

Minutes of the Consultation Meeting of the Parishes of St. Brendan (SB), Harwood, St. Columba (SC), Tonge Moor and St. John the Evangelist (SJ), Bromley Cross held at SJ on 25 July 2017.

The meeting was attended by 88 parishioners and chaired by Fr M Cooke (FrMC), supported by Fr F Parkinson.

Introduction

FrMC said opening prayers. He then welcomed parishioners to this important meeting to consider the next steps on the journey towards SB & SJ forming a new, single parish.

FrMC explained that SC was not part of the amalgamation process, as it had been determined that SC would merge with the parish of Holy Infants & St. Anthony. However, given the premises and associated financial matters to be discussed at this meeting the future of SC remained under discussion.

Consultation Process – Next Steps

Since 2008 the parishes of SB & SJ have informally worked together, sharing the vision of operating as “two churches within one parish.” There has been considerable progress, with good co-operation resulting in effective day to day co-ordination, sharing of expertise, relationship building and many parish organisations such as CAFOD, SVP operating jointly and effectively across both parishes.

Since 2008, there had been a multiple and diverse range of meetings, particularly parish forums, which had given parishioners many opportunities to be consulted about and debate the wide range of issues associated with the potential amalgamation of SB & SJ.

Following Bishop John’s letter of 15 June 2017, the priests and people of SB & SJ were now invited to enact the next period of consultation regarding their specific proposed amalgamation.

FrMC explained that a formal canonical consultation procedure had now to be followed to ensure that any new arrangement served the spiritual needs of parishioners. This would include, among other things, reviewing and if necessary, re-drawing parish boundaries and determining a name for the new parish. It would be important to shape the parish to serve both present and future spiritual and practical needs.

FrMC emphasised that the amalgamation of the two parishes was not to be regarded as one taking over the other. The principle is one of ‘Extinctive Union’. SB & SJ would cease to exist as parishes and a single new parish would be established.

Parish Boundary Review

Parish boundaries are essential in Canon Law. Following discussion of the maps circulated at the meeting and Fr MC’s explanation the meeting agreed the proposed parish boundaries were both logical and practical.

Naming the New Parish

It was noted that the churches of SB and SJ would retain their individual names. However, a new name for the new parish would be required to be submitted to the Bishop for his approval. To give this important matter proper consideration, it was agreed that parishioners be invited, both online and by the newsletter, to submit any proposed names together with a supporting rationale to FrMC by Sunday 27th August 2017.

St. Columba (SC)

FrMC explained that until a decision had been made about the future of SC, parishioners could be reassured that pastoral responsibility would continue to be provided as part of their relationship with SB & SJ.

However, there were serious and pressing matters associated with the viability of SC as a parish in respect of its premises, finances and Mass attendance.

FrMC explained that historically, due to a lack of finance in the parish, the premises had not been well maintained. The fabric of the presbytery building was in a very poor state of repair and was a continuous drain on parish resources with money being expended on security measures and dealing with vandalism. This also demanded a lot of priest's and parishioner's time dealing with such.

The costs of demolition of the presbytery and new security fencing is in the order of £130K + fees + VAT. The fabric of the church also needed extensive works, the last, conservative estimate in 2013 being approx. £40k. It was not unreasonable therefore to anticipate a capital outlay of £250K being necessary to bring the church up to a reasonable standard.

FrMC circulated a financial statement report for SC which showed that the parish was in deficit by approx. £2,500 with no capital balances. Each parish is expected to be self-sufficient in financial terms.

The report also showed a year on year falling Mass attendance, with present numbers being 111 of whom between 50% and 75% were from SB, SJ or elsewhere.

Given that the overall picture was one of decline of premises; falling income; falling Mass attendance and a requirement for major capital expenditure, FrMC asked whether SC parish could commit itself to doing the proposed work & if so how might the necessary money be raised? If not, then how might we best proceed?

The meeting accepted the financial report. No firm proposals were forthcoming to raise the necessary funds, apart from the suggested sale & re-development of the site to include a small chapel / Mass centre. (Subject to there being a pastoral need to provide such). FrMC agreed to discuss the suggestion with the Diocese's property advisors. The meeting noted that such a proposal would be longer-term and would not address urgent premises or financial problems.

Other Matters

FrMC briefly updated the meeting about the following (More information to follow in due course):-

- Parish Enabling Team - FrMC thanked the eight parishioners who had participated in the Lay Leadership Course and briefly outlined the integral part they would play in our journey towards becoming a missionary parish.
- Hope in the Future – An initiative to support the development of missionary parishes based around St. Francis's calling from God to 'Re-build my Church'.
- Eucharistic Congress – Liverpool – September 2018
- Harwood Methodists – who will be sharing SB church from September 2017 as their new premises are built on Longsight, Harwood. The meeting warmly supported this proposal.

Next Meeting

September 2017 – Date to be announced.

Note: This meeting is now fixed for Tuesday 5 September (7.30-9pm) at St John's