

Saint Mary's Parish Centre Update

This is a long and complicated story. What follows is the only way to summarise it.

Father Jerome

My frustration that the parish had no Parish Centre prompted me to launch a fundraising drive when I arrived in Crewe during Spring 2011. Thank you to those who contributed to the fundraising and also our benefactors who increased the amount raised with several five figure sums gifted to the project. Nearing £350,000 many parishioners additionally contributed to the Our Mission Together Project, adding £75,000.

Over the past two years we have hit two stumbling blocks with the project. First, the volatile building material costs as a result of Brexit uncertainty. Second, the increase in building material costs post Brexit. We had tendered the building of the centre at £750,000. The lowest price a contractor could provide was in the region of £900,000. I was then left with the frustration of where to find the additional funds.

However, as part of my agreement to enter the parish into the diocesan Our Mission Together fundraising project I asked why *CARITAS: Diocese of Shrewsbury* had a presence in other parts of the diocese, but not in Crewe. Unbeknown to me *CARITAS: Diocese of Shrewsbury* then proceeded to seek funds to build a CARITAS HUB in Crewe. I only learned of this when I was informed that they had been awarded £350,000 by a foundation grant to build a CARITAS HUB to address the social and community needs of our parish and town.

Just before Covid loomed I had various discussions with the diocese and the Parish Buildings and Finance Group about our shortfall for the Parish Centre Project. Following on from this I could not see the point in two separate builds on parish properties i.e., the presbytery garden and parish car park. After prayer, discernment, and banging my head against several walls, my suggestion that we focus on one building was welcomed by the diocese and supported by the Parish Buildings and Finance Group. I had made the decision to abandon building on the Presbytery garden. The combined Parish Centre and CARITAS building would now be built on the car park. CARITAS would lease the car park land from us, and the parish would retain ownership of the carpark.

Then the pandemic came, and months of nothing happening due to the retirement of the previous CEO of *CARITAS: Diocese of Shrewsbury*, and the furloughing of the Diocesan Property personnel. I subsequently learned that the £350,000 raised by CARITAS was no longer enough.

During January 2021 I had to act. We had the money raised for the Parish Centre Project and it looked like it would be resting in the bank, doing nothing, for a long time. When I was informed that Caritas required £250,000 to start the build, I approached the Parish Building and Finance Group and the diocese and offered to contribute £150,000 to ease the shortfall: £75,000 from your OMT contributions and £75,000 from the Building Fund Account, which would still leave £275,000 in the account to carry out much needed maintenance works around the Church and Presbytery. The diocese agreed to provide the remainder of that shortfall. I attached the following proviso: once the new building was complete the parish would discern whether the communal space in the new build was sufficient for our needs or whether we would need to add an extension. That has been agreed.

As CARITAS had achieved planning permission, and the majority of their funding, we could not go against the planning permission they achieved because we would face yet more delays. CARITAS were also bound to build what they had put to the foundation who had awarded them £350,000.

As Parish Priest I have committed £150,000 to the new build, which will be known as Saint Mary's Parish Centre. That will leave us with £270,000. This can be put towards an extension and also many of the neglected property demands that have arisen for the church and presbytery.

So, that is the long and complicated ten year journey that has led to this point.

Let me then go back to the start. We had about £475,000 raised for what was the original Parish Centre Project. I was at the point of giving up when I was informed that we would need to raise something in the region of another half a million.

I am now happy to say that by Advent 2021 we will have the new building, with its space for our parish groups to meet in, our social functions to take place, our children and young people to gather, our sacramental groups to be formed, and the social justice needs of our town to be ministered to.

It has been an exhausting process for us all. I could have done nothing. I could have waited for the pandemic to come to an end and then decide to do something. But that would have been to fail the task that I have been asked to fulfil as your Parish Priest.

Thank you for your endurance. I am glad to say that when I leave the parish you will have better facilities to meet in than those I inherited.

Father Jerome Fagan

(Parish Priest)

1st March 2021

PS: You may view images of the new build via this link:

<http://planning.cheshireeast.gov.uk/applicationdetails.aspx?pr=19/2242N&query=d3269628-132c-4010-a74f-018067dea3e7>