

Meeting of the Parish Council with Fr. Gregory Hallam as consultant at Bailgate Methodist Church on Saturday 5th November 2005.

Present:- Fr. Gregory, Fr. Dn. George, Diakonissa Anis, Natalya Covell, Karen Rastall, Justin Krijnen, Stavros Melides, Gali Melides, David Smith, Eleni Simpson, Maria Willock?

Proceedings

Fr. Gregory introduced himself with a short history of his journey to Orthodoxy and a description of the parish he serves, (St. Aidan's Manchester), and its history. The group then introduced itself in similar fashion.

Fr. Gregory then asked the group to share positive aspects and things lacking in the Review process so far. Fr. Dn. George thought it good that the parish had actually embarked on such a Review but felt perhaps that the reasons not been adequately communicated and explained to the parish beforehand. Stavros valued the humility and enthusiasm of the clergy and the way that different cultures and traditions in the community had been drawn together. He felt, however, that the development plan should not be allowed to stifle the simplicity of the faith. There would be a need gently to lead the faithful into a deeper understanding of what the Review as trying to achieve. Eleni felt that there was a danger that the language and complexity of the Review could put people off. Karen felt that it could indeed be intimidating if not handled properly. Fr. Gregory commented that the Review Guide Questionnaire was not signed for general circulation but in the first place to members of the Council. Gali responded that it was the congregation's responsibility to take it forward.

Comments were made that since this was the first time that the Council had met and he membership clarified there wasn't as yet a significant appreciation in the parish of the Council, its rationale and its work. As yet the faithful had not played their part. Fr. Deacon George commented that the intention was eventually to have the Council elected and that this Council in that context was transitional. Fr. Gregory then explained the role of the Council in the Patriarchate of Antioch in relation to the Diocesan and Deanery Statutes and in a response to a question from Stavros he showed how in the absence of the institution of a President, an elected Council was balanced by the chairmanship of the parish priest. All those present felt that the parish should move to a system of elected councillors as soon as possible.

Fr. Gregory then moved the meeting on to a consideration of two primary elements of the Review and Plan ... the need to move toward paying clergy stipends and expenses and the importance of acquiring a permanent temple for the community's own exclusive use, there being now no possibility of taking over the lease at St. Matthias. In order to achieve these goals these would need to be both payer and Christian stewardship. He then proceeded to explain the principles of Thanksgiving Sunday, an annual personal spiritual exercise for the whole parish, communicated by a teaching leaflet, informed by two weeks prayer and activated by communal completion of a pledge card which would then be used to facilitate Gift Aid giving by envelopes and standing orders. He explained how this had become accepted in his own parish as a normal part of peoples' spiritual lives, thus removing the need for priestly exhortation to "give more," (always unwelcome and counterproductive). The essential principles of giving under such a scheme were the scriptural precepts of:-

1. Gospel faithfulness
2. Thanksgiving
3. Joy
4. Freewill Offering

5. Sacrifice
6. Generosity
7. Trust in God
8. Regularity
9. Proportionality
10. Prayerfulness

Karen asked if it was strictly necessary that people pray about a proportion of their income to be given to God's work through his Church rather than, say, a flat amount. Fr. Gregory responded that this was a vital component on account of its scriptural precedent and the need for giving to be kept realistic as income and monetary values changed. Moreover the Council had to lead by personal example by being fully behind such a scheme before it was commended to the parish as a whole. He added that such principles had well served both St. Aidan's and many other churches / denominations that had embraced such or similar schemes. Fr. Deacon George explained that this was a normal part of parish life in the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America. Stavros commented that people would always give what they could. Fr. Gregory agreed but the difference here was that such freewill commitments would be more formally and comprehensively structured into parish life, an essential move if the parish as to meet significant commitments and goals. Karen commented that this was hardly controversial as this formed a natural and necessary part of the life of many churches. Nonetheless, the issue of parish education and representation through an elected Parish Council needed to be in place before such a scheme was introduced.* There was general agreement on this point.

After discussion throughout the agenda on the possible next step in the meeting after the Liturgy on Sunday 6th November, it was agreed that:-

1. Fr. Gregory would preach a traditional sermon but that he would take a short time at the end of the Liturgy to explain briefly the Review, its reasons and aims. The Council would come forward and be introduced to the congregation at this time.
2. In the meeting after the meal consideration of stewardship would be minimal (in the light of aforementioned considerations*) but more consideration would be given to the development plan goals. These matters would be simply, lucidly and spiritually explained.

In all of this the Council decided that it had embarked upon a prayerful educational process that might take some months to complete before stewardship and the full elective process could be deployed. The parish had to both understand and accept the whole process. The community had made a good beginning; but it was only a beginning and not as far advanced as perhaps some had hoped. The signs, however, had been good and the process promising. The Council would now reflect on how best to move forward.

Fr. Gregory Hallam
05/11/2005

Meeting of the Parish with Fr. Gregory Hallam as consultant at the church of St. Matthias on Sunday 6th November 2005.

This meeting was convened to carry forward the work of the Parish Development Plan and especially to address two pressing matters identified by both the Review and the Interim Parish Council:-

- (1) The need for a temple wholly within the control of the parish.
- (2) The need to start paying expenses and a stipend for Fr. Philip to help him to reduce his teaching commitments in the light of unexpected but very welcome church growth in the first year of the community's life at St. Matthias.

Stavros initially identified a matter that he believed needed clarifying. Hitherto, he claimed, the parish's ecclesiastical identity had not been defined but he had noted the exclusive commemoration of Archbishop Gabriel in the Liturgy rather than Archbishop Gregorios. A discussion followed in which Fr. Gregory explained that Fr. Philip, being a priest of the Church of Antioch and not "on loan" from that Orthodox church to any other, would naturally commemorate the Antiochian bishop in the Liturgy. It was not possible for a parish community to have more than one bishop in different jurisdictions. Any other arrangement would have to be agreed equally between Archbishop Gabriel and Archbishop Gregorios.

Fr. Gregory then summarised the Review process thus far and its objectives. Many parish members remarked with satisfaction and gratitude to God the heartening growth of the parish, unexpected in many ways, during the first year of its life at St. Matthias. They declared that this growth, combined with the current challenges of church property and clergy income, made the requirement of an elected Church Council very necessary. The parish members understood the need for an appointed Council as an interim measure but felt that the parish should proceed to an elected body as soon as possible.

The discussion moved to matters of acquiring a church temple much more under the control and regular use of the parish community. Fr. Deacon George explained the problem with the lease and how, under a five year extension to the Lincoln Deaf Association, this could not now be negotiated on renewal by the church. With continuing insecurity in prospect, Karen felt that the church should explore the possibility of an underlease with the Deaf Association to give these matters some more definition for as long as the community remained at St. Matthias. This was felt to be a good idea whilst not prejudicing the ongoing search for a permanent and exclusive place of worship, which some members then addressed with ideas and examples.

Fr. Gregory then identified from the Review the issue of Fr. Philip's workload and the need to pay expenses in full and a stipend to Fr. Philip to help him reduce significantly his teaching commitments. This, together with the issue of acquiring church property, would, of course, make demands on the church's financial resources. He explained from his own extensive experience of stewardship schemes that money ceased to be a "problem" in church life when decisions were made by people in the context of prayer and sound Orthodox teaching, renewed annually on a thankful and proportionate income basis. He warmly commended this method, referring the meeting to a teaching leaflet used by his parish and which he had made available to the Council and any other interested persons.

The meeting then proceeded to discuss (with limited residual time) the main aspects of the recommendations of the Parish Development Plan. Nothing was decided but the meeting was made better acquainted with some of the issues involved. The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.