

The Parish Church of St. Michael the Archangel, Mere
Meeting of the Parochial Church Council with Archdeacon Alan Jeans
held on Tuesday 6 July at 3pm in The Grove Buildings

1. Opening:

Jean opened the meeting with a prayer.

2. Present:

Archdeacon Alan Jeans, Hamish Bell, Judy Bickerstaff, Barry Clarke, Sherry Dixon, Derek Fisher, Jane Hurd, Pat Isom, Jean Knapp, Isabel Page, John Page, Julia Rankin, Nicky Ravenhill (notes), Kit Stallard, Lesley Traves, Richard Wilson.

Apologies: Christine Marsh.

3. Jean Knapp welcomed The Venerable Alan Jeans, Archdeacon of Sarum to the meeting and congratulated him on his recent award of the MBE.

Archdeacon Alan Jeans outlined his work with the Bishops of Salisbury and Ramsbury and his pastoral oversight over 100 parishes and 60 clergy across a large area of the Diocese.

Archdeacon Jeans welcomed an open agenda and explained he was very happy to discuss Mere and PCC business, and would be dealing with the vacancy/future options as a whole Benefice as he was legally obliged to do. He will be meeting with the PCC of Maiden Bradley next week and is to get a meeting with the West Knoyle PCC in the diary. There is also an aspiration to meet with the Churchwardens and possibly the Treasurers of the three PCC's in the future.

Archdeacon Jeans thanked the PCC for the paper sent to him in advance, which included some helpful information for him and also some assumptions to address.

With a potential deficit of £3.5m following a £1.5m deficit at the end of 2020, alongside a £2.5m Covid-19 loan drawn down to start to repay in September, there is no option to "do nothing". Jobs are at risk in the Diocese, Church House in Salisbury has seen a 10% cut in posts last year and there is a potential further reduction of 5% of clergy posts, in addition to one Archdeacon post too. The Church is considered wealthy on paper with assets held in trust, but is cash poor. This is where a purposeful pause – a freeze of 12 months - will allow the team to do some strategic thinking and to consider options. He welcomed people to come forward with wisdom and advice as decisions have to be made.

Sitting on the Finance Committee, Archdeacon Jeans is part of the team having to make significant decisions – currently 85% of expenditure goes on clergy stipends, and there is the necessity to maximise income. Vacancies are budgeted for annually, however

Covid-19 has meant fewer clergy moves, meaning the stipend spend is higher than budgeted for. One option is let out vacant parsonages as they occur, and not to rush new appointments.

Archdeacon Jeans updated the PCC of his intention to let the vicarage as soon as possible, acknowledging that letting on a short term tenancy for six months could mean that a priest may not be in place for 12 months, however this then ties in with the plan to take a pause to ensure we get the right priest and do not find ourselves having to repeat the process again too soon.

Conversations will be held with the Rural Dean, Assistant Rural Dean and Chair of the Standing Committee - we have to consider how many clergy the Diocese can afford and if a reduction is necessary, how we do this. One option is self-supporting clergy who live in their own homes and have other sources of income.

Discussion was held around our ability to make a greater contribution and increase our pastoral work and the view that the way to do this is to grow the congregation, which in turn would happen with the right vicar in charge as soon as possible. The PCC is flexible in terms of solutions but feel that the right person in charge to minister to re-energise this parish is a priority and stressed the need for a feel of a likely outcome and timescale.

Archdeacon Jeans confirmed, for the avoidance of doubt, that Mere will get a new priest, but will be working alongside the Deanery Pastoral Committee to make decisions on the details. The PCC felt that while Mere would love a priest based here, if we had one based elsewhere but who views Mere as an important part of their remit, it would be acceptable.

Discussion was held around the potential of a priest in the Benefice becoming Parish Priest and how long that would take in practice. Archdeacon Jeans advised that a formal consultation would be necessary and that there would also be options to manage around where they live. However, if a Vicar of the Benefice lived elsewhere it would negate the need to wait for the vicarage to be without a tenant. A formal consultation on this would take 6-8 weeks.

The Mission & Pastoral Committee would need to work out if boundaries need to change between Deaneries ie East Knoyle is in Chalke Deanery and West Knoyle in Heytesbury Deanery – any changes of Deaneries would require Church Commissioner approval.

The PCC reiterated it's desire to try something sooner rather than wait, Archdeacon Jeans indicated that is what is happening by the requirement of the Role Specification, Person Specification and Benefice Profile. He advised of the need for Mere PCC to meet with West Knoyle and Maiden Bradley PCC's to pool wants and needs to produce these three documents as soon as possible, which should incorporate all three parishes within the Benefice. When the Bishop indicates, the consultation can begin – potentially for four weeks.

Archdeacon Jeans updated the PCC that he had spoken with Bishop Andrew and advised that he would like to find an interim minister for the Benefice, either a retired or an associate minister elsewhere, to do the majority of pastoral care. There was a request that any interim priest be briefed on the Benefice and counteract the age profile – Archdeacon Jeans will continue his search and will bear our request in mind as he does so. Any potential candidate will not be interviewed by the PCC but by appointment

by the Archdeacon and the Bishop. The PCC will need to contribute by covering the travelling costs incurred.

Archdeacon Jeans advised that this is an ideal opportunity to channel information and ideas via Isabel into the Deanery Mission & Pastoral Committee, who are key in these options and who will need to work out an equitable balance of workload in priest to parish ratios. The Bishop and Archdeacon Jeans will then consider the options.

Discussion was held around the possibility for non-elected Deanery Synod members to be on the Pastoral & Mission Committee. It was confirmed that the Rural Dean and Lay Chair can decide but that the Mission & Pastoral Measure states that ideally a member of clergy and a member of laity serve, with the option to co-opt someone with the potential skills, which is in the Bishop's gift. Isabel to approach members from West Knoyle and Maiden Bradley to join her – or invite all Churchwardens across the Benefice. If there is no input from other parishes in the Benefice, Mere could be allowed two instead to represent it.

Archdeacon Jeans advised that where parish shares are not made, this accelerates the cuts which the Church of England need to make overall. There was concern that with a small congregation of more elderly members on fixed income, the scope for more income is limited. Archdeacon Jeans felt that the Generous Giving Campaign in Autumn would hopefully be successful to help this.

Archdeacon Jeans indicated a willingness for tolerance around the issue of parish shares for those who engage in the Generous Giving Campaign. It was felt that if we had a priest being visible in the town, people would return to the church and giving would increase.

It was raised that the congregation numbers are now rising noticeably. Archdeacon Jeans advised that Pauline as Acting Incumbent is drawing up a rota, and that he was hoping to join us to witness himself. Bishop Andrew will also be attending the Patronal Festival. He and the Bishop are hoping to attend as often as possible on Sundays.

Archdeacon Jeans thanked the PCC for the pre-emptive notes and confirmed he would attend the PCC meetings often, and encouraged the PCC to think about amalgamating the PCC meetings with the other parishes in the Benefice.

Discussion took place around the requirement for social distancing, mask wearing etc after the relaxing of laws on 19 July. Archdeacon Jeans advised that the Church Recovery Group interprets the Government advice and the Diocese will publish the guidance, but that the PCC will need to produce a risk assessment, which would include their interpretation of the regulations, including for communion. He would be attending a lengthy Zoom meeting of the General Synod during which the issue will be raised.

Sherry raised the initiative to increase the numbers of lay preachers, Archdeacon Jeans confirmed the growth of self-supporting and lay ministers and advised anyone with a calling to speak with Jane and/or Pauline Reid and apply through the selection process.

Discussion around lay-led services and the need for an ordained minister to be present. Archdeacon Jeans confirmed there has to be an authorised person - lay worship leaders can attend a 12 week course which is authorised by the incumbent (Pauline can do in our case). In a minister's absence the Churchwardens can take morning and evening prayer. In their absence, sidespeople can step in.

Judy Bickerstaff raised the issue of putting in two claims for visiting preachers for Maiden Bradley, which were refused as Rev Green has not yet left the Parish. Archdeacon Jeans confirmed he would liaise with Jill Hockham at Church House to clarify. [Post meeting note – this has been authorised by Alan].

Archdeacon Jeans thanked the PCC for their attendance and acknowledged there has been significant issues but he is reassured and expressed the need for us to look after one another.

Derek Fisher thanked Archdeacon Jeans for his attendance and update, Archdeacon Jeans indicated that he was happy to share updates and that if we have questions please channel them through the Churchwardens via his email or phone number.

4. Closing Prayer

Jean ended the meeting with a prayer.

Archdeacon Jeans left the meeting.

AOB

Derek updated the PCC that he proposed that Anne Dethick take over as Treasurer of Mere PCC with immediate effect. Anne is well known to many on the PCC having worked hard for St Michaels for many years and had until recently been the chair of 'The Friends'.

All agreed.

- 5. Date of next meeting:** PCC Meeting - 22 July at 2pm in the Grove Building
Profile Group Meeting – 8 July at 2pm in the Grove Building

Signature

Date