

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 2019

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 2019, the average weekly attendance was 48, compared to 32 in 2018 and 61 in 2017. This figure, so beloved of Diocesan number-crunchers, in fact fluctuates wildly year-on-year depending on how many Baptisms are booked for the weeks included in the census (4 weeks in October), and is thus not a particularly useful indicator as to the health of our Church. Usual Sunday attendance remained almost static at 28 (29 in 2018), while the membership of our Worshipping Community (those who can reasonably be deemed to be regular churchgoers) increased from 69 to 77. This suggests that we are right to offer a 'mixed economy' of good quality, inclusive worship opportunities which includes both traditional liturgical worship on Sunday mornings and newer forms of worship and engagement at other times. St John's will surely need and want to hold on to both sides of that balance as it moves forward into a new phase of its life and ministry.

Children and young people (aged under 18) make up 27% of our Worshipping Community, and children and young people (aged under 16) accounted for 12% of our Usual Sunday attendance. 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 – although, as with adults, they rarely all turn up at the same time! The intergenerational and participative nature of our Sunday worship is surely something to be cherished, preserved and strengthened, although the Church might also want to look for new ways of adding child-centred provision and worship at other times of the week.

Although there is nowhere to record it in the official figures, mention must be made of the fact that the St John's worshipping community is fortunate to include a small but significant number of young adults aged 16-30. This is the age group often missing from churches nationally, and we also know from our community engagement work that this is the group in the local community who often feel isolated or forgotten. As St John's changes its mission to include a particular focus on this demographic, it is good to know that we already have the seeds of successful engagement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that one of the most important reasons that St John's is attractive to young adults is our commitment to inclusion of LGBTQIA* people at every level of church life. It will be vital that this commitment is preserved and upheld.

The number of Baptisms rose slightly from 25 in 2018 to 27 in 2019, while both Marriages and Funerals remained static (at 8 and 16 respectively). Although those figures might seem small, compared with national averages, they put us well ahead of a median ('typical') Church of England church (B=3; W=1; F=5). Remarkably, the 2018 national Wedding figure for the top 5% largest churches in the country was 9, compared to our 8 in both 2018 and 2019. So St John's has been punching well above its weight in serving our community in this important ministry, without the resources that larger churches enjoy. We can only hope and pray that the new Benefice and its parish churches will build on this, and continue to offer the people of our community the hospitality and personalised attention which they have enjoyed from St John's in the past.

Easter attendance dropped from 158 in 2018 to 52 in 2019, although (like the October count) the figure is largely dependent on when people choose to book Baptisms, and is of little statistical significance. Christmas attendance fell slightly from 128 in 2018 to 124 in 2019, and there was a dramatic decrease in the number of those who attended a special service during Advent (e.g. Christingle, Crib Service) from 552 in 2018 to just 148 in 2019. This continues a disturbing downward trend from 881 in 2016. The mission focus of St John's will, of course, have changed by next Christmas, but clearly there is scope here to consider whether there are new ways that the church might help the community mark this special time of year.

In 2019, there were two Sundays when the main Parish worship was non-Eucharistic. Following the success of the 2018 pattern, Remembrance Sunday was marked with a vigil Mass of Requiem on the Saturday and an Act of Remembrance at 1100 on the Sunday. This was well-received, and provided a good balance in a community where people often have differing needs and emotions at this time of year. By contrast, the first Sunday of August was the occasion for the very first Community Worship, a parish service entirely led by laypeople. This provided an opportunity for several members of the congregation to lead worship, and was well-received by those who attended. As St John's moves to a different way of being church, we are clear that we would not want to lose our Anglo-Catholic tradition or the centrality of the Eucharist in our worship; however, it is clear that the congregation is also confident to worship independently and enjoy fellowship with one another. Future ministry at St John's must surely include raising up local leadership, nurturing lay vocations and equipping the saints for the work of community ministry.

Our Fresh Expression, Open Church, has settled into a structured pattern including a short time of creative prayer followed by a shared meal, and is well on its way to becoming financially self-sustaining. Open Church continues to provide alternative worship for people who are also regular congregants at the Sunday service, a 'gateway' for people who go on to join the Sunday congregation as well, and a space for people for whom this is their main or only pattern of Church attendance. However, its numbers are now fairly static, so it must now be time to continue allowing it to evolve in its own way but also looking towards starting new Fresh Expressions aimed at others in the community.

In 2019, we started a monthly 'Food for Thought' event in the local café, where people gather for lunch and discussion. There are usually around six people in attendance, and the discussions have been good and wide-ranging.

The weekly liturgy at St John's School continues to be successful. This year, we have changed the time from a Friday afternoon to a Monday morning, so that it sets up the week for the children and staff. We have also moved away from the Sunday lectionary to explore Biblical readings which support the school's Christian values of love, courage and respect. There are also warm links with Brockhurst Primary School, where collective worship is led by St John's clergy once a term. As the responsibility for schools ministry moves away from St John's and to the new Benefice clergy, it is hoped that this pattern of ministry and relationship will be preserved and strengthened.

Music

Pat Wallis and Ryan Bloxom continued as our regular organists during 2019, with guest appearances from Alex Wilson during the university vacations. We have continued to enjoy singing and listening to a wide range of hymns and music, of many different styles and periods. We were able to form a mini-choir for Good Friday to sing the Passion to traditional plainchant; special mention must be given to Eleanor Chalmers, who learnt her solo in very short time, and performed it admirably (and also treated us to another excellent solo at Midnight Mass). The replacement of the sound system has greatly enhanced our ability to enjoy both recorded and live music, as well as bringing us in line with Disability Discrimination legislation.

Social and Fundraising Events

The congregation has continued to be generous with ad-hoc donations, raffle prizes, etc., for church and charity. 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

Building on the success of previous gigs, 2019 has seen a number of successful live music events in the Church, featuring Elvis Returns, students from St Vincent College and many local bands. We have now formed a firm partnership with Quay West recording studio, who organise most of these events. The gigs have given us invaluable opportunities to engage with a huge number of local young adults who would otherwise have very little contact with the church. We have had many conversations about life, faith and everything, and it is clear that there is a great deal of goodwill towards the church from this generation. St John's is in a prime position to build on these contacts as we seek to find new ways to bless our community and share our faith.

Gosport Gaming Guild, run by Anna Smith and Matt Dallman, has gone from strength to strength in 2019, and provides a forum for young people to get together to socialise and share interests. The Gaming Guild regularly attracts around 20 teenagers, many of whom might not fit in with other youth clubs or activities, as well as a small number of adults. This is clearly meeting a real need in our community.

After 18 months of frustration, with our plans to develop a café and move into new forms of community ministry having been stalled by the Pastoral Reorganisation process, it is to be hoped that St John's will finally be able to move forward into a new and exciting phase of its life and mission.

Electoral Roll

The Electoral Roll currently stands at 38 members, of whom 15 are resident in the Parish.

Deanery Synod

Three members of the PCC sit on the Deanery Synod (two elected lay representatives and the Incumbent). Synod met twice in 2019 (once in Rowner and once in Forton).

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)

A new sound system was installed in the church, ensuring our compliance with Disability Discrimination legislation. All the lamps were replaced in the church light fittings, which will help reduce both lighting costs and our carbon footprint.

Plans to replace and improve the lighting in the hall and associated areas are still on hold, awaiting the outcome of the pastoral reorganisation and 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 and Jacqueline Hopewell; and to those who beautify the worship space, particularly Don Matthews, Irene Matthews and Bev Whitton. Special thanks are due this year to Andy Hancox for his sterling work in sorting out the lighting.

4. Financial Review

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £28,055, of which £11,515 was unrestricted voluntary donations, and a further £2,278 was from Gift Aid. This represents a slight increase in planned giving and a significant increase in sundry donations (including donations from those attending live music gigs at the church). Thank you to everyone who has given this year.

The letting of the old and new halls provided a gross income of £5,370. The PCC received £2,664 in Church fees from Occasional Offices. £1,228 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 £1,068 between 2018 (£26,987) and 2019 (£28,055). 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 £5,000.

£28,447 was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from St John's Church, including the contribution to the Diocesan Parish Share of £14,925, which was paid in full. This represents a rise in expenditure of £3,083 from 2018, but it must be remembered 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). In 2019, our main capital spend was the new sound system (£3,107); removing that from the equation, expenditure levels have remained roughly the same from 2018 to 2019.

The net result for the year was an excess of payments over receipts of £392. Adding bank and deposit balances brought forward at the beginning of the year, the balances carried forward at 31st December on unrestricted funds totalled £55,957.

Just as in 2018, on paper this looks like a good result. We finished the year just £392 in the red, as opposed to 2017 when we spent £11,605 more than we brought in. However, it should be remembered that in 2018 we sold £6000 worth of shares in order to fund work which was then postponed, and in 2019 we sold another £5000 worth of shares to fund work and to pay our ongoing expenses. These figures appear in the receipts column as money coming in, but that is slightly misleading. This is not income in the sense of money that used to belong to somebody else and now belongs to us; it is simply money that has always belonged to us, that we have changed from assets to cash. In real terms, we are still spending far more than we bring in each year. As St John's moves into a new phase of its ministry, we will hopefully have a welcome injection of cash from the SDF bid, but we cannot afford to be complacent. St John's will need to find ways of becoming financially secure and sustainable in the future.

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 2019.

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 2019. 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 2019 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);

Paul Newman (Vice Warden); Bryan Young (Vice Warden);

Keely Bremner; Lyn Freestone; Carole Giles; Irene Matthews; Anna Smith; Jane Thomas



The Revd. Mother Carrie Thompson (Incumbent) February 2020