

**Parochial Church Council Meeting
Monday 24 July 2023 18:30-21.00
Congregational Life
Church Hall and by Zoom**

CONGREGATIONAL REPORT

This meeting was one of the two held each year which looks at congregational life rather than business matters (which are the subject of the four quarterly PCC meetings for that purpose). As usual, it was a good turnout with most PCC members meeting in person and two online. We started with prayers and personal introductions.

Despite the main purpose of the meeting there were two business issues that needed urgent attention and that was to agree to apply for faculties (a rather old-fashioned word meaning permissions) from the Diocese (which are needed for any proposed changes to the church fabric and other works). One of the faculty applications relates to the gravestones from St James's Gardens (near Euston station) being reused, and the other relates to the whole Wren Project, listing the elements in detail. The following Faculty resolutions were agreed unanimously:

[1] Confirm resolution on ledger gravestones (passed unanimously by email on 7 July): "The PCC resolves to apply to the Chancellor of the Diocese for faculty permission for saving and reusing some of the ledger stones arising from the HS2 excavation of the St James's Garden, Euston as identified in the detailed proposal following the established precedent of reusing ledger stones within the churchyard paving which has enabled many of the Piccadilly churchyard stones to be retained rather than lost."

[2] To agree the following resolution:

"The PCC resolves to apply to the Chancellor of the Diocese for faculty permission for re-ordering works to the church and surrounding site consisting of the reintroduction of the church south door on an axis with Duke of York Street and the creation of an internal lobby. Replacement of the fibre glass spire and reinstatement of corner pinnacle spires to the tower. Repairs to the exterior of the church. The installation of air source heat pumps. Alterations to the pews. Redecoration of the church interior. Refurbishment of the church organ. Enlargement of the basement area to create new WCs and storage space. Alterations to the Piccadilly building consisting of extensions to its east and south sides, the installation of a lift and the creation of a new third floor while its ground floor will be converted into a cafe with direct access from Piccadilly. The removal of railings along Church Place. The removal of the current link building between the church and Piccadilly building and the erection of a timber canopy to cover the route between the church and Piccadilly building. Conversion of the Jermyn Street building into a new rectory with a new mansard roof above the existing to provide additional accommodation and alteration of the ground floor to create a pedestrian access route from Jermyn Street. Erection of a new thatched pavilion building in the south-west of the churchyard. Re-landscaping of the site including the creation of a new ramp. The

excavation of trial pits and other opening up works ahead of these building works and other works as described in the plans and drawings.”

These notices have to be publicly displayed in the church premises for 28 days so that any member of the public can object or make comments.

There followed a discussion in both groups and in plenary session on two subjects: the ‘Radical Welcome’ conversations that have been held on Sundays over the past few months and the survey done among the congregation regarding accessibility. Considerable feedback from the congregation has been received on these matters already and some of those were read out at the meeting. On the welcome issue there were many contributions from PCC members which will shape the way in which we encourage more people to come to St James’s and build an inclusive community together. Topics included wanting to be in a shared space that is quiet, how to overcome a natural discomfort among new people who may not know what to expect, how to address feelings of being an ‘outsider’ and an “in-group.”

Proposals included having more “welcomers” on the doors doing more than just handing out service sheets, perhaps having more ‘roving welcomers’, perhaps T-shirts for them, training for welcomers in particular. But also the view was expressed that this isn’t just up to the welcoming team, that everyone should be a welcomer. Concern was expressed about the need to make sure those with learning difficulties can participate in surveys with clearer explanations and how people can participate to be truly inclusive when conducting a survey. Comment was made that during the Sunday service when the congregation is invited to offer a sign of peace to another person it should be to someone you do not know. The view was expressed that coffee in the narthex is too cramped and that we need more space for interaction as physical space is important.

On the Accessibility Survey Report there was a similar discussion in groups and then plenary. From the congregation responses it seems that we could do better but also there is much in place to commend. One group felt that we need a real culture shift in how we handle issues with priority action dealing with groups, using the website and finding a way through between diametrically opposed views. One group had a heated debate about ‘tourists’ who come to St James’s on a Sunday: welcoming them could be part of a radical welcome but could also be a disruption of people’s accessibility to a service. Talking to people online can be an alternative to surveys. One suggestion was to look at the cost of producing service sheets and other material on cream paper and 16 point font which helps people with dyslexia as well as asking people to scan where able and ask users what language they prefer. The Sunday Forum participants raise similar issues and it’s important that their voice is being heard as well.

Note from Keith Best PCC Secretary: *If any of you reading this would like to add your views then please feel free to send them to me so that they can be included in the continuing debate.*

The meeting then received a Volunteering Strategy Update from the energetic Mac Olagoke, our Volunteer Projects Coordinator, who gave a presentation. He has two guiding principles: [1] discover and embed what is already happening and [2] what value can we add. He applies best practice and puts activities into a logical framework linked to the five strategic missions of SJP so this was a progress report. He mentioned the promotion of Churchsuite so that people are beginning to like the tool; anyone wanting to join can do so on the website; he wants to integrate the communication plan with this. There will be a Partners Roundtable at the end of October 2023. Also, capacity building with training planned for 17 and 24 September. He has attended, with others, 2 Volunteers Fairs to help recruit volunteers. He examined the cycle for recruiting volunteers with four priorities [1] development of a robust volunteer process/systems [2] recruit more than 25% more volunteers by December 2023 [3] continual engagement with experienced SJP volunteers and [4] at least one public event.

Questions and ideas included if there is a volunteer agreement in place and how wide is the definition of volunteer and whom does it include. Mac responded that these issues are being addressed and he noted that some volunteers presently are not recognized as volunteers and we are trying to get them included. Also, he said that the Church of England requires references (at least two people who can vouch for character). This is currently being done. Once the system is in place we can perhaps recruit other volunteers such as interns to get work experience. There is a variety of what volunteers want from the experience and we must ask what we want and what they want, and how we match the two.

It was noted that online safeguarding training needs to be undertaken by PCC members and that the link for both the Basic and Foundation courses will be sent out by the end of the week. Our Associate Rector Revd Ayla Lepine reported SJP's being listed on the Welcome Directory which helps faith communities become places where people who leave prison find a place to join a church: for which two people at SJP will be trained.

Always mindful of wanting to improve communications between the PCC and the congregation it was proposed by the church wardens and agreed by the PCC that there will be monthly catchups of the PCC with the congregation after the Sunday service. These will be held on the Sunday immediately after the written report of the PCC meetings in the newsletter and on the website.

Keith Best
PCC Secretary
7/26/2023