

The Parish of Forton, Saint John the Evangelist

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PARISH IN 2017

1. Aim and Purposes

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Forton has the responsibility of co-operating with the Incumbent, Mother Carrie Thompson, in promoting in the Parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC is also specifically responsible for the maintenance of the Parish Church building.

2. Objectives and Activities

The PCC is committed to ensuring that Saint John's is the Church at the heart of our community, where everyone is welcome.

As a charity with the aim of advancing religion, the PCC aims to provide identifiable benefits to the community by providing facilities and opportunities for public worship, pastoral care and spiritual growth to all those living within the Parish boundaries and any others who wish to benefit from what is offered. The PCC is aware of its responsibilities under the Charities Act and has due regard to the Charity Commission public benefit guidance.

We seek to serve the people of Forton, of all faiths and none, through worship, prayer and teaching; Occasional Offices; building up the fellowship and corporate life of the Church; collaboration with educational establishments and other statutory and voluntary agencies; and community engagement.

3. Achievements and Performance:

Worship and Prayer

The PCC is keen to ensure that S. John's offers a range of services during the week and throughout the year to enable Parishioners to worship, learn and grow in discipleship.

In 2017, the average weekly attendance was 61, a rise of 33 from 28 in 2016, bringing it back in line with the broad average in the years 2012-2015. It should be stressed, however, that this figure is predominantly made up of attendance at Sunday Baptisms, and therefore reflects one-off or occasional visitors rather than regular worshippers. The usual Sunday attendance fell again, from 29 in 2016 to just 22 in 2017, the lowest it has been in ten years. It is important to note that our Worshipping Community (those who can reasonably be deemed to be regular churchgoers) stands at 57 – so it is clear that even amongst committed, regular churchgoers, weekly attendance at the Parish Mass is no longer the predominant pattern. It seems clear that the Sunday Parish Mass, whilst valuable to those who attend, cannot be our only or even dominant offer or site of engagement. If Forton Church is to remain viable in the future, we must seek new ways of engaging our community, both churched and unchurched, through additional and alternative service patterns and events. Occasional Offices all saw a slight drop from 2016 to 2017 (Baptisms 36→31; Marriages 8→6; Funerals 16→11). Although the feedback from attenders is almost invariably good, and these are still healthy figures for a Parish Church of our demographic, we cannot afford to be complacent and presume that people will continue to seek us out to mark their significant life events. For the last few years, we have relied on local word-of-mouth and reputation; and while this is still very valuable, the Parish might be wise to think about how we can better market our offer for Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals, and how we can maintain and strengthen relationships with those who first encounter the Church through an Occasional Office.

Easter attendance rose slightly from 42 in 2016 to 46 in 2017, but is still significantly below the levels of previous years. Christmas attendance decreased from 189 in 2016 to 118 in 2017; likewise, the number of those who attended a special service during Advent (e.g. Christingle, Crib Service) decreased from 881 in 2016 to 583 in 2017. In a parish of 12,500 souls, over half of whom identify as Christian, it is clear that this Parish Church is not doing well enough in offering services and events which local people find attractive or accessible.

In contrast, our Open Church venture, begun in January 2017, has been successful, and by the end of the year was beginning to function as an emerging Fresh Expression, with a regular congregation of around 20, including 4-5 people for whom this is their main or only pattern of Church attendance. If, as we hope and pray, this FX continues to evolve as a congregation in its own right, it will be important for the whole Church community to recognise and embrace Open Church as a valid and valuable part of our worshipping life and our Parish community.

In the past year, the Parish continued to enjoy a warm and beneficial relationship with Fr Tim Watson, the Leesland Pioneer Minister, who is licensed jointly to Forton and Alverstoke Parishes. This appointment has led to closer collaboration between the clergy of both Parishes, as we seek to begin to discern a strategy for ministry and mission across the whole area. It is to be hoped that this collaborative approach will come to be shared by PCCs and congregations as we move forward. The PCC continues to value its role in developing discipleship and vocations, and the Parish was pleased to welcome Paddy Trasler on placement during Holy Week. Paddy is now licensed as a Reader in Alverstoke, once again cementing the bonds between our two Parishes and various congregations.

In Advent 2017, a new pattern of collective worship was established at St John's School, and Mother Carrie now leads a weekly liturgy for children and staff every Friday afternoon, based on the readings and themes for the coming Sunday. The reconstitution of Brockhurst Infants and Junior Schools as one through-Primary also brought new opportunities for involvement and engagement; Mother Carrie now leads regular collective worship for the school on both campuses, and there is an annual whole-school service in the Church. There is growing goodwill and warmth towards the Church from children, staff and families in both schools; it is now up to us as a Church community how we choose to support and develop those relationships, and to explore ways in which individuals and families might become part of the worshipping community.

Music

Jonathan Bardolph resigned as Director of Music in November 2017 owing to family and work commitments. The PCC is grateful to him for his time, energy and commitment over the past few years. The PCC decided not to appoint another Director of Music, but instead to seek an occasional organist or organ scholar who could share duties with Pat Wallis. Following a recommendation from the DoM at Alverstoke Church, we were blessed in securing the services of Alex Wilson, who has proved to be not only musically gifted but also a generous, easygoing and friendly addition to our community. The PCC extends its thanks to both Alex and Pat for their ongoing musical ministry. The addition of music notation to our Sunday Mass books for hymns and service music has greatly improved the level and quality of singing at public worship. Despite the slight increase in printing costs, and more significant impact on preparation time, this still feels like a practice worth continuing. Members of the congregation participated in the Deanery choir and regional RSCM events, and one young person from the congregation attended the Morland Choristers' Camp in the summer.

Social and Fundraising Events

A monthly raffle was established for the congregation, which has brought in small but welcome amounts of money through the year. There were, however, no social or fundraising events for the Church membership or wider community. It is clear that traditional fundraising and social events such as church fairs are no longer particularly enjoyable, relevant or successful. However, the Parish does need to think creatively about events which could raise funds for the Church and/or bless our community and offer ways of engagement. If we are to run social and/or fundraising events in the future, volunteers will be needed to organise and promote them.

Charitable donations were made to Nuevas Esperanzas, Safe Haven for Donkeys in the Holy Land, Christian Aid and the Bishop's Lent Appeal. Food and other essential items were collected as part of our Harvest celebrations and throughout the year in the Forton Food Exchange trolley, and donated to Gosport ARC, the food bank and to local people in need.

Electoral Roll

The Electoral Roll currently stands at 47 members, of whom 26 are resident in the Parish.

There were two new additions to the Roll (one resident and one non-resident), one change of address (non-resident to resident) and four removals (all non-resident, ceased to be habitual worshippers).

Deanery Synod

Three members of the PCC sit on the Deanery Synod (two elected lay representatives and the Incumbent). Synod met twice in 2017 and heard presentations on disability and on healthcare, as well as the usual round of business. Two members of the PCC sit on the Deanery Mission & Pastoral Committee (one elected lay representative and the Incumbent).

Ecumenical Relationships

The Church is a member of Churches Together in Gosport.

Church Building

(Churchwardens' Report upon the Fabric, Goods and Ornaments of the Church)

The PCC took the decision to replace the kitchen fittings and furniture, with a hope that this would better enable us to offer hospitality and increase our opportunities for mission and new forms of service. The work was carried out by Andy Fellows, and was completed on time and to a high standard. At the same time, the hall was given a spruce-up; this was done by PCC members, so there were no labour costs borne by the PCC. The work has created a much warmer and more welcoming environment, and the PCC hopes to continue the improvements as opportunity and funds allow. Routine maintenance, cleaning and repairs were carried out throughout 2017. Annual safety inspections and checks were carried out as required. Thanks are due to all those who have helped with the continuing upkeep of the Church building and grounds, especially to Andy Jeffery, Aaron Giles, Carole Giles and Jacqueline Hopewell.

4. Financial Review

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £22,042 of which £20,328 was unrestricted voluntary donations, and a further £1,714 was from Gift Aid.

The letting of the old and new halls provided a gross income of £5,406, representing a slight decrease from 2016 of £209 (new hall). £30 was raised through fundraising activities. The PCC received £3,644 in Church fees from Occasional Offices. £1,178 of unrestricted income was received from interest on investments (no income from investments was received as restricted funds).

There was an increase in total unrestricted income of £3,078 between 2017 (£22,042) and 2016 (£18,964). This owes in part to small increases in sundry donations (£1,193) and Parochial fees (£721), but is largely owing to the sale of shares to the value of £2,171.

£33,647 was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from S. John's Church, including the contribution to the Diocesan Parish Share of £16,870, which was paid in full. The increase in expenditure from 2016 (£6036) is largely owing to the costs of the new kitchen, which totalled £5,713. A saving of £919 was made by switching to a different Insurance provider.

The net result for the year was an excess of payments over receipts of £11,605 on unrestricted funds. Adding bank and deposit balances brought forward at the beginning of the year, the balances carried forward at 31st December on unrestricted funds totalled £54,745.

Although the receipt of generous legacies in 2014 and 2015 has resulted in an end-of-year balance which appears healthy, it must be noted that regular giving is still well below the level which would make the Parish financially sustainable. In 2017, there was an increase on the previous year of sundry donations totalling £1,193 and a very slight increase in planned giving of £11, but giving on the plate fell by £40. Income from fundraising activities fell by a significant £868, compounding a fall in the previous year of £183. The Parish simply cannot survive if we continue to rely on existing members giving at the current rate. St John's may well be facing closure within five years. If that is not a fate we wish for our Parish Church, we need to tackle this issue now.

There are three main ways we could do this:

1. Increase our giving

The PCC is aware that many church members give generously and sacrificially. Nobody should be giving more than they can afford, or feeling as if they cannot be a member of this Church because of lack of funds. However, each of us must be realistic and honest about our own giving. We do not hesitate to support a charity we believe in, spend money on an activity we enjoy or help out friends or family members if we can. By the same token, if we truly believe that the Gospel of Christ is transformative in our lives and the life of our community; if we love our Church and our Parish; if we take seriously the call to be a family of faith; then we will naturally and joyfully contribute what we can to support our Church. This is not "the Church asking for money" – we *are* the Church. It is our responsibility.

2. Attract new members

Of course money is not the motivation for mission – we do not want people just for their bank accounts! Nevertheless, the fact remains: if each one of us introduced a friend who started to give at the same level as current church members, the Parish would at least break even each year. As has been outlined above, it is clear that we can no longer just expect people to join the Sunday congregation. Traditional worship is wonderful if you like it – but not everybody does. We need to find new and creative ways of engaging people in our community who come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring different preferences and expectations. The Parish has planned three sessions with the Diocesan Mission Development Officer to help us in this area.

3. Fundraising and enterprise

Our fundraising income has fallen by £1,051 in just two years. In 2017, we raised only £30 from fundraising, a sum which equates to around 50p per member of the worshipping community. Of course Forton is not a wealthy area, but £30 divided amongst the entire population of this parish is around half a penny per household. Surely we can do better than that!

We know that traditional fundraising ventures such as Christmas Fairs do not work well for us in raising funds or engaging the community, but that doesn't mean we can do nothing. We need to find creative ways of raising funds, perhaps learning from other churches, charities and institutions – and more importantly, we need to have the energy and commitment to put them into practice. We also need to look realistically at how we are using our buildings and grounds. The Church building is not there to make money, but perhaps we could use it more creatively to engage our community and help us generate funds for our mission in this Parish.

To this end, the Parish has planned to take part in the rapid development programme run by Portsmouth CSR in the coming year. It is hoped that all church members will want to play a part in this programme as we seek to find new ways of being the community Church of Forton.

5. Reserves Policy

It is the policy of the PCC to maintain unrestricted funds, which are the free reserves of the PCC, at a level which equates to not less than six months' unrestricted expenditure. This provides sufficient funds to cover parish management and administration as well as the activities directly relating to the work of the Church. It is our policy to invest surplus funds with the CBF Church of England Deposit Fund. We confirm that unrestricted funds were maintained at this level throughout 2017.

6. Structure, Governance and Management

The Parochial Church Council is a body corporate established by the Church of England, and a charity currently excepted by order from registration with the Charity Commission.

The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure (1956). The appointment of PCC members is governed by and set out in the Church Representation Rules (2006).

In Forton, membership of the PCC comprises the Incumbent, the Churchwardens and elected representatives of the laity. Elected parochial representatives of the laity to the Deanery Synod sit on the PCC ex-officio.

The PCC met four times in 2017. All meetings were well attended. Minutes are displayed on the Church noticeboard in the hall, and may also be viewed by request to the PCC Secretary.

In addition, the PCC met once for Lego Serious Play training facilitated by Ben Mizen.

7. Administrative Information

Saint John's Church is situated on Forton Road, Gosport, Hampshire, PO12 4TQ.

It is part of the Diocese of Portsmouth within the Church of England.

The correspondence address is:

The Vicarage, 10 Spring Garden Lane, Gosport, Hampshire, PO12 1HY.

The Church website is www.fortonchurch.org

PCC members who served at any point during 2017 were:

Mother Carrie Thompson (Chair);

Shelagh Perch (Churchwarden / Vice Chair); Paul Whitton (Churchwarden);

Ed Chalmers (Deanery Synod Rep); Pat Wallis (Deanery Synod Rep);

John Green (Treasurer); Bev Whitton (Secretary);

Jonathan Bardolph; Carole Giles; Chris Gratton; George Jackson;

Irene Matthews; Paul Newman; Jane Thomas



The Revd. Mother Carrie Thompson (Incumbent) March 2018