

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting and Annual Parochial Meeting of St Leonard's Church Lexden held on

Sunday 13th September 2020 at noon

Present – Rev'd Matthew Simpkins, Chair and 20 attendees.

Annual Parish Meeting (also known as 'Meeting for the Election of Church Wardens' or 'Vestry Meeting')

Apologies (for both meetings) had been received from Julie Hinchcliffe & Peter Hinchcliffe, Sarah Blake and Christine Rose.

1. Minutes of the meeting of 7th April 2019 were agreed and signed.

2. Election of Churchwardens

A resolution was passed by the meeting that section 3 of the Churchwardens Measure 2001 ('Disqualification after six years period of office'), shall not apply in relation to St Leonard's, Lexden.

Two nominations had been received, Mr David Watkins and Mrs Esther Heptonstall were duly appointed. Rev'd Matthew Simpkins thanked David and Esther and the assistant wardens for their overwhelming support.

Annual Parochial Meeting

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 7th April 2019 were agreed and signed.

2. The Annual Report on the proceedings of the PCC and the activities of the Parish in general, circulated previously, was approved. Rev'd Matthew Simpkins gave a short summary of the report and thanked all those who give service at St Leonard's in any way.

"The PCC report relates to the calendar year 2019 – which seems a very long time ago. I shan't repeat its content. I do, however, want to draw the meeting's attention to some encouraging signs during 2019, and to one particular area of concern. The year saw the beginning of a new bereavement support group, the CAP Like Skills course – a partnership between St Leonard's and the Colchester CAP debt centre, which now works across the town, and our Brick Club – these things complemented our many existing outreach and mission project. Engagement with local schools continued to grow, while Messy Church, the Baby & Toddler Group, our Junior Church and Youth Groups, continued to engage and nurture younger people. Our key festivals – Easter, Christmas, Harvest and Remembrance Sunday attracted large numbers from our community, as did our summer fete and bazaar.

The particular area of concern for St Leonard's remains the relationship between the PCC's regular income and our regular expenditure. I spoke last year of a fall in regular giving, and the PCC then prioritised a stewardship campaign intended to further nurture gifts, including financial giving. A full campaign has been prepared but was postponed with the onset of the COVID pandemic. This campaign is ready to proceed once conditions allow. It is essential that the church uses its various gifts – financial and otherwise - for our core purposes of mission, outreach, evangelism and pastoral ministry; this means that we are not seeking to make a profit or business-style perfectly balanced books. But part of our stewardship is to fund our day to day expenditure from our day to day giving. Adrian will speak to the accounts soon, but I'd like to emphasise that the majority (80%) of the assets shown in the accounts – the value of the church hall, and our restricted funds – are not cash assets on which we can draw for either our day to day running or particular mission or ministry projects. This is something that can be addressed, I'm sure, and the overall picture remains of a church striving to grow, collaborate, and share God's love with all in our community."

There were no matters arising from the report.

3. The Financial Statement (Adrian Steward) The Statement had been independently examined by Peyton Tyler Mears and copies had been made available previously to the congregation.

Adrian reported on the annual financial statement and was available to take questions.

The relationship between the PCC's regular income and regular expenditure remains challenging. The PCC budgeted for a deficit of £3,000 for the calendar year 2019, the actual deficit was £4,000. The PCC is working to improve the relationship between regular income and regular expenditure. However, it must be remembered that the PCC is a church and charity for the purposes of mission and ministry in the parish, and our assets and reserves are required to be used for those purposes.

4. Acceptance of the Financial Statement was unanimously accepted and approved.

5. Report on the Electoral Roll Following the 2019 full review, the number on the roll was 205 at the APCM. 5 names have been deleted during the year and 12 applications have been received since April 2019. The current number on the roll is 212. Data shows that 54% of those on the roll live in the parish. There have been recent changes to the Electoral Roll application forms to comply with requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. Applicants are now given an option to include an email address and the notes section includes details of permitted uses of personal data.

Thanks were expressed to Jo Burrows for all her work in keep the Electoral Roll updated.

6. Fabric Report

A report had been prepared by David Watkins and circulated.

7. Report of proceedings of the Deanery Synod

A report had been prepared and circulated. Margaret Smith, Maureen Watkins and Julie Hinchcliffe were our parish Deanery Synod reps at the beginning of the year.

8. Election of Representatives of the Laity to the Deanery Synod

Nominations were received from Margaret Smith, Julie Hinchcliffe and Maureen Watkins as Deanery Synod reps – they were duly elected.

9. Election of Representatives of the Laity to the Parochial Church Council

Nominations were received from Amanda Allston, Janice Cocks, Vivienne Depledge, Ruth Windscheffel, Christine Andrews, Chris Newton and Matthew Brown – they were duly elected.

10. The appointment of Independent Examiners

Peyton Tyler Mears were proposed and unanimously appointed.

11. Appointment of Child Protection Officer and Adult Safeguarding Officer

Julie Hinchcliffe is our Parish Safeguarding Officer.

12. Churchwardens Assistants

Esther and David wanted to add their personal thanks to Peter Hinchcliffe, Beverley Kettell and Frank Wielobob for all their help and for everything they do.

13. Any Other Business

It was reported that our Time for God volunteer, Thea, had to return home at the beginning of lockdown – we hope to have a new volunteer by the beginning of September 2021. In relation to leaving Test & Trace information for services, a parishioner asked if the parish could be told when the parish office was going to be manned. The parish administrator continues to work remotely during the pandemic, and names and contact details should continue to be left on the publicised voice mail. A question was raised about the pace at which liturgies are read, the chair confirmed that the clergy team does its best to be sensitive to the natural tempo of each gathered congregation. A question was raised about the eventual return of mid-week services, the chair confirmed that the PCC will keep an eye on what is permitted and moral during the pandemic.

14. Priest in Charge Address

“A vision of St Leonard’s in a time of pandemic

*'Blessed are they who have not walked
in the counsel of the wicked,
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the assembly of the scornful.
Their delight is in the law of the Lord
and they meditate on his law day and night.
Like a tree planted by streams of water
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither,
whatever they do, it shall prosper'*

Psalm 1.1-3

“There’s no precedent for the situation in which we find ourselves, nor for the profound challenges faced by all charities, churches, our dioceses and the Church of England as a whole. It is also difficult to assess what our situation is likely to be in even a few months’ time.

However, I want to share a vision of St Leonard’s with you that is realistic and reassuring: a vision of hope and faith.

Think of the Parish of Lexden as though it was a tree. A tree caught up in a storm.

Trees can’t affect or control the storms they face, they can’t tell how long storms will last, or how devastating their gales will be. But different trees behave differently in storms.

Those that are brittle and inflexible, those that are unbending – are often snapped in two. Those that are heavy laden with their own fruit find that the wind tears the fruit away from them. Some trees have shallow and insecure roots, even though they look outwardly healthy and strong; but without strong roots, flexible and resilient branches cannot stop a tree being upended.

Other trees weather storms. They don’t emerge unscathed, but they survive and – eventually – flourish again. These trees are firmly rooted, they are flexible, they adapt and bend with the forces they face. These trees are often sheltered by the surrounding trees and shelter those trees in return.

My vision is of St Leonard’s as *that* sort of tree.

Our firm roots must be sunk deep in the fertile and steadfast soil of the Gospel, drawing up the nutrients of faith and grace through prayer, worship, and discipleship. Our roots must be kept healthy, so that we can be resilient and flexible through nurturing faith and discipleship in ourselves and those around us. We have, I believe, seen much of this in the first months of lockdown – a parish engaged in prayer and study, through creativity, reaching out, assessing the needs of our community and our church. We have let go of much with great grace. And though what we have picked up seems inadequate at times, we have tried to keep both rooted and flexible, with some success.

We must not hoard our fruit. We recognise that the tree will lose some of its fruit during the storm. So we must strive to share *more* with those in need all around us *now*. In a number of respects, St Leonard's has an abundance of fruit – in ministry, in music, in engagement in mission and charity – how can we seek to share this even more?

Even amid the gales, the tree of St Leonard's must grow – growing up *and* out. Each member should grow in their Christian life also. Every tree changes over time; but take a look inside and we see that the growth rings are an invaluable part of what each tree is. Our past is part of our strength and a foundation for growth. So we mustn't sit inflexibly to our past, we must value and honour it, without being beholden to it. Instead, we should bend with the needs and demands of our times and our context, giving thanks for all that has been.

Our tree should offer shelter and protection to those around it – sister and brother churches, ecumenical partners, and the community. Likewise, our tree should accept shelter and protection – the help offered to it by those around.

When the storm of COVID is over, the landscape will look different. Some of the trees we have known may not survive. We will need to rethink our geographical horizons and our roles – but this will be a chance to share fruit and benefit from others sharing fruit with us.

When the storm is over, our tree is likely to look quite different too. Some branches will not survive as they are: some of our activities, rhythms and worship are likely to be changed by our experiences.

To survive this storm we must continue to stay rooted and flexible.

If we do stay rooted and flexible, St Leonard's will flourish again – and more importantly – mission, outreach, and ministry will continue for the parish of Lexden and beyond.

With God's help and to God's glory - and with our collective determination - may this parish remain 'like a tree planted by streams of water bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither'.

Robin Greatorex said we should be very grateful to Matt for his wonderful leadership

The meeting concluded at 12.45 p.m. with prayers and Grace.