

St. Mary's Church, Aberfoyle

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 9th December 2007 at 11.45 a.m. in the Church

The meeting, which followed the Morning Service, was attended by 34 members of the congregation.

1. **Apologies.** Apologies were received from Sir James and Lady Fiona Stirling, Mr George Willis, Mrs. P. Aitken, Mrs K. Joynson and Mrs. V. North.
2. **The Minutes.** The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2006, copies of which had been distributed, were approved and signed.

3. Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising, which were not covered by the following agenda items.

4. Vestry Report

The Chairman said that the Vestry had held four meetings since last December. Copies of the Minutes were on the church website www.stmarychurchaberfoyle.org.uk. Time spent on formal business matters had been reduced by sending papers out well in advance of the meetings, and this gave time for other important issues to be discussed. At the last meeting, 1½ hours had been devoted to fabric and renovation.

There had been two joint events with St. Andrew's in Callendar, and it was planned to continue these, with the possibility of a congregational walk next year.

Mark thanked Vestry members for their hard work and support throughout the year, mentioning especially Nick Cooke (Treasurer), for his additional workload with the preparation of the accounts according to the new OSCR regulations and the Church renovation project, John Dymond (Secretary), Karen Gaskell (Communications Team Leader), Margie Stephen (Lay Reader), Margaret Johnson (Verger), and Jean Sykes (Organist).

5. Church Report

The Rector gave a written report, which is presented here in full:

“The Rector's report is not designed to be a blow by blow account of a year in the life of St Mary's. It is rather an opportunity to touch on matters of common concern, and to record my personal and heartfelt thanks not only for what you have done for St Mary's, but also for your care and understanding of me in a year that has required more than usually asked.

Once there was a man who sent out to sow corn... (Matthew 13)

Each of us sows at St Mary's according to ability and talent. Some serve the Vestry. It is hard for me to recall after nearly twenty years in parish ministry, a group of more talented people, all prepared to dedicate enormous amounts of time, effort and fiscal resources to the cause. Were these talents priced per hour, they would probably prove unaffordable. Others serve St Mary's outside the vestry with equal effectiveness and diligence.

Some seed fell along the path

Not all the seed sown in the story produced corn. Life rarely rewards human endeavour to the full! Some things therefore have continued to confound us. If it is of comfort, the same problems appear to trouble most other local congregations to some degree.

Some seed fell on good soil....

The renovation project has done much to occupy our efforts. It is tempting to think much of this effort has also fallen along the path. But it is important to weight up every option carefully, however trying that sometimes proves to be for those who already have decided! This year much has been done to refine and focus the aim of the project, and rule out that which is enhancement rather than maintenance. One argument often used against spending money on buildings is that 'we are

spending the money on ourselves.’ If we are true sowers, then this should never be so. Another argument against spending money on buildings is that a secular building might instead be hired: perhaps we could. Would we really care though to worship in a cafeteria or gymnasium on a permanent basis?

Some yielded a hundred grains...

We give thanks for all that has been made possible this year.”

Mark thanked Richard for all that he had done for St. Mary’s over the past twelve months.

6. Presentation of Accounts

Nick Cooke, Treasurer, introduced the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 30 September 2007, copies of which were distributed, and pointed out that these had a radically different format this year, as required by changes in Charity legislation under the new OSCR regulatory framework. Both he and the Chairman had attended a Seminar on “Charity Matters”, organised by the Scottish Episcopal Church. Under the new legislation, Vestry members are deemed to be Charity Trustees, and their names all appear on the first page. When approved and signed, the Annual Report would be sent to the OSCR office and would also appear on the St. Mary’s website.

It should be noted that this year’s accounts had been prepared on the Receipts and Payments basis, and not Accrued Accounts basis, as our annual income as a registered charity was less than £100,000. In this form of accounting, transactions are recorded in the year when they are made rather than in the year to which they relate. These accounts have been examined by our new Independent Financial Examiner, Iain Kyle CA (the Treasurer of St Saviour’s, Bridge of Allan), who was appointed by Vestry during the year in place of MacFarlane Gray. Iain had not indicated any reason why he should not sign off the Accounts after this AGM.

Nick commented that this had been an excellent year financially, with the Accounts showing an operating surplus for the year of £6,600 in our general activities due to the highly successful Stewardship Campaign launched in August 2006. He thanked everyone for their commitment and generosity which had made this outcome possible, and saw this as a good platform from which the Vestry could launch the 2008 Church Renovation Appeal.

The Accounts now classified the Renovation Project and Church Giving Funds as Restricted Funds, only to be used for these purposes, and Nick anticipated that in 2008 these would show considerable movements arising from the Renovation Appeal.

Finally, he hoped that the new format and content of the Report and Accounts made it easier to follow what was happening to St. Mary’s finances, and would happily answer any questions.

Johnny North proposed the adoption of the accounts, and this was seconded by David Miller, and unanimously approved.

The Chairman thanked Nick for all his work and for his comprehensive report.

7. Lay Representative’s Report.

Mark Seymour reported that, during the past year, he had attended 3 area meetings and the Diocesan Synod meeting. Copies of reports and minutes are always available for those who wish to know more. He said that his role was basically to act as a communications channel, and noted the following points:

- Apart from routine business, the Area Chapter responded to the Bishops Strategic Review, arranged a visit to the Stirling Islamic Centre and a pilgrimage to the Celtic Churches in the Strathearn Valley. Consideration was given to the wording of the new Marriage Liturgy.
- The Bishop’s Strategic Review has been published, and working parties are presently engaged on considering how to implement the recommendations.
- The Area Chapter will be considering changes to various Canons at its next meeting in January 2008.

- A pilgrimage has been organised to Lindisfarne in April 2008.
- Nominations are needed for 2 people to represent the Area Chapter at the General Synod in Edinburgh, since our two current representatives have served their allotted terms. Names should be given to the Rector.
- He had represented the congregation as Lay Representative now for 5 years. With the Church renovation project likely to produce an increased workload over the next eighteen months or so, he was seeking a successor. Philip Gaskell volunteered to take over as Lay Representative, and was unanimously elected.

8. Vestry Membership and Appointments

Mark Seymour expressed the thanks of the Vestry and the whole congregation to Charles Brown for his contributions as a member of Financial Stewardship Team, to Keith Gibbs for all his work in looking after the Reading Rota, and to Catherine Riches, for her work with the Sunday School and as Child Protection and Vulnerable Adult Co-ordinator. All were retiring from Vestry at this time, though Keith and Catherine had agreed to continue with their specific roles. David Thompson, was proposed by David Miller, and seconded by Margie Stephen, for Vestry membership. Anne Winther was proposed by Charles Brown and seconded by Catherine Riches. These were both unanimously approved.

Saffrey Miller agreed to continue as deputy Lay Representative.

9. Church Renovation Project

By way of introducing the subject and to summarise the present position, Mark said that since last year, when John Sanders from Simpson and Brown had given his report to the 2006 AGM, consideration had been given to the extent of the work required and to the costings. The thinking was to get the balance right between the work that we had been advised by the architects needs to be carried out now, with a project that was thought to be affordable. As a result, it was now recommended that we have a complete roof overhaul, rather than a full strip and re-slate. This would involve treating all visible problems, instead of a complete re-roofing which would involve the removal of all the slates. It was now accepted that re-siting the organ after it's removal for repair was not a practical proposition. The revised project has a cost of £330,000 to £350,000.

We had been successful in obtaining a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant (Stage 1 approved) of £105,000 for Fabric Repairs. Taking into account the VAT element, which can be reclaimed, and the money set aside for organ repairs, we need to raise about £150,000 through other grants and donations. The ratio of these might be about 50:50.

A major question was whether to proceed without the HLF grant, by employing a local builder and dispensing with a managing architect. This would lead to a significant reduction in fees, but would require a similar sum, (thought to be about £150,000), to be raised. In other words, the Vestry needs to raise about £150,000 whichever route was decided upon. Mark had approached one builder, who had been unable to provide an estimate for the work, but he would seek two quotes from other builders.

Whichever route was followed, we needed to launch a Church Renovation Appeal. Nick pointed out that the Vestry had considered all of these factors and had decided that the Appeal should be put in hand sooner rather than later. The Appeal letter had therefore already been sent out to all St. Mary's members, just prior to the AGM.

Nick referred to the Appeal letter, which outlined the extent of the Renovation Programme, with indicative costs, and the different ways in which individuals could support the Appeal. He noted that informal approaches to a few members had led to pledges totalling about £25,000. The support of the whole congregation was going to be essential to the Appeal's outcome. By making pledges now, grant applications would be strengthened by the higher level of promised donations. Actual payments did not necessarily need to be made now. Interest-free loans were also a good method of support. Offers to organise a fundraising event were also very welcome. He said that a web portal would be set up to enable any member of the public to support the Appeal.

The topic was then thrown open for general discussion.

In answer to a question about the timing of the Project, Nick said that confirmation of the Stage 1 HLF grant had to be made within one year (that is, by September 2008). Builders' tenders and bills of quantity were expected between January and March 2008. It was important to have pledges in as soon as possible, as Vestry has to demonstrate by September 2008 that the balance of the funds for the grant-aided works had been identified or secured. Until we get to Stage 2 approval, there is no contractual agreement between HLF and the Diocesan Trustees. It was expected that the Project itself would commence towards the end of 2008, or at the beginning of 2009. In the event that full financial support was not obtained, it would be necessary to decide which repairs to carry out.

It was emphasised that there are no structural alterations or additions to the building within the present scheme, but there would be a rearrangement of the Vestry Room.

With regard to the roof, Mark said that it is generally accepted that slate roofs have a life of about 90 to 120 years. Maintenance can extend this by another 40 years, but this transfers the burden of a major roof recovering to a future generation. Bill Richardson, who has much experience and expertise as a slater, pointed out that the roof had been put on by slate quarrymen and was the best around. He recommended that we should leave well alone, and instead build up a fund towards future roof repair work. He thought that repair of the roof of the Lady Chapel, which had been added later, and repair of the organ should be our priorities.

In a wider-ranging discussion, Nick said that we had been asked by the Heritage Lottery Fund to apply for a grant, in spite of the Church building having initially been given a low rating by Historic Scotland in terms of its architectural and heritage value. By contrast, the HLF grants committee had been particularly impressed by photographs of the interior and exterior of the building. It was widely agreed that we had an obligation to past and future worshippers to continue to maintain St. Mary's for worship and also as a witness to the local community. It was the focus for Episcopalians in the surrounding area, serving 15 villages, and a welcome place of worship for many visitors, including the Manchester Church Lads' Brigade. There was the potential for an increased number of weddings annually. The idea of discussions with the Kirk on the possibility of the two congregations using either one of the two church buildings in Aberfoyle was raised. It was pointed out that, at the highest levels, an agreement of unity between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church had been rejected by the Church of Scotland. At the local level, there was close cooperation, for example with a joint Remembrance Day Service. However, at the present time, Aberfoyle Kirk did not have a Minister and rationalisation plans by 6 local Church of Scotland congregations had received a mixed level of enthusiasm.

Returning to the Renovation Project, the question was again raised of why we had to accept Lottery money, with which some people were uncomfortable, which had certain strings attached and would lead to higher fees. Mark confirmed that the HLF grant allocation came from a fund specifically ring fenced for major Church repairs, and HLF had also awarded a grant of £6,000 to St. Mary's towards the fees for the architect and quantity surveyor. He re-iterated that he was seeking costings from builders, and that he would have a more realistic budget by April 2008. There was some support for carrying out the various individual parts of the project piecemeal, but it was pointed out that there would be additional costs in bringing contractors back on site as each individual piece of work is undertaken. Furthermore, costs would increase with time.

Mark brought the discussion to a close by saying that there were essentially three choices

- we could either abandon the present project and Appeal and carry out repairs to the building as and when necessary
- or we could continue with the Appeal, but wait until next April to see whether to accept the HLF grant once we can compare the estimates provided by local builders with the QS estimates
- or decide to proceed with local builders now.

By next Spring, we should know the results of the Appeal and of some of the other grant applications. We should also have the various contractors' tenders for the HLF scheme through the architects and the bills of quantity.

IT WAS AGREED

- To continue with the Appeal, and to convene an E.G.M. around next March/April to decide the next steps.
- To make available in the Church Room the existing drawings for the proposed Project.
- To make available the spreadsheet with the costings.

David Miller, immediate past Lay Chairman, said how pleased he was that he had demitted office, and complimented Mark on the way that he was handling this difficult Project.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 *Thanks to the Cleaner.* David Stephen proposed, and there was unanimous agreement, that the cleaner, Marion Nolan, should be warmly thanked for keeping the church so beautifully clean.

Action: Secretary

10.2 *Seating.* It was agreed that the congregation should be asked by the lesson readers to sit closer to the front.

Action: Keith Gibbs

10.3 *Supplementary Hymn Books.* Johnny North asked if a check could be made on the whereabouts and number of supplementary hymn books donated to the church in memory of his father, and if they could be used in Church services.

10. Date of next meeting: An E.G.M. to be arranged in March/April 2008. The A.G.M. will be held on 7th December 2008.

There being no other competent business, the Chairman thanked the congregation, and the meeting closed at 13.10 p.m.

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