

THE SACRED HEART & ST MARGARET MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH, DEREHAM

Minutes of a Meeting of the Parish held on Wednesday, 2nd October 2024

20 parishioners were present.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm with an opening prayer by Fr. Jay.
Rex Baker in the Chair.

1. **Apologies & Welcome**

Apologies for absence were received from Kathleen Edmunds, Robbie & Kate Meehan and Judy Reid.

A special welcome-back was given to Pat & Richard Grout, following Pat's recovery from her back injury.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the last Parish Meeting held on 15th May 2024 were received. Arising from the minutes, it was reported that Philip Borthwick would be replacing Stephen Smith as Parish Treasurer who was retiring and John Booth was taking over as secretary of the Parish Finance Committee from Elaine Wilkes, who would remain as a member of the committee.

3. **Parish Priest's Reflections**

Fr Jay spoke about the effectiveness of parish activities during the year and felt there was more we could do, not only as a parish community but also by engaging more in the wider community of the town. He felt the recent Yard Sale gave a good indication as to how we could interact with the wider community and charity work.

Fr Jay drew attention to Diocesan plans to gradually implement more clustering of parishes in future years.

4. **Parish Life**

A. Financial Matters

- (i) **Parish Accounts** – The half-year statement of accounts was received and noted. The Treasurer was quietly confident that the budget shortfall would be made up by the end of the year. The quarterly figures were now available showing a slight surplus at the nine-month point. However, it should be noted that energy costs were above the projected budget target. The new church heaters should prove to be more cost-efficient and a new energy contract on improved terms had recently been agreed.

The parish response to the request for increased take-up of offertory giving by standing order had been very good, substantially increasing regular monthly income. Parish running costs continued to rise over time and therefore, parishioners were invited to keep under review what they could afford to pay in their weekly or monthly offerings and to increase their giving where possible. The Treasurer expressed his thanks to everyone for their support in this regard.

The Treasurer thanked the members of the Finance Committee for all their support during his tenure and particularly thanked Philip Borthwick for agreeing to take-up the role of Treasurer.

- (ii) **Alive in Faith (AIF) Projects** – Following the replacement of the church heaters, the outstanding projects to be completed were the decoration of the church & flooring in the Emmaus Room and entrance lobby, refurbishment of the windows and car park. Once those works were completed, the parish would have some £10-£15,000 remaining in its AIF account. The parish would need to agree a new project to utilise that money.

The Diocese was winding up the AIF scheme. It was noted that the cost of the introduction of the scheme had been extremely high and the Diocese would not use such a process again in the future.

Reference was made to the Diocesan proposals for clustering parishes and sharing Priests' housing in the future, which was aimed at saving costs. It was hoped to have more information on this at a forthcoming Diocesan meeting on 19th October.

Finally, a special thank you was given to Catherine Perkins who had identified an existing insurance policy which enabled the parish to cover the considerable costs of repairs to the mains water pipe in the church grounds.

B. Spiritual Life Matters

- (i) **Music** – Judy Reid reported that the music continued much as before, with music on Saturday evening Mass at 6.00pm and Sunday Mass at 11.00am, and on feast days. Masses from the coming weekend would be reverting back to the plainsong and the Lourdes Gloria, and also introducing the Memorial Acclamations in the Mass Book, devoting three weeks to each to help people become familiar with them, also with a rehearsal before Mass. Kathleen (Edmunds) and Judy continued taking it in turn to choose the hymns, which we do two to three months at a time.
- (ii) **Lectors / Eucharistic Ministers** – Gerry reported that one new Reader and Eucharistic Minister had come forward. However, there was still a shortage of Eucharistic Ministers, there being only 10 persons to cover all Masses: four at 1100 Mass, three at 0900 and three at 1800. Ideally, we really need four at each Mass. A suggestion was put forward to rearrange the distribution of Communion at Mass to improve the flow of communicants into lines in the aisles rather than across the altar. This had been the practice in previous years.

It was also noted that Gerry was now also carrying out Ministry at Dorrington House.

(iii) Catechists –

- **First Holy Communion:** Last June seven children received their First Holy Communion and lessons for this year are due to start early October.
- **Sunday Children's Liturgy:** is running again after a summer break, and the children of school age up until their First Communion follow the format of the Mass and the Gospel is explained to help them understand and learn more about Jesus. Two new catechists are now helping with Liturgy.

- **Altar Servers:** at the end of the summer break the Servers went Bowling in Strikes followed by Pizza. They all enjoyed very competitive games! We have two new Servers following First Communion in June, and they are doing very well. The Altar Servers group meets fortnightly on a Friday evening during term time, which is well attended.

(iv) **Baptisms** – Fr Jay reported that the number of baptisms in the parish was growing slightly and three young people were currently undergoing instruction.

(v) **Funerals** – Fr Jay informed the meeting that Undertakers were now being invoiced for £228 per funeral, which was in line with most other churches. Fr Jay advised that in future when he was away, a small group needed to be set up to be responsible for helping to organise for a funeral which would entail calling for a priest and then allowing the priest to make the arrangements with the family. In the event that a priest could not be found to conduct the funeral, Fr Jay should be emailed.

(iv) **Flower Arrangers** – Jan Duffield reported that there were now four people on the Rota. Volunteers were always welcome to join.

(v) **Cleaners** – Catherine Perkins reported that a volunteer to replace Peggy Mealy who was retiring was needed. Volunteers worked to a six-week rota, with cleaning done on either a Friday or Saturday as convenient. Cleaning of the whole church took only two hours.

(vi) **Collection Counters Rota** – Elaine Wilkes reported that there were four teams of two counting on a four-weekly cycle. With the increase in the uptake of offertory donations by standing orders, there was a corresponding decrease in the amount of cash having to be counted each week.

C. Communal / Social Matters

(i) **Safeguarding** – Kathleen Edmunds reports that anyone who is performing a voluntary role in the parish that involves contact with vulnerable children and/or adults, is required to have a DBS certificate, that is re-checked every 3 years, e.g. catechists, ministers taking Holy Communion to the sick in their homes. This process is to ensure the protection of both the vulnerable person and the volunteer. The process has changed slightly, and the paperwork been streamlined, to hopefully make it even more smooth.

Kathleen has been parish safeguarding representative for over 10 years now, and has now resigned from this position. The new parish safeguarding representative is Kate Meehan, who has kindly agreed to take over the role. It is expected that there will be a few weeks of overlap between them as current applications are completed and new ones started.

Kathleen expressed her thanks to all volunteers for their cooperation when processing DBS checks for our parish.

(ii) **St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP)** – Deacon Martin reported that they had had a very challenging year. They had only five members and it had become clear that it was no longer safe for them to visit unless in pairs. Three members' experiences had proved to be too time consuming and invasive to their lives. He had felt demoralised and had thought about resigning; other members felt they also needed to step back. This would have left just one member and the branch would have had to close.

The current problems stemmed from the referrals from SVP head office to befriend people in the parish boundary. It had become obvious that these referrals had come from other agencies that cannot cope. Therefore, the branch had taken the decision to befriend within our parish community only. Most of these referrals had complex needs that the members were not equipped to deal with and, having been used and abused, it was right to take care of ourselves too. From the recent pulpit appeal, one volunteer had come forward to become a member, and we were commencing the necessary DBS process. But more volunteers were needed. The situation would be reviewed again after Christmas but if nothing had changed, then this Conference would reluctantly be would up out of necessity.

In the meantime, the SVP Mass for the sick on would be taking place on 23rd October as previously notified.

(iii) Youth Group – There was nothing to report.

(iv) Social Group – Donal Hannon reported that the next event would be the Christmas Party on 15th December at Yaxham Village Hall (from 11am-5pm). There would be a planning meeting for this beforehand. He said it would be good if all nationalities in the parish could be involved and attend on the day.

(v) Garden Club – Sonia reported there were now four volunteers helping her to keep the church garden and grounds in good order. Two of the volunteers had minimal garden knowledge and were working under Sonia's guidance where necessary and otherwise doing general weeding and tidying. More volunteers were always welcome. It was agreed to include this Group's report as a standing item on future agenda.

5. Other Matters

- a) **Jubilee Year in Rome, October 2025** – Fr. Jay said he was promoting this event for next year and there was a poster on the notice-board. He was interested to know if there was sufficient interest to arrange for an independent parish group to attend. Alternatively, whether anyone wanted to join the Diocesan group. **Fr Jay undertook to investigate costs.**
- b) **Parish Meeting Secretary** – A volunteer was sought to take over from Elaine Wilkes in this role.
- c) **New Alive in Faith Project** – Rex Baker referred to a proposal to use some of the balance of AIF monies in the presbytery garden, to improve and level the grounds, to include a proposal from Fr Jay to create a grotto to Our Lady as a contemplative area, and incorporating some hard landscaping for social events, such as the annual BBQ. The meeting gave its support for these proposals.
- d) **World Day of Prayer** – Pat Grout referred to the 2024 World Day of Prayer which was hosted by the Parish. The response from the other churches in the town had been very complimentary. Pat felt this highlighted the mistaken perception others had of us as a community somewhat 'different.' People were surprised to find that we were 'normal'!
- e) **Dereham Churches Together** – Linked to the above item, Sr. Gabrielle added that we were not so visible as a parish at the various events that the Churches Together team hold in the town. So she encouraged parishioners to attend these

events. She felt we needed to reach out more as a parish. She said the Baptists were also looking for volunteers.

- f) **Yard Sale** – Patsy Gray thanked everyone for helping to make the recent Yard Sale so successful. However, there were still a lot of items left over and she sought advice as to how to dispose of them, e.g. donate them to another charity, or try to sell them. She highlighted one particular item of a complete First Communion outfit which she felt should be sold separately.

After discussion, the general consensus was to dispose of the remaining goods to charity, including one option to see if the local homeless charity contact would be willing to take the items.

So far as the First Communion outfit was concerned, Lorraine Bugeja undertook to arrange to sell this on eBay for the parish.

- g) **Suggestion Box** – Some general comments from a parishioner (unsigned) were received and noted for the minutes as follows:
- Arrival at Mass – Silent or Welcoming? Should we reinstate the practice of ringing a bell five minutes before the start of Mass to bring the congregation to quietness in readiness for the Mass.
 - Offertory Prayers – These are not audible when music is played over them.
 - The microphone at the lectern should be placed in front of the Reader, not to the side.
 - Sound System – Audibility is better when listening to Mass at home than in the church.

The meeting closed with a prayer at 7.45 pm.