

Minutes of the Walton Churches Partnership Council Meeting
9th July 2020, via Zoom

Present: Rev. Matt Trendall (Chair), Rev. Ruth Gookey, Rev. Ruth Maxey, Lynn Atkinson, Joyce McKenzie, Ayokunna Otunla, Steve Potter, Klaus Reidel, Carolyn Sanderson, Emma Tyler, Sue Wilson

Apologies: Ann Beaton, Rev. Keith Straughan

Introduction

Matt welcomed everyone to the meeting, and opened with prayer. Much time had passed since our last physical meeting in February, before lockdown began at the end of March. Prior to formal business, Matt asked what had been the highlights of our Partnership life before the pandemic. The Unity Party, held on 18th January, had been much enjoyed when 80 people were able to gather at CtK. The Bible Course was also hailed as excellent.

1. **Approval of Notes of last meetings (15th January and 2nd February 2020)**
There were no comments, and both sets of minutes were approved.

2. **Reflections on where we are**
Feedback from church communities on their experience of last few months:

Christ the King - Ecumenical congregation

Blessings - Ruth G. felt that the community had broadened. More people had been tuning in online to watch the weekly service. Given also the pastoral care that had been happening in terms of phone calls to members, Ruth had a sense that her community had become closer. Lynn A endorsed this and said phone calls had allowed her to get to know others more deeply. There was also something refining about stripping back on the usual activities/routines. Lynn also felt that the opportunities that arose out of shielding e.g. doing shopping or collecting prescription for others, had been a much more valuable use of time than travelling to meetings. Steve enjoyed the flexibility to watch the online service at a time convenient to the individual.

Challenges - getting used to not meeting physically. Ruth was concerned - that some people may have 'slipped through the net' in terms of regular contact. Not all are happy with working online. Finances are also a challenge.

Plans and Looking Ahead – Ruth G. wants to join in with Ruth M.'s idea for a Discovery Church. Also, to be more prayerful, once the building re-opens, and be mindful of old routines and new ways.

Christ the King – Catholic congregation

Klaus reported that there was an online Mass every Sunday shown on YouTube, and this will continue. The building had opened for prayer for the last 3 x Sundays. A physical Mass will start this coming Sunday, but not at CtK.

Church without Walls

Blessings – Ruth M. - the congregation had adjusted well to online worship as CWW has experimented with new forms from the beginning. CWW now has daily prayer at 8am online, too. Ruth had already established a get together event called Sacred Space. This was fortnightly but had now grown to a weekly occurrence, with an extra 10 people attending. The monthly teens group has also become a weekly event, although there are only 5 x children now. Sue - CWW had given much support to their community by doing shopping and collecting prescriptions for those isolating at home. Emma - the new Zoom group for 5-8 year olds has been great, allowing children to engage with others. Above all, they had remained as a community.

Challenges – Having no actual building, Ruth M. has set up small meetings in her garden, using a gazebo. These meetings have included ideas such as pop-up coffee mornings. Given social distancing rules, Ruth has been able to invite a maximum of 6 people at any one time. Nonetheless, over the weeks, she had seen a good number of folk.

Plans and Looking Ahead - Discovery Church is an idea that Ruth M. would like to take forward. Basically, it is an invitation to take a reflective walk in the park together.

All Saints

Ayokunnu had appreciated the online worship, and felt that phoning others regularly had been worthwhile in getting to know them better. Lockdown had allowed a more leisurely pace, and she had formed a deeper relationship with the children. Caroline had been amazed by the diversity of experience across the congregation, and had enjoyed the online worship, too. She felt more connected to St Mary's, given we watch the same service each Sunday. All Saints had opened their church for worship on Sunday 5th July, and it was evident that those who came along really love being in church; there is a special experience of being in such a sacred building that enhances worship.

St Mary's

Joyce re-iterated what others had said about the blessing of phoning others and getting to know them better. She has enjoyed the online worship, too, and particularly, likes the contributions made by others, including the children. It just makes the service more of a community thing, a joint effort. Joyce was also surprised regarding the creativity that lockdown had given rise to; despite the physical limitations placed on us, all kinds of new ideas had been forthcoming, and had already borne fruit.

Matt remarked that having services online had extended the congregation across the UK: there was even one person watching from Australia each Sunday! The flexibility of watching when it's convenient for you is a great plus. *Rock Solid*, the young teens youth group, had moved online from early April, and a new 14+ age group has developed weekly online, too.

Matt invited everyone to consider our planning as an LEP for 2020 and beyond.

Steve remarked that he had participated in the Bishops' Chapter meeting recently and had found it very useful. This had caused him to consider the benefit of having a forum where we could share what we were doing and how can we could do it better.

Matt reported that across MK, our LEP is offering the greatest diversity and extent of online worship. Every week, our churches across Walton are initiating a lot of activities. Klaus definitely thought that online worship had benefitted the Catholic community.

Ruth G. reported that CtK had given much support to the Hospital Chaplaincy, and particularly to the cluster priests.

Matt posed the question: has the enforced separation during lockdown, been harmful to us as a Partnership? Matt thought that we had benefitted by strengthening our commonality. We are still offering shared ministry like the Week of Guided Prayer and online youth work. Lynn said that the WCP were good at sharing ideas.

3. Finance

- **Approval of 2019 Accounts**

Emma reported that we had ended the 2019 financial year with no real concerns. Emma drew our attention to the Budget sheet, and said that she was concerned about the Bank charges as they seemed rather high. She is currently liaising with Barclays Bank.

Proposal: That the WCP Council approve the 2019 accounts.

Proposed: Ruth G. **Seconded:** Steve Potter

Agreed: Unanimously

- **Latest updates and current position**

Matt asked Emma to comment on WCP finances for this current year. Emma said it was too early to say.

CWW - Emma has not identified any issues, but will look again when Qtr 4 arrives.

CtK - Steve Potter wanted to flag-up that CtK are suffering from a lack of cash income from services. Having undertaken a look at the accounts for the 6 months to June, and then forecasting to the end of year, Steve believes there will be a deficit of, approximately, £6k. Ruth G remarked that sharing the building with the Catholic church has its benefits in reducing the costs for both congregations.

Steve further remarked that, though CtK has reserves of about £27k, £12k of these monies were restricted – only £15k is unrestricted. Matt asked for clarification on what ‘restricted’ meant in this context. Steve explained that some monies were given for specific purposes by benefactors, for example, only to be used for the fellowship fund, or only to be used for mission development. CtK have used up all the money in their current account.

All Saints – Currently have a deficit of £4k, and are budgeting to have an expected £6k deficit by the end of the year. They need to be cautious and, hopefully, the deficit will be less.

St Mary’s – likely to be in deficit, but probably won’t need to dip into reserves to cover it.

- **Planning for 2020 and beyond**

After hearing from each congregation, Matt concluded that a deficit will be evidence across the Partnership, but the situation is not as bad as it could be. as we have £150k in reserves. We must look carefully at paying our share to the Diocese.

Steve asked Matt if he was saying that the WCP will be in a position to protect congregations against loss? Matt said he didn’t want to guarantee that, but we must make sure that all congregations can pay bills without going into the red.

Matt asked Emma for her take on the situation? Emma suggested that it would be prudent to arrange a finance meeting soon to consider the needs of the individual churches. Through discussion, we should be able to come to a better understanding. Matt agreed that this was a very good suggestion, and the meeting should be scheduled for end of Aug/early Sept. He didn’t want churches to be dipping into their reserves. Matt also felt that our congregations should be made aware of the situation.

4. Pioneer Post

After a great deal of time and energy had been spent on this venture, only to result in much disappointment, Matt reported that we are now stepping away from it. From a financial viewpoint, the venture looks increasingly untenable. Matt has resolved, through much personal prayer, that we are called to a season of prayer. We need to pray in faith for a group of at least 8 people, living on Eagle Farm now, or in the future to come, to pray and have a vision of God’s will for the area. When this group is there, then we will look to support them in planting a new Christian community.

5. Nuts and bolts

- CIO Registration update – Steve and Matt had met at the end of Feb. Then lockdown arrived. Four months on, it is imperative that we register with the Charities Commission by the end of March 2021. There is much to read and discuss before then, and before we sign up for the Constitution and Partnership Agreement. Ruth M. said that we must look at the appropriate documentation at the next WCP meeting, In September, we have the opportunity to meet with a lawyer who will advise us on the necessary legal issues. The lawyer is offering a discounted price of

£100 to each LEP in Milton Keynes. Ruth G. said that, at the last Mission Partnership meeting, she gained the impression that some LEPs are already further on with this than us.

- CWW Reference Group – Ruth M. reported that this weekend (11/12 July) the annual meeting of the URC Assembly takes place. The URC will be welcoming CWW as a new congregation.
- Safeguarding updates- Ruth G. reported that she had put together an appendix to our Safeguarding policy document, to allow for groups of young people aged 9+ to meet online. Matt said that the Safeguarding Training Meeting – 28/09/2020 – was still in the diary. As for progress with the DBS Verifiers, Matt asked Ayokunnu if any progress had been made as regards the work beginning. Ayokunnu replied that she had received her login details. Joyce had also received her login details with basic information on using the system, which is intuitive. The Due Diligence Checking agency had also sent out, to CtK, Rachael, Ayokunnu, and Joyce an email giving details of a church member who had been checked and issued with a Certificate, showing that the system is under way. Ruth G. informed the Council that Rachael, our Safeguarding Officer, is currently working in ICU as a nurse, so her availability is restricted.
- WCP Bursary Fund – Ruth M. asked the Council to agree to a figure of £500 to be released from the Bursary to provide a break away for families at CWW. Ruth has to complete a form to get this underway, and time is short. Though this is not the ideal process, Ruth was asking the Council to underwrite this amount now, and then the members of the Bursary Fund committee can deal with the request. Members of this committee are: Stephanie Warren, Trish Rosewell, Elaine Maries, and Mike Held.

Resolution 2: The WCP Council agrees to the figure of £500 being released from the Bursary Fund, at the request of Ruth Maxey, in order to benefit certain families at CWW to take a brief holiday.

Proposed: Ayokunnu Otunla

Seconded: Emma Tyler

Agreed: Unanimously

- Redeeming our Communities (ROC) update – In February, this charity, together with Thames Valley Police (TVP), held a meeting at Monkston Park community centre to kick-start an initiative across the eastern flank of Milton Keynes. Though the majority of people attending represented churches, there were also representatives from various volunteer agencies and clubs. To date, as far as we are aware, very little has happened since in picking up on any action points. Matt said that Charmaine Howard, a minister from the Woughton parish had been put in charge of the Monkston Park area. Joyce said that Charmaine had contacted her and they had had a telephone conversation. Matters seemed rather vague and confused, not least the geographical area covered. Whilst the Monkston Park name was the title of the project, Charmaine said that Wavendon and Eagle Farm were

covered. Matt said that the TVP had not done ROC any favours by not consulting with the churches. The initiative had been poorly planned. It was something that had been 'done to us' rather than 'done with us'. ROC, in Milton Keynes had, in essence, been set up to fail.

- Week of Guided Prayer Review – due to the pandemic, this had happened online this year, and was a 'last minute' venture. Ruth M. apologised to Klaus and the Catholic community who had been left out. While Ruth had previously proposed that the Week of Guided Prayer should happen every two years, it was so good this time, that she is strongly in favour of it happening next year, too. The Prayer Guides were so good in giving up their time. Doing it online meant no travel expenses were necessary, though Prayer booklets had to be bought. Matt and Ruth G were in full agreement.

6. Next Meeting of WCP Council – Thursday, 17th September 2020 at 7.30pm.

There will be a meeting of several Council members to consider finances on 9th September 2020. This group will report to the whole Council on 17th September.