

**Minutes of Meeting regarding Sacred Heart Church, Newhaven
St. Thomas More Church, Seaford
9th September 2020 at 7.00pm**

Present: The Rt. Rev. Richard Moth, Sarah Kilmartin, Fr. Ian Byrnes, Deacon Colin Purchase, Brian and Margaret Slattery, AM and P Brook, L and J Gravenor, Joe Fackler , Elenora Tully, Steve Waugh, Joyce Morgan, Will Cassell, Les Robertson, Maureen Greening, Ian Farrow, Val Booth, Norman Da Silva, Ilda Da Silva, Gill Vaughan, Fridel Hirtgens, F Chris Parkinson, David O'Shea, M Logan.

Bishop Richard opened the meeting with prayer and thanks everyone for coming to the meeting, explaining that he was coming to the meeting with news that would be difficult for all concerned.

He then reviewed events since the previous meeting at Newhaven, explaining that while positive indications had been received from the Religious Community that he was seeking to invite to the Diocese, this would not be happening for perhaps two to three years.

Bishop Richard reported that, In accord with the request at the previous meeting, a further quinquennial survey had taken place in February and the report received. The report contained information that was very concerning from the perspective of health & safety and indicated that very costly repairs would need to take place. In the light of the report, it would be necessary to look to a new way forward for the three parishes of Newhaven, Peacehaven and Seaford, with the area covered by the present three parishes being seen as one parish, with two churches at Peacehaven and Seaford.

He went on to look to the time when Fr. Ian Byrnes would retire and the possibility that it may be necessary for Canon Jonathan Martin to take on pastoral care for the people of Lewes as well as these communities of Newhaven, Peacehaven and Seaford. This would be a very great responsibility. The Bishop hoped that he would be in a position to send another priest.

Sarah Kilmartin distributed a presentation on the Quinquennial Report and the Finances of the Newhaven parish. (copy attached)

Sarah expressed thanks for the work that had gone into caring for the parish buildings over the years, with the nursery (hall) and flat having been correctly prioritised in terms of health and safety. Sarah explained that, with the cost of the further works required by the report and the level of income at Newhaven, it is no longer viable to maintain parish buildings. Work to the retaining wall at the rear of the property would have been carried out, but funds are insufficient for other works.

The Bishop thanked Sarah for her presentation, explaining that it was necessary to provide the best possible provision for the Mission of the Diocese, mindful that there are fewer priests that had been the case in previous times. He illustrated this with the information that seven priests had died so far in 2020, while there had been one ordination this year.

The Bishop announced his decision that the Newhaven site is to close and be sold. It was thought that this process would take about one year. The parish of Newhaven would be absorbed into Peacehaven and Seaford with a new parish being established that would cover the territory presently covered by the three parishes of Seaford, Newhaven and Peacehaven. Funds from the sale of the property would be apportioned 65% to the parish and 35% to the Diocese, in accord with usual practice.

Questions were invited.

Brian Slattery raised a number of points, beginning with the Valuation on the properties. Sarah Kilmartin explained that properties had been valued at £450,000 to £550,000 for the entire site. The hall had been valued at £175,000 if sold separately.

Brian reported that No. 32, in the same road, was on the market for £400,000.

It was suggested that the house and hall sold and the monies used to bring the church to a condition that would ensure its future. This was seen as a legacy for the people of Newhaven and the loss of a Church in Newhaven a tragic prospect.

It was also suggested that the funds be used to buy a smaller building for use as a church, with a Saturday evening Mass being celebrated in Newhaven. The value of live-streaming was also highlighted.

The Bishop indicated that the proposal to retain the church would not be a long-term solution. The community at Newhaven is small and the income would not be sufficient to maintain a property into the future. The result would be that, in a number of years-time, the community would be facing similar difficulties as at present.

He also indicated that the distance from Newhaven to either Peacehaven or Seaford was quite small and that it was necessary to look at Newhaven in the context of the wider picture of the whole Diocese and the need to ensure best possible provision for the whole Diocese into the future.

Margaret Slattery spoke of the sense of shame she felt when seeing the list of churches in Newhaven that had closed and the fact that Sacred Heart was among them.

Eleanor Tully supported the view expressed by Brian Slattery, saying that Sacred Heart should remain open, to provide for the many Catholics of Newhaven. She explained that, prior to the closure of the church, the attendance had been growing, with a lot of church attending Mass. She also stated that, since the closure of Sacred Heart, she had not attended anywhere else.

Joe Fackler expressed the view that it was important to look to the future, that it would be wrong to keep a church open that would depend on other communities to keep it open and that the resources from the sale could be used to build up the Catholic community across the three towns.

Lyndsey Gravenor expressed her sadness at the closure of Sacred Heart and reported on her experience of the closure of St. Francis, Moulescoomb. She held the view that since the Bishop had made the decision, there should be no further argument.

Fr. Ian stated that the Sacred Heart site should close. He reported, following a conversation with a councillor in Newhaven, that the population of the town was 12,000, of whom 10% would be Catholic – yet the maximum attendance at Sacred Heart during 2019 had been 50. Fr. Ian had made the decision to operate two centres in Seaford and Peacehaven. He could not operate a third in Newhaven.

Bishop Richard emphasised the need to look to future and get used to thinking of a parish family drawn from Seaford, Peacehaven and Newhaven rather than three separate communities. He cited other examples in the Diocese where this has happened. He explained that this new way of thinking would take time, but that the day would come when people felt part of one parish community.

Fr. Ian closed the meeting with prayer at 8.10pm.