

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 2018

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 2018, the average weekly attendance was 32, a drop of almost half from 61 in 2017. This sounds drastic, but it must be noted that the figures fluctuate year-on-year depending on how many Baptisms are booked for the weeks included in the census (4 weeks in October). Usual Sunday attendance grew from 22 to 29, bringing it back in line with the 2016 figure. This is encouraging, although the figure is still well below the membership of our Worshipping Community (those who can reasonably be deemed to be regular churchgoers), which stands at 69. As suggested last year, this indicates that even amongst committed, regular churchgoers, weekly attendance at the Parish Mass is no longer the predominant pattern. In 2018, 19 new people became members of the Worshipping Community, which suggests that we are on the right path by remaining committed to good quality, inclusive liturgical worship on Sundays and seeking to provide new forms of worship and community engagement.

Children and young people (aged under 18) make up 30% of our Worshipping Community, and children and young people (aged under 16) accounted for 14% of our Usual Sunday attendance and 15% of our Average Weekly Attendance (not including school services). In the Parish as a whole, children and young people (aged under 18) make up 22.6% of the population, which suggests that we are doing well at reaching and keeping children and young people – perhaps better than many other parishes. This is a success to be celebrated, and a strength to be built upon.

The number of Baptisms dropped from 31 in 2017 to 25 in 2018, but both Marriages and Funerals saw an increase (Marriages 6→8 and Funerals 11→16), bringing both exactly in line with 2016 figures. The large drop in Funerals from 2014 to 2018 (44→16) seems to be reflected across the Church of England, and may be connected to the large fee increase brought in by the national Church in 2014. Since feedback at Funerals is almost invariably positive, perhaps the decrease is affected by factors we can do little to change. In happier news, it should be noted that the number of weddings puts us not far behind the 'top ten' most popular churches for weddings in the Diocese. Given the Parish demographic, and the fact that St John's is – with the best will in the world – not a traditional 'chocolate box' village church, this would suggest that we are doing extremely well to attract so many weddings, and that we provide a great experience for couples and their guests. I believe this is because of the personalised attention we give to each couple, and I extend my thanks to all those who give so generously of their time and skills to make this a possibility.

Easter attendance rose dramatically from 46 in 2017 to 158 in 2018, although again these figures fluctuate depending on when people choose to book Baptisms, so we cannot read too much into them. Christmas attendance saw a slight increase from 118 in 2017 to 128 in 2018, but the number of those who attended a special service during Advent (e.g. Christingle, Crib Service) decreased from 583 in 2017 to 552 in 2018, continuing a downward trend from 881 in 2016. The format of those services and events has not markedly changed over those three years, so perhaps they have simply become outdated and we need fresh approaches to helping our community mark this time of year.

The centenary of the end of the First World War was marked by a weekend of special events and services in November. The Church was open throughout both Saturday and Sunday and hosted an exhibition of paintings by local artists organised by Lyn Freestone. A vigil Mass of Requiem was held on the Saturday, so that Sunday worship on Remembrance Day itself comprised simply the Act of Remembrance at 1100. This pattern seemed to work well, and may be worth repeating in future years. The weekend ended on Sunday afternoon with prayers for peace.

Our Fresh Expression, Open Church, continues to be successful, and has now settled into a more structured pattern including a short time of creative prayer followed by a shared meal. Although it still contains a few people for whom this is their main or only pattern of Church attendance, the majority of attendees are also regular congregants at our Sunday service. Open Church has definitely grown in depth and fellowship in 2018, but it has not really attracted new worshippers in the last year. This might suggest that we should allow Open Church to keep evolving in its own way, but also look at starting a new and different Fresh Expression aimed at others in the local community.

The Friday afternoon liturgy at St John's School, started in Advent 2017, has gone from strength to strength over the past year. The service comprises a pared-down version of the Sunday Liturgy of the Word, including the Collect, Gospel reading, a short reflection, prayers of intercession led by the children and the Lord's Prayer. The children always show great enthusiasm to participate in the liturgy, and are keen to be chosen to share their prayers. It is a great shame that there is nowhere to record this in the Annual Statistics for Mission which are sent to the Diocese and national Church, as we are essentially providing a Sunday service for 400 people each week, which puts a rather more positive spin on our attendance and engagement figures!

Music

Pat Wallis and Alex Wilson continued as our regular organists during 2018, with a couple of guest appearances from Jonathan Bardolph. In October 2018, Alex took up a place as Organ Scholar at Worcester College, Oxford, but continues to play for us during the Vacations. On Alex's recommendation, we were pleased to secure the services of Ryan Bloxsom, who has now joined Pat and Alex as one of our regular organists. The church organ is not a particularly popular instrument of choice for young people, so by supporting young organists (as well as the young-at-heart), we are not only benefitting from their talents but giving them opportunities to develop as church musicians, which will hopefully be a gift to the wider church in years to come.

On the Feast of the Epiphany, a carol service was held, sung by a visiting choir, The St Mary's Singers. This was enjoyed by those who came, and it is hoped the choir may return on a future occasion.

Social and Fundraising Events

The regular raffle continues to bring in small but welcome amounts of money through the year. 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.

Community Engagement

As in previous years, the Church building was the venue for successful Beatles and Elvis in the Chapel concerts. As an indirect result of these, we also forged links with the music department at St Vincent College and Quay West recording studio, which led to two very successful live music events featuring music students and local bands. Gosport is otherwise lacking in large, affordable live music venues and this is clearly an area in which our Church can bless and encourage local artists and young people.

In a similar vein, the PCC has been considering creative ways in which we can make our Church building more accessible and useful to local people. It was decided to explore the possibility of turning the hall into a community café, and to that end we sought advice from the Council for Social Responsibility. This in turn led to our involvement in the "rapid development programme," during which we identified two main areas of need in our community: young families and people aged 18-30. In particular, our conversations with young adults identified a wish for a local place to gather in the evenings, which fitted well with our developing plans for a café on site.

In September 2018, the rdp and our own plans were suddenly put on hold, when the Diocese announced plans for pastoral reorganisation connected with a Strategic Development Fund bid. Thus we finished 2018 in a time of great uncertainty, which persists even at the time of writing; and indeed, this may be the last ever Annual Report of Forton Parish. Nevertheless, within that uncertainty, there is hope: St John's is a strong faith community with a clear vision and passion for mission and community engagement, and there is no reason that we cannot grow from strength to strength within whatever scheme finally emerges. As St Paul put it in Romans 5:4-5,

*endurance produces character, and character produces hope,
and hope does not disappoint us,
because God's love has been poured into our hearts.*

Electoral Roll

The Electoral Roll currently stands at 38 members, of whom 15 are resident in the Parish. This was a year in which a completely new roll was prepared.

Deanery Synod

Three members of the PCC sit on the Deanery Synod (two elected lay representatives and the Incumbent). Synod met twice in 2018 (once in Lee and once in Forton), and pioneered a new format in which the business took place within the context of a Eucharist, which seemed to result in a more purposeful and prayerful atmosphere on both occasions. Two members of the PCC sit on the Deanery Mission & Pastoral Committee (one elected lay representative and the Incumbent).

Diocesan Synod

In 2018 the Incumbent was elected to Diocesan Synod, and attended one meeting. One Parish Safeguarding Rep also attended; the Reps had been invited to a play and panel discussion about child abuse plus free soup. The play turned out to be rather demotic.

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)

After a certain amount of lobbying, Gosport Streetscene agreed to remove one dead tree from the Churchyard and to remove several overhanging branches from the large horse chestnut tree on the liturgical north side of the Church (as per the Quinquennial Report). The removal of the branches has greatly reduced the amount of leaf litter falling into the gutters, which means that the perennial water ingress problem now seems to have been solved.

The PCC did agree to replace and improve the lighting in the hall and associated areas, and a quotation was obtained. However, this work was put on hold on the advice of the Archdeacon because of the potential SDF bid.

Routine maintenance, cleaning and repairs were carried out throughout 2018. 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; and to those who beautify the worship space, particularly Don Matthews, Irene Matthews and Bev Whitton.

4. Financial Review

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £26,987 of which £9,606 was unrestricted voluntary donations, and a further £1,449 was from Gift Aid. This represents a slight but extremely welcome increase on both planned and loose giving. A huge thank you to everyone who has managed to increase their giving this year.

The letting of the old and new halls provided a gross income of £5,295, representing a slight decrease from 2017 of £111 (new hall). This continues a slight downward trend on income from the new hall from 2016, suggesting that this may be an area for attention.

£160 was raised through fundraising activities, a great improvement of £130 from 2017. Once again, thank you to those who organised and supported those ventures.

The PCC received £3,279 in Church fees from Occasional Offices. £1,198 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 £4,945 between 2017 (£22,042) and 2018 (£26,987). This owes in part to increases in donations and fundraising, for which we are extremely grateful, but is largely owing to the sale of shares to the value of £6,000.

£25,364 was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from St John's Church, including the contribution to the Diocesan Parish Share of £15,406, which was paid in full. This represents a fall in expenditure of £8,283 from 2017, and of £2,247 compared with 2016. However, it should be noted that 2018 was an unusual year in that there was no single big project or significant expenditure as there has been in most other years (for instance, the kitchen refit, the Quinquennial Inspection, the new organ). The PCC had planned to devote significant funds to the hall lighting, and to mission activities as part of the rdp, but both of these projects had to be shelved because of the proposed pastoral reorganisation. It is now likely that the hall lighting will have to be replaced before the proposals come into effect, so the relatively low expenditure in 2018 may well be offset by a higher rate of expenditure in 2019 or early 2020.

The net result for the year was an excess of receipts over payments of £1,604. Adding bank and deposit balances brought forward at the beginning of the year, the balances carried forward at 31st December on unrestricted funds totalled £56,349.

On paper, this looks like a fantastic result. We have finished the year £1,604 in the black, as opposed to 2017 when we spent £11,605 more than we brought in. However, the receipts column only looks healthy because we sold £6000 worth of shares in order to fund work which was then postponed. In real terms, we are still spending more than we are bringing in, and money we didn't spend this year will almost certainly have to be spent in 2019, on top of the usual expenses. In a sense, it's slightly misleading for that £6,000 to appear in the receipts column at all, because it's not income in the sense of money that used to belong to somebody else and now belongs to us. The money was always ours in the first place, we've simply changed it from an asset into cash. Without that £6000, our net result for the year would look like an excess of payments over receipts of £4,396 – which doesn't look nearly so nice, but is a more realistic picture of our real-life financial situation.

What is undeniably fantastic is that giving and fundraising has increased. A massive thank you to everyone who has started giving or who has increased their giving. It really does make a difference. When you look at the big numbers in the accounts, it's easy to think that your couple of quid doesn't matter, but it does. If everybody put an extra £3.50 on the plate every time they came to Church in 2018, we would really have broken even (forget the £6,000 anomaly). Of course, you might not be able to afford £3.50 every week, but perhaps you could spare an extra £1 or even 50p? That's less than a cup of coffee or a can of pop.

We don't know yet what the future will hold for St John's, but we can presume that being financially healthy will be a big help in ensuring our survival as a worshipping community. So, thank you once again for all that you contribute – and if you can manage a little bit more, please do.

P.S. Did you know that if you turned off all your appliances instead of leaving them on standby, you could save about £100 a year? That's £50 for you, and £50 for a church you love. 😊

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 2018.

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 2018. 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.

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 2018 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);

Keely Bremner; Carole Giles; Irene Matthews; Paul Newman; Jane Thomas



The Revd. Mother Carrie Thompson (Incumbent) March 2019