement and attendance at church.

**Hearing Loop**: Robina has asked about the possibility of (i) installing a hearing loop and/or (ii) Father being able to provide a written copy of the main points of his homily for those with reduced hearing.

**9. Date of Next Meetings**: This will be held on Saturday 11 March 2023 at 10.00am

**Closing Prayer**

**The meeting concluded at 11.25 am.**

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