

SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH
MINUTES OF PARISH AGM 7pm WEDNESDAY 15th OCTOBER 2025

1. **Welcome** from Chair Stuart Fox (SF)

Opening prayer led by Fr James (FJ)

2. **Apologies:** John and Mary Cook, Helen Booth

3. **Chairman's introduction:** We have had a fantastic year as a parish. Some highlights include:

- Having two excellent priests
- Significant improvement to the façade of the church
- Improvements in the Narthex
- Many well attended social events
- A huge amount and variety of music
- Sound financial position, but always room for improvement.
- Greatly improved communication within the parish, thanks to the introduction of the SFX WhatsApp channel
- Being part of an increasingly thriving Deanery. Abbot Brendan (Dean) is keen to nurture interaction of parishes in the Deanery. Archbishop Mark is keen for Herefordshire to feel fully included withing the Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia

SF expressed his thanks to the Parish Pastoral Advisory Council

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting** (October 2023) *Please note that an AGM did not take place in 2024 as Fr Brendan had left to take up his position as Abbot of Belmont and the parish was being looked after by a series of priests who were temporarily running the parish until the arrival of Fr James and Fr John in November 2024.*

SF and FJ have checked the 2023 minutes and signed them as a true record.

5. **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising, other than the need for a review of the parish Green Policy (SF)

6. **Father James' Report**

Welcome: Delighted to find myself as PP of this wonderful parish. Thanks to all for the great welcome. Special thanks to John and Mary Cook and SF for all the guidance and support.

Prayer life – sacraments: i) Sunday Mass is the heart and centre of parish life. Each of the three weekend masses are celebrated reverently and prayerfully. Many thanks to all involved with different aspects of the Mass: welcomers, readers, Eucharistic Ministers, Altar

servers, musicians, those making tea and coffee after Mass. Please think about helping in one of these roles. ii) Thank you to Roger Firman and Edward and Eleanor Perks who have all retired from their music roles. Their involvement has been very much appreciated. iii) Suggest commissioning new Eucharistic Ministers and readers during Lent next year. Training will be provided. iv) Moving forward: would like to establish a number of small Lectio Divina groups in the parish, with the aim of meeting weekly to read and pray the gospel for the next Sunday. Training would be provided for Lectio leaders. NB this would be different from but complementary to the ABC Scripture group. v) Rosary at home during October is a wonderful way of getting together to pray in homes. Effective way of strengthening relationships within the parish. Will host one evening in the Presbytery. vi) There have been a number of baptisms in past few months. A number of people are currently being instructed in the faith. Hopefully the Feast of All Saints will be marked with baptisms, receptions into the church and first Holy Communion. vii) There were two first Holy Communion Masses in the summer (one for pupils at SFX school and the other for pupils in non-Catholic schools). Many thanks to Brenda Williams for preparing the children from non-Catholic schools and to Fr John who visits SFX primary school as Chaplain. viii) There have been no weddings this year but one is taking place in November and another in June 2026. Thanks to Paul and Brenda Williams who run the Marriage Preparation Course.

Social Life – Being together. Thanks to all involved in the many social events (*See in Parish Reports below*)

St John Kemble: We are privileged to have a relic of St John Kemble, a 17th century Herefordshire priest, and one of the 40 martyrs of England and Wales, who was martyred on Widemarsh Common in 1679. It is right that St JK is a focal point in our parish. In May we had a talk about the life and times of St JK as part of the Herefordshire Histories Festival. His feast day (August 22nd) was celebrated with Mass at this altar. The annual pilgrimage to his grave at Welsh Newton took place on August 24th. St JK prayer cards are currently being printed for all parishioners and visitors to the church. The Parish Hall will be renamed The Kemble Hall. 2029 will be the 350th anniversary of St JK's martyrdom, and various associated projects are in mind.

Religious Events: Highlights include the shared blessing of the Palms and shared Easter Vigil with the Cathedral (with whom we enjoy a close relationship), the shared celebration at the Cathedral with the parishes of the Deanery and the Cathedral congregation to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea (Archbishop Mark preached), The Shroud of Turin exhibition in SFX Parish Hall (visited by hundreds), the Deanery Horizons of Hope talks hosted by SFX and Belmont, Nigerian Mass for the persecuted Christians in Nigeria, the celebration of St JK over the weekend closest to his feast day, the Healing - Anointing Mass in August and the Deanery Mass on the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham, hosted by SFX and followed by a reception in the Cathedral's College Hall.

Deanery and Archdiocese: i) Clergy have benefited greatly from support provided at Priests' Deanery Meetings and the Archdiocesan Priests' Gathering. Archbishop Mark has outlined his vision for the newly created Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia. At the heart of this is evangelization of the young. As part of this, Fr Matt Roche-Saunders (who recently visited our parish) has been appointed to lead the vocations' ministry to the priesthood and also the youth ministry. Congratulations to SF who has recently been elected as Chairman of the Diocesan Pastoral Advisory Council. ii) The archbishop has set up a think tank to explore ways of moving forward in the Archdiocese. The 4 pillars to enable mission are: 1. Growth in prayer, 2. Raising up leaders, especially among the young, 3. Developing a culture of Evangelisation in parishes, 4. Empowering every believer to live out their baptism.

Fundraising – Prayer for Benefactors: Propose re-introduction of sponsoring stars in the

church dome at a cost of £250 per star. Important to pray for benefactors. Mass on 19th November will be offered for all benefactors, living and dead.

Safeguarding: We are all responsible for safeguarding in the parish. Many thanks to Maggie Daron who has been the parish Safeguarding Representative for many years. Kathy Weston is kindly taking over this important role and is already working to make sure we are compliant with all Archdiocese guidelines and policies.

Green Policy: Thanks to the CAFOD group who have worked on raising awareness of green issues. SF will review policy.

Retirement and thanks: Roger Firman (organist) Eleanor and Edward Perks (organ/cantor at 10 am Mass) Maggie Daron (Safeguarding) Diana Pearce (Headteacher of SFX school, retired 2024)

Lent – synodality: There has been a talk on Synodality as part of the Horizons of Hope talks. Would like to take this forward. SF and FB have met with Louise Wright, Chair of Belmont Parish about possibility of getting our parishes together (possibly in Lent?) to discuss our vision/aspirations. Archbishop is keen that parishes work together to share resources and ideas. We can learn from what other parishes are doing e.g. Belmont “Conversations in the Spirit” (Parish discussions about what we want from/can give to our parish)

7. Safeguarding report *See above*

8. Buildings

Early 2025 saw on budget completion of refurbishment of front exterior of church. We have recently had a site Inspection report by consultant Edward Holland and architect Fred Hamer (who oversaw refurbishment of front exterior). Awaiting report, which will give comprehensive overview of exterior and interior of all buildings on site. Will enable forward planning. Solar panels are proving very effective. Exceptionally sunny July and August this year means our electricity bills are currently £300 in credit, as opposed to monthly bills of £700 last year. Parish Hall roof repairs: recent repair work undertaken at a cost of £4000 to seal leaks and tackle damp problem. Much needed work on upgrading toilets and entrance porch of the parish hall due to start in January 2026. (Cost £30,000) Presbytery: one of the bathrooms has been upgraded. Old pipework in cellar replaced to help with chronic water pressure issue.

9. Communications and IT

Many thanks to Owen Jenkins (OJ) who is working hard to modernise and improve communication within the parish. He explained that social media is important in order to make us visible. The SFX Facebook page was non-existent but is now active. OJ has launched the **SFX Hereford WhatsApp channel**. Currently 95 followers. Currently posts are about feast days (with appropriate prayers) and parish events. Advantages of WhatsApp channel include no advertising, updates (notices) are one way i.e. no comments/private messages/conversations, content is safe for children, messages are sent out instantly and directly to followers (no dependence on algorithms). Notice about Nigerian Mass had over 10,000 interactions. Good for our church to be so visible.

10. Finance Report

SF thanked Audrey Fussell (AF) for all her work and for producing a very clear report on Parish Finances 2024-2025. *See report for details.*

The headline figures (correct on 31.3.25) are: **Parish income** (from collections and fundraising) £102,704. **Parish Expenditure** (including Diocesan Levy) £87,375. This gives an **operating surplus** of £15,328. Collections have increased slightly (by £3,477) in the year.

The deposit account (reserve fund) is slowly sinking due to capital expenditure on projects to maintain the fabric of the church and presbytery. *See building report*

In order to ensure ongoing maintenance of our beautiful church we need to:

- Start serious fundraising. SF pointed out that we cannot rely on funding from the Archdiocese. He suggested that a Fund-Raising Group is set up to investigate fundraising from organisations other than the parish.
- One third of our income is from loose coins/notes on the plate, so is not gift aided. Encourage as many parishioners as possible to use Gift Aid.
- Encourage those who give via envelopes to change to a standing order.
- Encourage parishioners to review giving. Costs of living have risen, as have cost of running the parish.

There was some discussion about the now defunct second collection (also known as the “Restoration Fund”). This was in place for many years and was set up in order to ensure the upkeep of the fabric of the church. The Diocesan Levy was applied to the first, but not the second collection. However, the Diocesan Levy is now applied to all parish collections, so a separate second collection is no longer relevant. There is some confusion about this as those who pay via envelopes still receive two envelopes, one being labelled “Restoration Fund”. It was felt that there needs to be some clarification about this. Stephen Cleeve (SC) stated that 51 parishioners pay via standing order and 44 via envelopes. It costs over £300 to have envelopes printed for individual givers. SC suggested that the PAC makes a decision about the envelopes, removing the use of “Restoration Fund” envelopes at the end of this financial year and possibly with the aim of stopping the use of individual envelopes altogether. It was suggested that generic envelopes could be used, but this would involve individuals having to write their details on any envelopes used. It was pointed out that if you give via the card machine in the Narthex, there is an option for your donation to be used for maintenance of the buildings.

Fr James thanked AF, SC and the Finance Team for all their hard work.

11. Social Event Report

Dorothy Kennedy reported on the regular social events; **Social Club** on first Thursdays of the month, **Poetry for Pleasure** on the third Thursdays (which has grown into a thriving group attended by SFX parishioners and others who have heard by word of mouth), regular **tea and coffee** after Sunday 10am Mass and 9.30 Mass on Mondays and Thursdays. There have been a number of successful **Parish Walks**, around Eastnor Deer Park, Breinton, Brockhampton, Hampton Bishop/Mordiford and one “In the footsteps of Sir Edward Elgar”, which ended with torrential rain and tea in the Parish Hall!

Whole parish events have all been very well attended and include the **Parish Jubilee Garden Party** in June, where everyone brought food traditional in their culture to share, the **Parish BBQ** in August and a **Harvest Supper** in October.

A **Parish Christmas Bazaar** is being organised for Saturday 29th November.

Other ideas for social events include parish trips to Harvington Hall and Downside Abbey.

New ideas for social events, and volunteers to organise/help run events are always welcome! Please consider what you can contribute to the social life of the parish.

SF and FJ thanked DK

12. AOB

- SC: More people are need to join the Counting Teams. There are currently 5 teams of 2 people. Training will be given.
- OJ: would it be possible to have one additional weekday evening Mass for those who are unable to get to the daytime weekday Masses? It was suggested that this could be trialled during Advent and/or Lent to ascertain popularity.
- There was some discussion about the recently reinstated Sunday evening Mass at Our Lady's. This is proving to be very popular with many of the Keralan community, many of whom work shifts in the hospital and care homes. This has had a negative impact on numbers attending weekend Masses at SFX. This Mass was provided for all the Catholics of Herefordshire and used to be celebrated by priests from OLQM, SFX and Belmont in rotation but is now just celebrated by Fr Andrew of OLQM. Some clarification is needed.
- Pete Fawcett: Many thanks to our excellent and faithful team of Altar Servers. If you see them make any mistakes, let him know and he will provide relevant training.

13. **Closing Prayer and date of next meeting:** FJ thanked all those who attended the meeting and closed with a prayer. Meeting closed at 8.25 pm. Date of next meeting to be arranged