**St. Mary’s Reordering Project (previously the Extension Project)**

For a number of years now St. Mary’s has had a preliminary design in place for a modest extension attached to the North Porch. At the time of writing this report the congregation and local community have raised £46,684.23 towards the cost of this extension which, with the offer of an interest free loan from the Friends of St. Mary’s, makes £55,184.23 available for the project.

As you would expect, fund raising during the Covid19 pandemic has been low, but it is estimated that, even if we could return to the fund raising level before the pandemic, it will take several years to even meet the 50% cost point of the extension project (estimated at £190,000 plus VAT). This is the point at which we could apply to the larger funding agenciesfor the more substantial grants.

Given this situation the Extension Committee, in conjunction with the PCC, have revisited the possibility of achieving the required facilities (as specified in the Statement of Need) through a reordering of the interior of the church. In this way it is anticipated that the cost will be reduced and the money we have available will be at least 50% of the overall cost.

With the help of a generous grant from the diocese a feasibility study for the reordering was initiated in August 2019 and the architects firm Simon Ablett Architects was selected to carry out this study. After several meetings of the Extension Committee and the architect, a report and initial drawing set was issued to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) in January 2020. This was done with a view to holding a site meeting to see whether the proposed reordering design is likely to obtain a Faculty, which is a requirement for a Grade 2\* listed church building. As part of the feasibility study a measurement survey was carried out on the complete church and this is useful for both the reordering design and any future work that needs to be carried out on the church.

A site meeting was set up with the DAC for 23rd March 2020, but this was postponed due to Covid19 restriction reasons. The site meeting eventually took place on 14th July 2021 and involved the DAC, the Archdeacon, the Architect and the Extension Committee. The proposed reordering design was presented and discussed and then questions were taken. The design proposed has all the changes in the west end of the church behind the cross-aisle and in summary includes a toilet facility in the base of the bell tower (where the choir vestry is currently located), a self-contained children’s area / meeting room located beneath the organ pipes, a choir vestry straddling the central columns, and a kitchen/serving area in the current coffee corner location.

The discussions with the DAC revealed that it is very unlikely that the proposed children’s area / meeting room part of the reordering would achieve a Faculty due to the visual impact in that area of the church. Furthermore, the new choir vestry part of the design would need to be changed for similar reasons. Because the toilet and kitchen parts of the reordering are largely acceptable from a Faculty point-of-view, it was generally agreed that it would make sense to approach the project in a phased manner, the toilet, kitchen and new choir vestry forming the first phase. This would represent a reduced cost that would be much closer to the funding already available and hence would allow these aspects of the reordering to proceed in a much shorter timescale.

Based on this I am working with Rev Clive and Simon Ablett to develop a first phase reordering design that can then be discussed with the whole Extension Committee. Once we have an agreed design that the DAC accept would get Faculty approval, it can be presented to the PCC and the congregation before it is costed by a quantity surveyor. This will then reveal where we stand on the funding aspect.

The Extension Committee (which will be renamed the Reordering Committee in due course) continue to work hard to bring about the facilities that St. Mary’s has been lacking for many years, and we thank the congregation and local community for their continued support. We gratefully accept any donations you wish to make towards this project, and these can be made by cheque or cash in the envelopes provided in the church, by cheque (made payable to ‘St Mary’s Bexley PCC’)to the Team Vicar at the address in the contacts area of the website, or by BACS payment (sort code 16-17-32, account number 10099559). Please ensure that any payments made clearly identify that they are for the extension fund.

**Proverbs 16:9** “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.”

Chris Kirk,

Chairman of the Extension Committee,

St. Mary’s Church Bexley,

16th September 2021.