

Situation Report 20 April 2011

Last Sunday a special general meeting was convened to consider motions that would request the Church Property Trustees to demolish the hall, and to deconstruct the Church, with the Bishop Deconsecrating the Church prior to that event. The lift to the Harper Gardens Lounge had failed that morning, and so the Palm Sunday Liturgy and the SGM that immediately followed it had to be transferred at short notice to the St Francis Hall, which made for a slightly chaotic start to things, particularly as this smaller venue struggled to contain all those who turned up.

Around 50 people listened attentively as Elizabeth Clarke of Church Property Trustees and the Bishop explained the steps ahead. I made the point right at the start that we weren't there to debate what items should be removed from the Church as that was a conversation for another time and another forum, and as we were fortunate that many items had already been removed. However not a few questions did turn to that subject, I guess as a way of holding on to precious parts of the past. The Bishop's explanation of what a Deconsecration Service consists of was particularly helpful, and I think at that moment the emotional consequences of saying goodbye to the Church really began to stir in people. For many people there that beautiful house of God had been the place where they and their family had come at key moments in their lives, and now those memories were interposed with the sad awareness of what had happened to that special place. The resolutions passed without demur – we paused for a minute's silence – and then the Bishop gave us the blessing at that solemn moment.

This week attention shifts to Holy Week, and especially to the celebration of the Paschal Triduum, the most important four days in the Christian year. It is a challenge setting up the St Francis hall in such a way as to observe the full range of ceremonies from the Maundy Thursday evening Service to the Good Friday Liturgy of the Passion at 3 pm, to the Easter Vigil and first Mass of Easter on Holy Saturday night at 8 pm. Usually we have a large liturgical space with lots of room for drama and stylised movement. Yet for all the limitations we are up against this time I have a hunch that the more intimate space will generate a different and even more powerful sense of liturgical presence. I am looking forward to it.

This is the last update I will be posting for some time. From Monday I will be away on Sabbatical in Britain at Westcott House Theological College, Cambridge. My brief will be to write the Avonside lectures, which will be given here later in the year. My major interest is in systematic theology, the doctrine of God, and this will be an opportunity to go at it hammer and tongs. It will be an appreciated

change to be immersed in the deep things of God rather than being a crisis manager.

I don't expect much to change in the three months that I am away, apart from the demolition of the hall. The Avonside Operations Group, which consists of the Wardens and two of our more energetic and capable parishioners, will be running the week-by-week affairs of the parish in my absence. I will see if I can persuade one of them to write some updates.

Hugh Bowron