



Timeline of Correspondence

The Parish Trust (TPT) and The Church in Wales (CinW)

Re: Sale of St Thomas Church Centre Heol Yr Ysgol, Trethomas, Caerphilly CF83 8FL (2020-)

- 2020** TPT started using St Thomas Church, one of two church buildings in the Parish of Bedwas led by the **Revd Dean Aaron Roberts**, Rector.
- St Thomas was used to facilitate large-scale practical help during the Coronavirus pandemic. The opportunity to serve the community widened, and so a separate charity to the Parochial Church Council (PCC - church trustee charity body) was set up. But St Thomas still used as the HQ for the community outreach. The CinW, and the Bishop of Monmouth, the **Rt Revd Cherry Vann**, were fully aware of this at the time.
- August** 9 Aug: The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Bedwas agreed a **proposal to the CinW for St Thomas Church Centre to be transferred to TPT** due to *“the numerical decline and significant financial difficulties of the parish.”* The proposal said: *“The Parish has two buildings which they are not able to maintain, due to the lack of human resources and finances.”*
- 14 Aug: **Visit by the First Minister of Wales**, Mark Drakeford, to TPT at St Thomas.
- 18 Oct: PCC meet following meeting between Rector, parish reps and Jonathan Williams in which he said the next step was for the PCC to formally **Petition the Bishop to make St Thomas Redundant**. The PCC so Petitioned, with the addition that the land be transferred via sale to TPT.
- 9 Months then followed with no contact from the CiW, or the Bishop.**
- 2021** **30 July**: Rector chases the Bishop via email following comment that the Bishop’s senior Staff had put the petition ‘on hold’ until the future of Ministry Areas were clearer.
- He advised the bishop that the UK Government had made pots of £250,000 available to purchase buildings at risk which could become a community asset, TPT wished to apply, but could not until things were confirmed by the Bishop.
- He quoted Alex Glanville, head of Property Services at the CiW, stating their charity preferred a sale of the building so the proceeds could go to local Ministry Areas, (ie back into the parishes to support their own activities), rather than a Lease. Mr Glanville said that it would be possible to **sell the land, yet still have “religious use”**, *“subject to approval as to form and content of worship by the bishop”*. The Rector said the sale of St Thomas would provide a “massive boost” financially to enable new things to spring up in local churches.

Bishop replied saying she hoped to get back to him in October (**over a year since request was filed**).

1 Dec: TPT Trustees write to the Bishop advising that as the Parish had no money to upkeep St Thomas, they had taken over repairs and maintenance, which had already financially benefited the Parish of Bedwas. Mr Glanville **confirmed a Survey was needed** to enable an “*arms-length sale to proceed*”, and the Trustees felt now was the time for this to happen, fundraising start, and then the Parish benefit from the sale proceeds.

2022

9 Aug: The CinW **Decree for the “Closure and Declaration of Redundancy of the Church of St Thomas”** was signed by the Bishop and the Seal affixed, making the church **closed and redundant** for “Divine Worship”.

6 Sep: The Cin W issue a **decree RESCINDING the Decree of Closure and Redundancy** of St Thomas the previous month!

15 Sept: TPT asks solicitor to the Diocese why? They say “*This reversal has been driven by the Representative Body [+] soon as they can complete their part then a fresh Decree of closure and redundance will be made by Bishop Cherry.*”

21 Sept: CinW send a ‘Heads of Terms’ document to TPT Trustees, proposing a **new tenancy Agreement** for St Thomas Church with:

- **an annual rent of £12,000**
- **a full repair and insuring basis for 10 years**
- **no alternations permitted,**
- **no acts of worship or religious use**
- **the property must cease to be called St Thomas Church**

12 Nov: TPT Trustees reply that the TPT and PCC had met together and agreed on the future and had liaised with the Diocese over two years on a sale to them. and that:

- **TPT was interested in the freehold of the property**
- **the charity was Christian in nature and core to its work**
- **a freehold sale would provided income much needed by the parish of Bedwas who face upwards £100k repair work to St Barrwg Church which they do not have**

The trustees state they have maintained the building for the PCC/diocese and had had many conversations with senior diocesan staff at which the sale of the church was openly discussed, and officers led TPT trustees to believe a sale to them was a real possibility. The TPT say they find the proposals “*grossly offensive and we will not entertain the offer as it stands*”.

Trustees conclude: “*The CinW has a golden opportunity to be seen in a favourable light in the Caerphilly area through the freehold sale of St Thomas Church, and benefit from a good news story.*” They ask the diocese to reconsider its offer.

2023

January – Revd Roberts sends **Letter of Resignation as Rector of the Benefice** to the Bishop, saying he wanted to focus 100% on the charity.

1 Feb: TPT Trustees chase diocese as no reply received from 12 Nov response,

Media Note: following Revd Roberts’ resignation, relations take a different feel. Instead of dialogue and discussion, hard-end legal language started.

8 March: A **different Tenancy Agreement** from solicitors to the CinW. This time, a **Tenancy At Will**, Rent £1 per month but Clause 5.7.5 **“The property must not be used for religious use”**, clause 5.8.1 **“not to call the premises ‘St Thomas Church’**, which is what it is known as in the community and amongst long-term charity users, and, under clause 7.1.1, **the tenancy can be terminated immediately “upon one month’s notice in writing made by or on behalf of either party”**.

Media Note: In effect, the CinW solicitors have decided the charity is in possession of the church without any legal document in force and is trying to insist on a one-sided agreement, with no security for the charity, despite the trustees engaging constructively and in good faith, for three years with the CinW, and the bishop, both of whom, many times, have delayed correspondence, discussion and changed proposed tenancy agreements and legally Decreed the church ‘redundant’ in one month, only to re-open the next!

05 April : **CinW solicitors demand a response from TPT trustees within 7 days** if they wish to continue to use the church, failure to reply and the solicitors will take **“steps to recover possession of the premises”** and **“the legal costs of any such action will be recovered from the trustees response, and no negotiations of any kind will be entered into until vacant possession of the premises has been secured and the costs of doing so recovered.”**. The solicitors conclude – after three years of the CinW delaying matters: **“It is now imperative that the matter is dealt with by your organisation promptly”**.

9 May: **Berry Smith Solicitors instructed to act on behalf of TPT** respond to the solicitors for the CinW: **“The [CinW] have been fully aware of the position regarding the occupation of the building by the Trust for the last 3 years since March 2020 as the Trust has at all times been in direct dialogue with the Church at Diocesan and Provincial level as evidenced by correspondence and minutes of various meetings so the Trust are perplexed by this sudden change of direction by the [CinW] and the involvement of a solicitor.**

“The dialogue has also included discussions about the Trust acquiring the freehold title from the Church and which included visits by the Archdeacon and the Bishop.

“In addition, the [CinW] consequently employed an independent valuer to value the property for this purpose. Throughout their time of occupation, the Trust have paid for all ongoing maintenance of the building, including carrying out improvements. such as the installation of a new kitchen and a new boiler and central heating system.

“At no point until now has anyone from the [CinW] raised any issues about the occupation by the Trust, nor about any of the arrangements of the occupation.

“The Trust is prepared to vacate but as previously stated, the Trust will need a reasonable amount of time to re-locate as they will need to find, negotiate, fund and fit out alternative premises to rent or buy.

“Bearing in mind the Trust has been in established occupation for more than three years, a 12-month period is considered a reasonable period within which to relocate.

“We suggest, therefore that the Trust’s current occupation be formalised and regularised by the entering into a fixed term 12-month tenancy agreement for this purpose but not a Tenancy at Will as that would be terminated at any time without notice.”

TPT solicitors suggested the matter be dealt with by dialogue between the

parties so that an *“amicable agreement can be reached”*. If not, then the firm’s specialist lawyers would be instructed and any costs incurred would be recovered against the CinW.

Nearly Three Months pass and no response from the CinW Then

24 July: Solicitors to CinW write to TPT saying client believe terms of 17 May clear, no other matters to discuss at this stage and CinW not willing to countenance any further delay. 14 days given to respond. Solicitors say if their CinW terms not accepted, CinW will take legal steps will be taken to secure the property.

7 Aug: TPT instruct Berry Smith Solicitors who write to the CinW solicitors expressing *“sadness that the CinW are not willing to speak to them in order to find a way forward”*. The Trustees express sincere thanks to the CinW for the support given over the years, the success of which saw the visit from the First Minister and major media coverage that benefited the Trust and the CinW. They acknowledged the visit by the Bishop who came to see how the TPT and the church were working together to *“benefit some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.”*

It stated that since the end of the Pandemic, the TPT had expanded to meet the growing needs (TPT ‘project list’ available for media as a separate document). Adding that recently TPT had engaged with a number of Ukraine refugees, who had been settled locally.

The Trustees acknowledged that the CinW was now at a point where it wished to do something different with St Thomas Church and, TPT recognised it needed to secure alternative accommodation to meet the growing demand for the work it was doing to support communities.

It said it hoped that *“as the paths took different directions, it would be possible to publicise the partnership that had enabled such successful work to be done”*, and that *“we strongly believe that the work we have engaged in had been underpinned by our collective Christian beliefs”*.

TPT said it had hoped it would be able to establish an *“amicable period of grace”* with the CinW during which it could continue the partnership in a way that *“doesn’t unnecessarily create difficulties, or result in poor publicity for either organisation.”*

The trustees asked the CinW to *“grant us more time, without commitment, restriction or cost, as has existed to date”*, adding that the trustees hoped to have alternative accommodation in place within 6 months (early February 2024).

The trustees urged the solicitors to press upon their client the desire to create a *“direct line of communication”* that doesn’t necessitate the *“involvement of solicitors, and the time and costs that this results in which directly impact on the work that we are able to do.”*

The trustees concluded they *“remained committed to working with the CinW and to find a solution that reflects the Christian values which we both hold and which will demonstrate this partnership for the gospel in the communities.”*

6 Sept: TPT chase the Bishop direct asking for personal response, not via solicitors.

13 Sept: Bishop replied to say she would liaise with Archdeacon.

Media Note: No progress has been made, and the last legal position from the CinW stands. The track-record to date of the CinW leads the TPT trustees to

believe that the CinW needs to be 'forced to the table', and agree a mutually-beneficial arrangement, giving TPT reasonable time to find suitable new accommodation.

Notes:

[+] The 'Representative Body' is a charity of the Church in Wales which holds the property of the CinW and through it sales of building are processed. any sale of land is subject to the Charity Commission Acts.

[1] The Parish Trust is a registered charity, No 1186996. Its **Governing Document**, including its 'Objects clause' can be found at [Governing document, The Parish Trust - 1186996, Register of Charities - The Charity Commission](#)

[2] The **Annual Accounts** of the charity can be found at [Accounts and annual returns, The Parish Trust - 1186996, Register of Charities - The Charity Commission](#)

[3] TPT charity benefits the historic geographical parishes of Bedwas, Machen, Michaelton-y-Fedw and Rudry – which mirrors the Benefice footprint.

[4] During Covid public restrictions, under Welsh Government Guidance, St Thomas Church Centre was not able to be used for activities for the public. However, the 'Public Service' nature of the CARE Project of TPT, founded by rector Roberts, did fall within permitted Guidance. Therefore, St Thomas became the Hub/HQ for the CARE project/TPT. This was with the full knowledge and approval of the CinW, and the Bishop of Monmouth. It was well publicised in the media and on 14 August, the First Minister of Wales visited and commended their work.

The Parish Trust is a Registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in England and Wales (no. [1186996](#))