

*A pastoral letter to the congregation of
St Michael & All Angels regarding the
redevelopment of St Michael's Church
Hall*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The period between the Feast of the Ascension last Thursday and Pentecost next Sunday is a time when we as Christians pray for the coming of the Spirit. Our Lord promised that he would 'be with us always' and that he would send the 'Comforter' upon his disciples to bring renewal and peace in the Church and the world.

I expect that most of you know that our appeal regarding the scheme to redevelop our Church Hall with an enabling development has been unsuccessful. If you are on our mailing list you should have received a simple statement during the week, but if not, this can be found in the News section of the website and there are also some copies at the back of church. This is a good moment to express enormous thanks to those who have worked so hard on the project over a long period of time. The appeal decision itself is potentially useful, as it clarifies some points, and makes balanced comments that will perhaps be helpful for the future. If you would like to read it, do email the Parish Office who will send you a copy.

As I have mentioned before, the plans were extremely advanced when I arrived as Vicar last year, and they were clearly the result of much hard work and dedication by the PCC and others in the church community over a long time. In such circumstances, it was important for me to support the scheme, and work with your elected representatives in taking them forward. Whatever questions I might have had about the scheme, I could see that there were many wise and good decisions, such as sourcing all planning costs from the lettings income of the Hall, so that no giving from parishioners would be used.

There were many people with strong views in favour and in opposition, and others who were neutral on the subject. It has been a very great sadness to me that these plans have been so controversial, particularly in my first year, and I am sorry for the distress they have caused to some of you. To be a parish priest often means being the focus for many strong feelings and having one's heart broken for the people you are serving, when they disagree with one another. It means sometimes taking the hard path, neither liked nor admired, but standing in the breach between earth and heaven, commending the people of God to the love of God.

I regret that communication with the community – both church and wider parish – has not been effective, and understandably this allowed misunderstandings and some inaccurate information to arise. The PCC has never had any intention of selling the site, and it remains committed to a long-term and high-quality facility for the use of the church, parish and wider community. For



some time now it has been my desire that a brief summary of topics discussed in PCC meetings with key outcomes should be printed in the Pewsheets. This will help everyone to remain better informed on a whole range of topics in church life. Now, as we are about to begin a new PCC year, it feels the right time to make this change. As ever, the full minutes will be available at the back of church for those who wish to look more in detail at something in particular. Above all, it is essential to come and speak to me or one of the Churchwardens, if you have a question about anything. We may disagree but fully trust and support each other at the same time.

As ever with these things, much has been learnt in the process, and now is the time for careful reflection and prayer. God has a way of revealing to us many things through challenges, and I am confident that, in the fullness of time, a new way will be found that is something that more people can get behind. I don't prejudge what that might be, and it is important that this emerges out of careful listening, discussion and thought over a long period of time rather than rushing to any conclusions at this point. Please don't be anxious if little appears to be happening: prayer is taking place and that can't be rushed!

You are all welcome to the open forum on Monday 26th June at 8.00pm in the Church Hall. This is an opportunity to get together to share information, ask questions, express aspirations and hopes. It is too early to form any particular new plans, but it will help for us all to get a sense of understanding and trust, and perhaps rediscover an excitement about the opportunity that a new vision might offer. We are an Easter people who believe in Resurrection, and whatever short term harm there might be now, in the long term the Risen Christ always brings new life into every difficult situation. So please pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of renewal and peace in the world, to guide and direct us in the way that we should go. At Pentecost, the disciples were empowered to do things they never thought possible, and it is with this sense that we move forward under the inspiration of our recent Vision Statement: 'St Michael's is seeking to be the spiritual heart of the neighbourhood; creating a community of faith, of hope and of belief in the power of God's love.'

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people,
and kindle in us the fire of your love.
Alleluia!*

With best wishes and prayers,

Father Stephen

Written on the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord 2017