

Minutes of the Meeting of St Etheldreda's Parish Forum
Held on Thursday, 5th October 2023 at 7.30pm

Those Present

Fr David Finegan, Michele Seidler (Chair), Angela Bishop (Secretary), and 8 parishioners
Apologies received from M Twin.

1. The meeting began shortly after 7.30 and Michele Seidler (MS) welcomed everyone to the meeting before Fr David lead us in a prayer.

2. **Introduction**

MS said this would be her last Forum meeting in the chair and that we, as a parish, need to decide how this will continue and if the Parish Forum will continue in this way.

She then went on to reflect on the many positives which we as a Parish have achieved this year:

- (i) We have thriving First Communion and Confirmation numbers.
- (ii) There was the lively celebratory festal Mass and meal in June, as well as the whole weekend with the Bishop's visit.
- (iii) The gardening party continues its good work.
- (iv) There are 2 bible and prayer groups.
- (v) Children's liturgy, although some help is needed with this. It had been suggested that this could be held at the 9am Mass, as many families attend this. However, most of these are probably too young.
- (vi) Coffees continue after Masses.

MS asked if anyone had other things to add. The following were mentioned:

- (vii) The Coronation meal with the neighbours.
- (viii) A new Deacon.
- (ix) An international meal is being planned for the parish, to include our foreign parishioners. This is after 11am Mass on 26 November. We should encourage more young people to get involved in this.
- (x) We have started the parish registration process.
- (xi) There will be a Nativity this year.
- (xii) We now have the Parish Notice Board.
- (xiii) The SVP joined in with the Parishes Together day in Ely on the green in the summer.
- (xiv) There was a family day and there will be an All Saints day/party for families.
- (xv) We have provided many items to furnish houses for Ukrainian refugees.
- (xvi) A men's group has been established.

All in all there is much to be thankful for.

3. **Parish Finance**

Tony Gryzbek (TG) presented a brief summary of the half year accounts. The parish has £1,600 surplus compared to a deficit last year. We currently have £45k Alive in Faith monies for parish projects.

The offertory was up slightly on last year. The basket collection was only up a small amount. Gift Aid envelopes have gone down, but more people are paying by standing order, which have increased from £7k to £9k.

There was a question about the energy supplies which has risen greatly, and TG said if payments continue at the current rate, we will have a large deficit. Fr David is currently in discussions with the Diocesan finance representative regarding a change in supplier and joining the Diocesan scheme. It was suggested that it would be beneficial at that stage to have a smart meter installed.

The accounts are on the Parish website and the notice board.

4. Stewardship

Martine Gryzbek (MG), as facilitator of the Stewardship group spoke about what has been happening in the group, who have been meeting for 18 months.

- (i) There was a Parish Mission at Clare which was successful.
- (ii) Regarding the Parish registration, some parishioners have not yet registered. The information we have is being transferred to a database and information of people who have volunteered to help in certain groups is being collated.
- (iii) They have been trying to increase Parish giving, particularly on Gift Aid. At the end of the month or early November they hope to present that to the parish. Phil Parker will be at all 3 Masses to help with this.
- (iv) They are looking at developing opportunities for young people.
- (v) They are looking at producing a weekly or monthly timetable giving details of what is happening in the parish, on the website/notice board. Or there could be a separate flyer once a month. Someone suggested that links could be created for the different groups to pictures showing what they've been creating, etc. It was decided that the best place for this information would be in the porch and so maybe move the notice board from the parish rooms to there.
- (vi) Encouraging people to donate by Gift Aid needs a drip feed approach over a few weeks to remind people.

MS thanked MG for all her work as a facilitator of this group.

5. Open Discussion

- i) The matter of having a Parish Council (PC) was raised. The Bishop is in favour of PCs in parishes. MG stated that we are moving towards this from the Stewardship group. This could be the next project for the group. MG is willing to facilitate putting it together. Meetings of the PC would only be for parishioners who had been nominated to the board, but there would need to be an AGM. A representative for each parish group should either be at the meetings or send a report. Once the finance initiative has been completed, then we can move on to the matter of a PC.
- ii) It was proposed that we hold a kind of 'Freshers Fair' where all the groups have a stall. St Luke's is having one and Joan Wall will be going to see how it works. This would need to be done during the lighter/warmer days, possibly combining it with either the BBQ or with another social element.
- iii) It was suggested that one group could be 'advertised' on the notice board per month and make it eye catching.

- iv) In order to make more space in church, it was suggested we look at removing the cupboards just inside the church and then people can decide what to do with the space.
 - v) The matter of outside lighting was raised. Could something be done about the lights now we have the darker evening. Potentially a bulb may need replacing as its effectiveness is intermittent. Could a sensor light be put by the back door?
 - vi) Someone asked about the rat situation. The population is decreasing. Poison has been put down weekly.
 - vii) The matter of St Etheldreda's shrine was raised. No progress has been made; it is a big project and is on the agenda. Deacon Paul will be a useful contact when considering the financial implications/funding and grant applications etc.
6. A date for the next meeting was set for Thursday, 29 February 2024. Parishioners need to start to think about how this group shapes up and who facilitates it. If anyone has any ideas they should speak to Fr. David.

Before the meeting closed, a sincere vote of thanks was recorded for Michele's work as Chairman of the Forum over many years.

There being no further issues raised, the Forum closed at 8.45pm with a prayer.