



WARFIELD PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a special meeting held on Saturday 02 December at 4.30pm
at St Andrew's Church, Priestwood Avenue, Bracknell, RG42 1TU**

PRESENT: Gaynor Boulton, Penny Brinkley-Brown, David Brown (Minutes), David Chislett, Andy Colpus (Lay Chair), Juliet Date, Chris Drage, Alex Fry, Ashley Hill, Catharine Mabuza (Chair), Lily Mirza, Kevin Pearcey, David Ritchie, Gary Rivington, John Watts.

APOLOGIES: Abi Howe, Amanda Palethorpe, Michelle Porter-Babbage

23.155 Opening

Catharine thanked everyone for coming at such short notice, adding that she was sure they would appreciate that would not lightly call an extra PCC meeting on a Saturday afternoon.

She then opened the meeting with a short greeting prayer.

23.156 Staffing Update

Catharine told the meeting that she had some very sad news to share with the PCC which is going to impact the life of Warfield Church very significantly. At the end of a week in which there has been many, many hours of conversation, much heartache and indeed many tears, she then read in full the text of a letter received from David Ritchie:

Text of the letter:

Dear Catharine,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to you today to formally inform you and the PCC of my resignation as an Associate Minister at Warfield Church.

The last 11 years here at Warfield Church have been filled with many highs and lows but God has remained faithful through it all. I love the church passionately and have always chosen to serve it as best as I can.

However, after prayerful consideration and reflection on the latest decisions at the General Synod on human sexuality, I feel as a matter of conscience that I can no longer continue in my role as a Church of England Associate Minister.

I want to take this opportunity to personally thank you for your support and friendship over these last 6 years and I wish you and Warfield Church all the

*best for the future as you seek to share the love of Jesus with the world.
Please be assured of my continued love and prayers.*

God Bless,

David

Catharine then explained that she would now read to the PCC a statement that will be read in each of our congregations the following day.

This statement has been written with great care, and has been agreed by David Ritchie, Catharine, Andy as Warden, and David Brown in the light of the handover of leadership from me to him in a few weeks' time.

See attached statement.

Subsequent to the meeting, matters changed. At the PCC meeting on 16 January 2024 it was agreed that a note be attached to these minutes to document this and that the statement would not be attached to the minutes.

Catharine then explained further the communications process.

- (i) The statement just read will be read at Warfield Church West, by Catharine and David Ritchie respectively,
- (ii) A slightly modified version will be read at the North and East congregations
- (iii) At 0830, we will tell the (in person) congregation that there will be another important email, which we encourage them to read later in the day. David Brown will then read the North and East version of the statement at the St Andrew's Prayer meeting that will follow the 0830 service. This is done to honour the St Andrew's congregation, but also honour the Woodhurst congregation, whom this will affect most deeply, and we want to reduce the risk of 'leakage' from anyone at the 0830 service before the WCW congregation have heard the news.
- (iv) Tomorrow afternoon we will send out an email to the whole of Warfield Church which will have:
 - More of less the same statement as was read and Warfield Church West, with one or two small additions.
 - Some general comments about the future shape of Warfield Church and the conversations that will need to take place in the coming weeks.
 - Some comments about Living in Love and Faith, outlining what was said at the PCC meeting last Saturday, i.e. that views are divided on these matters and also outlining the process for January to May.
 - A section on recruiting a new vicar.
 - A call to prayer.

Catharine also added:

- (i) It is important for the PCC to be aware that we have been in conversation with +Olivia and the Archdeacon this week and they are fully aware of the situation.
- (ii) There is a huge amount of information to take in. Some immediate questions may arise, and there will be more to come in due course.
- (iii) An invitation to David Ritchie to add anything further.

David Ritchie then addressed the meeting:

- (i) He has been at Warfield Church for 11 years during which time he has given it his all.
- (ii) In 2016, when 15 out of 17 staff members left, he was determined to keep fighting and to stay.
- (iii) He feels committed to the people, loves them, and feels loved back.
- (iv) However there has been a grey cloud looming in the form of the LLF conversations.
- (v) Just as Nebuchadnezzar threw the three Hebrew young men into the fiery furnace, he has been beginning to feel the heat of the fire and it has only intensified.
- (vi) He expressed that he wished that he didn't hold to or believe the things that he did (as that would make life much easier) but he feels that he has to have the courage of his convictions.
- (vii) The hardest thing about leaving the Church of England is leaving Warfield Church but he feels that he has no choice but to do so.
- (viii) He expressed his deep sorrow for the hurt that he knows this will cause, but also expressed the hope that, although pain will come, we can remain friends, and that people will find it in their hearts to forgive him.

Catharine then invited any questions of clarification, rather than about the issues over which David is resigning.

There were no questions asked.

Gaynor Boulton expressed (on behalf of the PCC) that she / they are here to support all those involved. She had sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit during the meeting, and affirmed that we are one body in Christ, here to support one another.

Thanks were also expressed to David Ritchie for all that he has done for Warfield Church and the sacrifices he has made.

Catharine then added some further comments on this situation.

- (i) Some people already know this news because David Ritchie has shared it with them as personal friends.
- (ii) Before tomorrow morning Catharine will speak with the leadership team of Warfield Church East, and to Dave Cappleman as an LLM and a member of the Warfield Church North core team.
- (iii) A request to **maintain confidentiality**, for the sake of people at the West particularly – we would prefer that they don't hear second hand, or hear half the story.
- (iv) This especially so at events happening this evening which members of the PCC may be attending.
- (v) Other PCC members not here will be sent an email this evening.

23.157 Other business.

- (i) Practically we are postponing the PCC meeting planned for Tuesday evening 5 December. The main purpose of that meeting was to approve the budget, and clearly that will now need to be drastically revised, and it's not possible to do that work before Tuesday. The meeting will be postponed until January.
- (ii) There would have been one other small piece of business at that meeting relating to a headstone in the graveyard, and this item of business will now be conducted by email.

23.158 Close

Andy Colpus closed the meeting in prayer.
Catharine pronounced a final blessing.

Chair:

Date: