

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Re: BROMLEY: ST PETER & ST PAUL

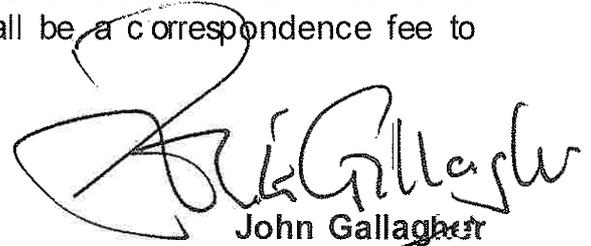
J U D G M E N T

1. By a petition lodged on 27th May 2017, the petitioners, being the Incumbent, the Reverend Anne Jablonski, the Associate Vicar, the Reverend Andrew Jablonski, and the Churchwarden, Mrs. Gillian Thompson, applied for a faculty for works to be done to the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul, Bromley, Kent, for the introduction of new audio-visual systems, to include the installation of new and replacement speakers; associated new amplifiers and control systems; new sound desk and recording systems; projectors, screens and cameras and recording systems; new camera systems; and an LCD screen for the organ.
2. The estimated cost of the proposed works is given in the petition as being £85,000.00, which has been raised through gifts and legacies. The church is Grade II* listed. The D.A.C., in their Notification of Advice dated 26th May 2017, recommended the works for approval, subject to the proviso that any fixings into stonework should be in mortar joints where possible. The D.A.C. went on to opine that none of the proposed works were likely to affect the character of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest, or the archaeological importance of the church. I agree with this assessment.
3. On 14th July 2017, I indicated that I was prepared to deal with the petition on the basis of written submissions, provided that the petitioners agreed in writing to this course being adopted. By email letter dated 17th July 2017, the Associate Vicar confirmed that the petitioners so agreed. Having reconsidered the matter, I am of the view that it is expedient and appropriate for me to deal with the petition on written submissions.
4. The P.C.C., at a meeting on 29th March 2017, resolved to approve the proposed works. There were 16 members present out of a total membership of 18. There was one abstention, but that was on the basis of costs. There has been one objection to the public notices.

5. The objection comes in the form of a letter dated 22nd June 2017 from Mr Alexander Fishburn, who is a student at the Royal College of Music, and who has been the assistant organist at the church for the last two and a half years or so. I have read his letter and taken it into account. Mr Fishburn is a weekly attendee at the church and believes that the proposed installation works need "to be reviewed." He is concerned that whilst what is proposed will make the church more flexible, there is a risk of the clergy "using the equipment excessively." His reasoning is that whilst the Vicar and Associate Vicar are "lovely people, and wonderful vicars," they are "rather evangelical in their approach to styles of worship, which does not fit with the very middle of the road Anglican choral tradition that we have here." He feels that their views on styles of worship are not shared by the choir and congregation. I have little doubt that Mr Fishburn is sincere in his views about the lack of desirability of the proposed works. However I must remind myself that the D.A.C. recommended the works for approval; that the P.C.C. overwhelmingly approved the proposals; and that no other objector has come forward. Moreover, since Mr Fishburn has declined to be joined as a formal party opponent to the petition, understandable though that stance may be, I have no hard evidence before me as to the extent of his objections, their merits, nor as to how deep-rooted they are. I have not had the opportunity of hearing the evidence of Mr Fishburn given in person, nor of seeing his demeanour when giving such evidence. Crucially, I have heard nothing from him on oath, and have not had the advantage of hearing his evidence tested in cross-examination.
6. I also have before me a letter dated 13th July 2017 from Mr Jablonski which deals with Mr Fishburn's objections. Mr Jablonski makes the point that the voting members of the P.C.C. have an average of 17 years membership of the church.
7. I have no hesitation in rejecting the arguments against the proposed works. With all due respect to Mr Fishburn it would run wholly in the face of the Great Commission as expounded in Matthew 28 v 16-20 were I to refuse works on the basis that they might make the church too evangelical. Furthermore, I do not accept that Mr Fishburn's views are representative of the members of the church as a whole. If the new sound systems enable better communication with those attending the church, and the spread of the Word, then they are to be welcomed. There is nothing, not even anecdotal evidence, to support Mr Fishburn's assertions. In fact the reverse is the case; Mr Jablonski says that two visiting preachers, one an Anglo-Catholic, and the other from the Orthodox tradition, commented that their addresses would have been better for the use of a system that allowed pictures to be shown, if such had been available. Finally, and importantly, the proposed works are easily reversible.

8. Thus, for the reasons given above I reject the objections advanced. I am satisfied that the proposed works are required and are appropriate. In the premises I direct that faculty issue. There shall be a condition attached that any fixings into stonework shall be in the mortar joints wherever possible. The works are to be completed within 12 months, or within such period as may be further ordered.

9. The petitioners must pay the Registry and Court costs of and incidental to the petition, in the normal way. There shall be a correspondence fee to the Registrar in a sum as I direct.



John Gallagher
Chancellor
15 August 2017