



DIOCESE OF MENEVIA

BISHOP'S PASTORAL MESSAGE

to the Parishioners of St Winefride's, Aberystwyth

My dear People

Bad news is difficult to accept. It is no easier to be the messenger of this bad news. Three years ago I sent a pastoral message to you, not realising at that time how prophetic it would be. It said:

I want to be completely honest with you. To hold out false hopes would be to show a lack of integrity. Therefore, I would suggest that the option of restoring the present buildings is a non-starter. Patching up what is there is not really an option at all.

In recent days, our insurers have independently inspected the property, as a normal part of reviewing risks on a number of diocesan properties. They have concluded that St Winefride's church and presbytery are not safe to be used. They have advised that they are unable to continue to provide insurance cover, as in their view the risk of injury to parishioners, clergy and others is too great, given the structural issues with the buildings.

Detailed costings prepared by Ash Cost Consultancy indicate that some £2.6 million needs to be spent to re-build/re-furbish properly all of the existing buildings and site infrastructure. In contrast, another structural report has appeared, drawn up by Barratt Associates, which envisages renovation of the church and presbytery to cost an estimated £625,000. This report would appear to be more of an "appraisal" than a thorough inspection or detailing of costs. It seems merely to indicate the minimum amount of work that might need to be done to make the buildings usable. It states that the assessment and costs are subject to confirmation by other professionals. I believe that it is true to say that the Barratt Report is not as detailed or wide-ranging, and therefore is less complete than the more thorough ASH report. Again, as I said to you three years ago, and I say again in the light of the Barratt appraisal:

It would mean throwing good money away and merely delaying a decision to another day when it ought to be taken now.

To spend £625k now would still not make St Winefride's "fit for purpose" for the 21st Century which was the objective when discussions began some 10 years ago.

The Pastoral Message of December 2009 marked the beginning of my own consultations that have continued ever since. A couple of weeks later it was followed by my "Meet the Bishop" opportunity over a 2-day period in the parish-hall. Since then, there has been much correspondence, letters and articles in the press, planning applications, and the involvement of Town and County Councillors, as well as the local member of the Welsh Assembly. Now we have the 2 structural reports and the insurers' assessment. THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTS ARE ON VIEW ON THE DISPLAY BOARDS IN THE PARISH-HALL, plus a copy of this Message.

The news from the insurers is devastating news, because it seems all of a sudden to make a parish community homeless, when 3 years ago most of you thought we were embarking on a new church project at Penparcau. It could have been completed by now. It would have been debt free. It would have been something to be proud of. It would be God's home - and your spiritual home. You would have been involved in its design and contents. However, until something better and more permanent can be provided, Mass will be said in the current parish-hall, or possibly some other suitable location, from the First Sunday of November.

I ask for reconciliation and goodwill where that is needed for mending fences. I have no desire to apportion blame to anyone. If I myself have appeared remiss in any way, I seek your forgiveness and understanding. We walk a delicate road, but let us do it together, for the sake of God's kingdom, as well as the present and future generations of this great parish. God bless you.

Saturday 06 – Sunday 07 October 2012

+Thomas Matthew – Bishop of Menevia