

Report to Congregation on Parochial Church Council Meetings July 2024

REPORT

July has been a busy month for the PCC. There was an Awayday in the second week in which we discussed and analysed not only the parable of the workers in the vineyard and how it might be interpreted but also the future of the Wren Project with an encouraging update on fundraising from our Development Director Brian Willetts. The team was congratulated on their efforts so far, and momentum is good. St James's has a way to go however: so if any member of the congregation would like to know more about how to contribute, or let others know about the project, please contact us directly. It was especially encouraging to hear that the Julia Rausing Trust has fully funded a new pipe organ which will be housed in the original Grinling Gibbons organ case. This is a major milestone for the Wren Project.

One of the main topics for the awayday was the PCC's Ethical Fund Raising policy. There was a report on the consultation meetings (one in person, one online) with the congregation in which there had been a great variety of views expressed, but also more openness and preparedness to accept donations from a variety of different sources. The distinction had been drawn by some between investing in a company's activities and accepting donations, which didn't imply such support or approval. While donor acknowledgement was recognised as essential, (there are several named elements of St James's currently, such as the Southwood Garden), there wasn't appetite for a proliferation of names of donors around the church. Overall, the PCC affirmed the 'case by case' basis for donors, within set parameters, and could guide the Development Department to be more flexible than at present with full discussion. The PCC should strive for consent from the congregation but all appreciated that this is not always easy, and that the PCC are elected by the congregation to take a view. St James's has already ceased pursuing two prospective donations because of their sources and in difficult cases, for amounts above the threshold set out in the policy, the PCC will make a decision. So far, the issues were clear according to the policy.

Particular discussion was had about SJP not taking or pursuing donations from fossil fuel companies. A variety of views were expressed, including engaging on sustainability - the fact that we exclude fossil fuel companies should not prevent us from speaking with them, and doesn't prevent SJP engaging individually with employees. The view was taken that there is a difference between a company and an individual working for it (even though their capacity to give through their salary derives from their employment).

Our Chief Operating Officer Nick Thasarathar then gave a presentation on our Operating Model followed by a discussion on Year 3 of our 2023-26 strategy looking

at what the PCC priorities should be for 2025. As it was hoped that this would be a preparation year for the construction phase of the Wren Project, there was consensus that no new major initiatives should take place, but a focus on core activity and themes before moving. With regard to congregational communication, We (the PCC) now have a schedule of congregational meetings after Sunday church on various dates throughout the year, after each quarterly PCC meeting. The monthly PCC 'available in the side chapel' hadn't quite happened as planned. In looking at priorities there was powerful support for Young St James's and Pride of St James's LGBTQ+ groups recently re launched and flourishing (the WhatsApp groups have large numbers on each). There was consensus that Church services and social outreach including FEAST/Sunday breakfast are the 'must do' and must continue.

The day after the Awayday the Rector, the COO, Nick Thasarathar and the PCC Secretary Keith Best attended the PCC meeting of St Pancras Church after their Sunday service and ran a workshop regarding the St Pancras strategy for the next 3 years. There was also a useful and agreeable discussion about how we take the partnership forward with them giving us their ideas for the future and what needs attention so that Nick can work this up into a strategic plan. We are hoping that we can find an early opportunity when both their PCC and our PCC can meet together and establish a closer relationship between PCCs.

On 15 July we had our own PCC meeting at which, for the following year, Ros Fane was re-elected as Lay Vice Chair and Audrey Sebatindira took on the role of Treasurer (now that Ben Mariam has resigned from the PCC). We thank them very much for their service and leadership, and wish them both well.

We considered the Financial Reports/Management Accounts for May which are on an even keel. It was felt that more needs to be done to inform the congregation about Gift Aid and tap donations.

On the fundraising update Brian Willetts referred to the Julia Rausing donation for the organ as well as for two organ scholarships. We now have almost £15m in pledges so far at varying levels of certainty. A percentage system is employed whereby, for forecasting purposes, no donation pledges are counted for planning unless at 75% certainty of payment. The National Lottery Heritage Fund will start to release funds and more is expected from the American Friends. Raising funds for the Operating Fund (for all our church activities) is more of a challenge but our outreach work on Feast and Sunday Breakfast is provided for. We need extra funds, however, to break even on the Operating Fund. It was felt that the PCC should all encourage the congregation and people they know to become involved in 'keeping the doors open' and supporting the sort of church St James's is: there could be many others who might be prepared to give if approached. With regard to the Wren Project, leading up to the next decision

point in January 2024, as a result of the wide cultivation of people over the last few years we now have around 80 people to whom we are talking regarding large contributions.

The PCC then formally agreed to proceeding with the work to reinstate the Wren South Door which will be important in giving improved accessibility to the church for people who use wheelchairs, as well as being the most striking architectural aspect of the Wren Project.

On St Pancras it was reported that we have appointed an additional priest whose identity will be revealed once approved. Site improvement there is continuing so as to make the church look as though it is open and welcoming. We are moving forward on sharing our services.

As at all PCC meetings we examined the Risk Register. The PCC then discussed and agreed to give support for the Zero Hour campaign as have the Church Commissioners.

There was a report and discussion on Safeguarding (which is a standing item on our agenda). There is a lot of work to be done to make sure that all relevant staff and volunteers are DBS checked; there is clergy safeguarding leadership training and domestic abuse training is needed; all is in our Handbook and all activities need risk assessment. The safeguarding dashboard is reported to the Diocese. It was acknowledged that the safeguarding brief is a huge amount of work, and extra capacity is being recruited for this.

We then discussed the mechanisms for PCC communication with the congregation regarding our PCC meetings which include (a) a summary of each meeting posted on the website and newsletter, (b) the side chapel PCC members available monthly after the Sunday service which could start again, and (c) quarterly meetings after PCC meetings, the next of which was Sunday 4th August.

Keith Best
PCC Secretary
22 July 2024