

The Parish Church of the Ascension, Hall Green

Annual Report and Statement of Accounts



For the year ended 31st December 2016



Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council of the Ascension, Hall Green

Aim and purposes

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) along with the vicar, Reverend Paul Leckey, share the responsibility of promoting the mission of the church: pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical in the parish of the Ascension, Hall Green. We are committed to enabling as many people as possible to journey together to share the Christian faith and God's love with all.

Objectives

Anyone is welcome to worship here and to become part of our parish community. Our site brings people together for Christian worship, education and fellowship from diverse cultures and faith traditions as well as providing multiple opportunities for service to wider community.

Our worship puts faith into practice through prayer, scripture, music, sacrament and community.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. We try to enable people to live out their faith as part of our Christian community through:

- Worship, prayer; and education in the gospel: offering discipleship opportunities for children, young people and adults;
- Provision of community spaces;
- Partnership initiatives with Job Marston Centre, hall users, fellow churches and others.
- Pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Mission and outreach work.
- Stewardship of the Ascension's physical, financial and human resources.

Acknowledgement

At the start of the Annual Report, it is important to recognise that all of the above requires the efforts of many and to thank everyone giving their time and talents in God's service. We are fortunate to have so many dedicated people at the Ascension. Particular thanks are given to our Church Wardens and readers for their tireless efforts all year round and for taking on extra duties during the Vicar's illness.

Our Vicar, Reverend Paul Leckey, fell ill in late November 2016 and had two spells in hospital receiving treatment. Following surgery in January we are very pleased that he has made a full recovery.

Paul has recently accepted an appointment as Vicar of St. Paul, Balsall Heath (Balsall Heath Church Centre) and St. Mary and St. Ambrose, Edgbaston. He will be leaving us in shortly – his last services will be on 11th June. Our thanks to him for his four year ministry amongst us and we send our best wishes to him and his family for the next stage of his journey in Christ.

Activities and Achievements

Worship and prayer

We continue to offer a range of services each week. Every Sunday, we have Communion at 8.30am, an all age service at 10am and a reflective evening service at 6pm. We also hold a range of special services throughout the year, linked to key events in the Church calendar.

As well as our regular services, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of their journey through life. Through baptism we thank God for the gift of life; in marriage public vows are exchanged with God's blessing and through funeral services friends and family express their grief and give thanks for the life which is now complete, commending the person into God's keeping.

This past year we have sadly marked the passing of, among others: Norah (Nikki) Barter, Olive Goodfellow, Beryl March and Margaret Yates. We would like to pay tribute to the many faithful years of service that they gave to the Ascension and to express our sympathy to their families.

The new audio visual system has enabled us to use a variety of different resources and made it easier to engage with worship, especially for those who are unfamiliar with our services. We are still at the start of our journey of exploring the possibilities offered by the new system.

Music continues to form a key part of the life of the Ascension and we are very fortunate to have Clive Jones, our Director of Music, and a dedicated Choir. An appeal for new Choir members has attracted some interest and will be repeated later in 2017.

We made good progress in reaching out to families in 2016. We had a successful and well attended 'Messy Easter' on Good Friday, a Teddy Bears picnic in August and a well-received light party in October. We now have a good core of families we are in touch with and we are building on this in 2017 through Messy Church on the last Sunday afternoon of each month.

Pastoral care

Some members of our parish are unable to attend church due to sickness or age. The vicar and lay pastoral team respond to the sick and to requests from other church members who wish to receive home communion or other support. Our thanks to everyone involved in this vital ministry.

Mission and evangelism

Helping those in need is a demonstration of our faith. At the start of 2016, we responded to an urgent request from our link parish of Chilipa in Malawi. Crops had failed and food was in short supply. A special appeal was issued to the Congregation and we were almost immediately able to send enough money to provide approximately one and a half tonnes of maize. All together the appeal raised in excess of £2,000 and in October the Standing Committee made a decision to support a further request and provided £1,100 towards the cost for an irrigation scheme and the purchase of a laptop. A balance remains in the fund and the PCC has decided to establish a small group to provide a supportive link through regular communication and to explore further opportunities for providing assistance; anyone interested in joining this should speak to the Churchwardens.

During the year, the PCC reviewed the way that we collect for charities and a box is now placed at the back of Church every Sunday for charity donations. The PCC has also decided to support the following charities during 2017: the Bible Society, CMS, Malawi, RNIB, Air Ambulance, Barnardos, Birmingham City Mission, The Church Army and Mission to Seafarers. We also continue to collect for Christian Aid week and for the Children's Society in Advent.

Safeguarding

The PCC has complied with its duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 to have due regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Our safeguarding children and adults policies were updated and approved by the PCC in November.

Outreach and Partnerships

Beechcroft

The five year extension to the existing fifteen year lease requested by the club has been completed by our solicitors, taking the club's lease to 2034. The club has now completed redevelopment of their Clubhouse's rear extension with the aid of a £50,000 grant from Sport England. They have further extended the range of sporting activities and, with further grant funding, have now been able to install floodlighting. This means sporting activities can now take place during the long dark evenings of autumn and winter.

Hall Green Churches Child Contact Centre

Operating from the Church Hall every Saturday between 2pm - 4pm, Hall Green Child Contact Centre continues to flourish. There are currently 22 families registered. Open on alternate Saturdays, Smith's Wood Child Contact Centre in North Solihull open has 9 families registered. In all there are 49 active volunteers working at the two Centres. In the financial year 2016/17 grants of £10,000 and £2,000 have been awarded by BBC Children in Need and CAF/CASS respectively; donations of £1,482 were also received. No fees are charged to families who use the Centres.

Since the beginning of 2017, two of just four such child contact centres in Birmingham offering supported contact free of charge have closed down. Both Hall Green and Smith's Wood Centres have accommodated their displaced families and, as a consequence of these closures, there has been a large upsurge in enquiries and referrals to both Centres.

Foodbank

In light of Jesus's call to love our neighbour, a particularly important venture was the opening, in October, of a satellite foodbank in partnership with Narthex Sparkhill. This is only one of two foodbanks in Birmingham open late on Friday afternoon and it is clear that there is a real need for it. More volunteers, including drivers, are still needed.

Thanks go to everyone who is volunteering their time to help with this vital mission and particularly to Brian Cove for his work in establishing the foodbank.

Hall Green Action Group

The Ascension is a member of the Hall Green Action Group which aims to bring people in Hall Green Together. We participated in the 'getting to know our neighbours' day in September 2016, being one of a number of local community venues who opened our doors and offered hospitality.

Monday Club

The Monday Club is in its 48th year in 2017. It continues to meet fortnightly between March and November offering fellowship and a very interesting programme of speakers.

Mothers' Union

The Mothers' Union works with people of all faiths and none in 83 countries to promote stable marriage, family life and the protection of children through praying, enabling and campaigning. Our branch celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2017 and continues to play an important role in the life of our parish. There are regular afternoon meetings and also Nosh and Natter in the evening, where all are made very welcome and enjoy food and fellowship with friends. The monthly luncheon club is also proving very popular.

On 7th May, our Mother's Union hosted visitors from across the Diocese for a craft workshop; this was a great success and integrated successfully into the 'Rise and Shine' open day held at the same time. Many people wandered into the MU event, showed an interest and made prayer flags etc. Jackie Brocklebank, MU President gave a talk about the Mother's Union to raise awareness.

Avril Badham, stood down as branch leader at the AGM in February 2017. We would like to express our thanks to Avril for her vision and hard work over the last three years and we pray for the Mother's Union to go from strength to strength.

Job Marston Centre

2016 has proved to be a busy year for Job Marston Centre with both the House and Chatterton Hall being used for many events, groups and organisations, together with 'one-off' hirings for parties and courses.

Barnardos have used the premises for Children's Centre meetings and Courses, as well as finding the House a refuge for peace and quiet for staff meetings. *Barnardos* continuing work with families is a valuable contribution to the community. The house and garden(s) are also used regularly by the Child Contact Centre who find it an informal setting for their sensitive meetings.

The JMC were jointly involved with the Church of the Ascension in arrangements for the '*Rise and Shine*' day in May 2016. This heavily involved our Administration Manager Sylvia Samuda working alongside Sarah Barnes and many others. All halls users were encouraged to take part and demonstrate their skills and knowledge. The event was well attended and supported by the Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Mike Leddy.

There has been a steady flow of clients attending the weekly *Job Club* who have received help and support with writing CVs. There were 53 attendees, both new and repeat clients. 2 clients reported back having secured jobs, with 11 others indicating that they also had been working for a time. The number of telephone enquiries has increased all of which are now logged, and with advice being offered. Thanks go to Sylvia Samuda and Penny Wagg for continuing this service.

The JMC was successful in obtaining grants from Veolia in order to replace the windows in the Chatterton Hall, together with its redecoration. Many of our organisations have been enthusiastic in their praise for the completed up-grade and as the Veolia press release following the completion stated 'Centres like this one play a vital part in community life.'

In September 2016 as part of the Heritage weekend, Councillor Mike Leddy returned as he had not been able to meet with the Church of the Ascension Pre-school Play Group during his visit in May. He was welcomed by staff, children, representatives of Veolia and JMC Board members.

The JMC have fully supported the initiative of the Church in setting up the Food Bank and has assisted not only with volunteers, but also with storage of food.

The Annual Meeting of the JMC took place in November 2016 and we were pleased to report healthy accounts and look forward to working with our partners in the future. The Board at present is looking to expand its membership.

The JMC is fortunate in having Sylvia Samuda as its administrator, and our thanks go to her for continued enthusiasm and commitment to all those who use the Centre.

Theatre 28

Due to falling membership, Theatre 28 was only able to put on one performance last year - the pantomime The Pied Piper. This was well attended with some good performances from junior members. Lack of membership has reached a critical stage and Theatre 28 is not operating at present. Sadly, it is likely that after more than 50 years at the Ascension that Theatre 28 will be unable to continue.

'Rise and Shine' Community Open Day

One highlight of 2016 was the 'Rise and Shine' Community Open Day on Saturday 7th May. The aims of the day were to showcase everything on offer across the whole site and generate enquiries about using the halls and raise the profile of groups using them.

The day was a great success. Over 300 people came along on the day helped no doubt by the glorious sunshine. Feedback from those attending was that it was very enjoyable, the various activities blended well together and that the day had a real 'buzz'. A number of new enquiries and bookings were also generated as a result of the day.

Planning for 'Shining Again' on Saturday 20th May 2017 is well advanced!

Structure, governance and management

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity. The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. The membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent, churchwardens, two licensed readers, members of the Deanery synod and members elected by members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the church. All members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent.

The PCC met 6 times during the year with an average attendance of 84%. Maurice Powell resigned from the PCC in November, having served since 2014.

The PCC elects a number of sub committees. The Standing Committee has met as required to make decisions between PCC meetings while the Halls Development and Management Group meets regularly to look both at maintenance matters and also the future development of the halls as a community resource.

Three members of the PCC sit on the deanery synod. This provides an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude and thanks to Mary Minchin for her service as PCC secretary since 1975. Over the course of the last few months, Mary has been progressively handing over duties to Sarah Barnes, Assistant Secretary.

Church Warden's property report

This report is required to include a statement on the fabric, goods and ornaments of the church and the general state of all parochial properties.

The Church and Churchyard

After a very long drawn out process, Hall Green Theatre Supplies were at last able to install our new audio visual system. There have been a few teething problems, but on the whole the project has been successful. An additional speaker has also been installed in the chancel. The cost of the new system was partly covered by a Transforming Church grant, with the remainder coming from the Chester Legacy Fund. We continue to have issues with the sound system in church, but with the help of Hall Green Theatre Supplies we are slowly resolving many of those issues. We are not sure whether any part of the existing sound system will need to be replaced, should that be necessary a member of our congregation has kindly offered to help to cover the cost. Whilst we encourage people to access services by using the AV system, there are service sheets and hymn books available for those who prefer not to.

There are several areas in the church that need to be redecorated; most of the problems have been caused by water ingress, whether because of leaking stop cocks or missing pointing. The problems causing the water ingress have been largely solved with the exception of the area next to the lectern which needs further investigation.

The church boiler was serviced at the end of the autumn, we continue to have intermittent problems with the boiler and we may need to replace it.

The organ is well maintained and both the organ and piano are regularly tuned, as are the pianos in the Chatterton and Church halls.

Whilst the grassy areas in the churchyard are regularly maintained, we must thank a small group of volunteers who help to look after the memorial gardens and flower beds. These volunteers give freely of their time and we are thankful for them. We also thank our Brownie Guides who found time in their busy programme to replant one of our larger flower beds.

There is a small but faithful group of people who work hard to make sure our church is somewhere that is ready to welcome those who need it, we thank those who clean our church, look after the church linen, polish the silver and brasswork and those who act as vergers.

As always, special thanks go to June Hobbs and the flower team, the arrangements in church give so much pleasure, not only to those who visit our church but also those who are able to appreciate them through pictures posted on facebook. They have been liked as far away as Canada!

Church Hall and Coffee Lounge

The lighting in church hall has been replaced. The church hall boiler has been serviced and is in good order. There have been some issues with the heating, mainly due to misuse by users.

The locks on the cupboards in church house have been changed. As we now store food for the Foodbank, regular pest control checks are carried out. We have changed our cleaning contractors and energy suppliers.

There are problems with failing tarmac on the path between the car park and Chatterton hall. Grants are being sought to replace the path.

The re-plastering and decorating of the coffee lounge has been completed.

Chatterton Hall

Following successful grant applications by the JMC to Veolia and Yardley Great Trust, the metal windows in Chatterton hall were replaced with UPVC double glazing and the hall was redecorated.

The JMC have paid for minor works to the roof, there is an ongoing issue of leaves and pine needles blocking the drainage systems for the roof and leading to problems with damp. The JMC have offered to seek funding for any more extensive works that may be identified.

The boiler, flue and gas pipework have all been checked following a reported smell of gas. There was no leak found and all the tests carried out on the flue were negative. An extractor fan has been repaired since which no smells of gas have been reported.

40 Studland Road

Repairs have been carried out to the heating system. The annual gas safety inspection was carried out and following some minor repairs a safety certificate issued.

Portable Appliance Testing has been carried out across the whole site. The fire alarms have been tested. Fire extinguishers have been checked and certified, used fire blankets have been replaced.

Thanks to everyone who supported a very successful Christmas Present to the Church “buy a chair appeal” due to the overwhelming response, we were able to replace the chairs in both Church house and the Chatterton hall.

As always, thanks go to all those who give so generously of their time and skills to help maintain our church and halls. In particular we thank Richard Hyde and Jeff Kimberley who carry out a significant amount of the maintenance and repair work that is needed.

Financial Review

Total receipts on unrestricted funds, excluding Gift Aid recovered and other exceptional items were £61,532. This compares with a figure of £65,013 for the previous year, a decrease of £3,481. The majority of this fall in income can be attributed to unrestricted planned giving which fell by £2,850 (7.46%) during the year. This reduction is not totally unexpected as the number of regular attendees continues to reduce as older members pass away coupled with a gradual tail off from those ‘less regular’ who supported the Funding Programme of some ten years ago.

Expenditure on unrestricted funds for the year was £74,337, a reduction of £15,348 year on year. Most of this can be accounted for by the lack of major repairs to the Church, Halls and Church Yard, as well as a reduction in the costs of support staff.

The net result for the year was an excess of expenditure over receipts of just over £2,300 leaving a balance carried forward 31st December on unrestricted funds of £72,259.

Income from Church Hall lettings exceeded expenditure for the first time in many years due to a combination of additional one off lettings, low levels of maintenance expenditure and an adjustment in our gas and electricity payments. The net expenditure in the Chester Legacy Fund of £4,875 represents the cost to the Church of the AV System and the £3,777 income to the Comfort Fund comes from donations to the Christmas Gift / Buy the Church a Chair Appeal

Reserves Policy

The PCC maintains a Reserve Policy, details of which can be found later in this report. The cash balances held in unrestricted funds more than satisfy this target.