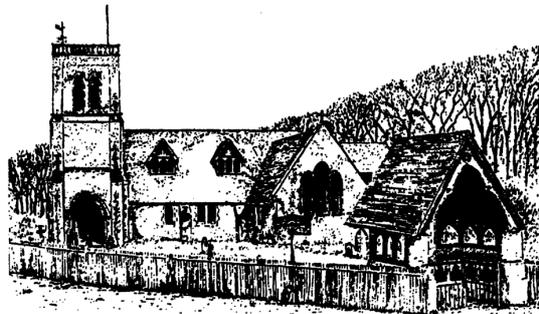


The Parish of St Lawrence, Seal

www.sealstlawrence.org.uk

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Annual Report for 2018 of St Lawrence Church (Seal Chart)

INTRODUCTION

The Parochial Church Council ('PCC') has the responsibility of working with the Vicar, Rev'd Serena Willoughby and to further the mission of the Church in the parish in all its pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical aspects. It also has responsibilities in relation to the church building and fabric, including the churchyard and the War Memorial.

1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE PCC, COMMITTEES AND OFFICERS

The members of the PCC are either ex officio or are elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting ('APCM') in accordance with the Church Representation Rules.

During the year from the 2018 APCM the members of the PCC were:

The Vicar The Revd Serena Willoughby Chair

Reader Mrs. Gretel Wakeham

Churchwardens Mr Ron Drury

Mr Rob Otto

Deanery Synod Representatives Mr Peter Wharton and Mr Ron Drury

Elected Members:

Mr John Morris(Secretary), Mr Andy Rowell(Treasurer), Mrs Rosemary Attenborough, Mr John Carlisle (to February 18, 2019), Mrs Hilary Denby-Jones, Mr Eric Jackson, Mrs Sally Rees, Mrs Sue Ward, Mrs Teresa Anderson (co-opted).

Committees: there is a Standing Committee made up of the Vicar, the Reader, the Churchwarden, the Treasurer and the Secretary, which meets between meetings of the PCC as necessary to conduct any urgent or non-controversial business and draw up PCC meeting agendas.

The Council has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 to have due regard to House of Bishop's guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Mrs Kate Clark is the Parish Children's Representative and Miss Katie Hodder is Parish Disclosure Officer. Mrs Hilary Denby-Jones is the Vulnerable Adults Officer and from March 5 2019 became Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Mr Clive McLintock is responsible for the electoral roll.

Bankers and auditors: The PCC's bankers are CAF Bank Ltd, West Malling. The church accounts are independently examined. The PCC is a charity excepted from registration with the Charity Commission.

2. THE ELECTORAL ROLL, ATTENDANCES AND REGISTER

As at the 2018 APCM there were 82 members on the Church Electoral Roll (as compared with 83 in 2016 and 2017, 85 in 2015, 87 in 2014, 84 in 2013). .

Usual Sunday attendance, taking the month of October 2018 as the benchmark, was 33 adults and 2 children (31 and 3 respectively in 2017) but much larger congregations attended at major festivals.

Sunday School met 9 times during the year with an average attendance of 5 children, with attendance higher during school term time. There are 5-6 families with young children who regularly attend Sunday School and All Age Services.

In the 2018 calendar year there were 1 baptism, 1 marriage and 4 funerals.

3. REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The full PCC met four times in 2018 to oversee the mission of the church; in between those meetings the Standing Committee met four times. The main matters considered during the year were:

Stewardship and financial support for the church:

2018 was a very good year financially for the Church: increased income streams and reduced expenditure levels – underpinned by robust financial controls – led to a substantial and larger than predicted surplus of £4,700.

This result is built upon the platform of solid income and event generation allied to control of costs. The overall strength of our giving income is evidenced in many of our key year-to-year comparisons. Planned Giving increased by 9% (£19,578 vs. £17,983 in 2017) and donations also rose (£1077 to £2154 in 2018). Declines occurred in Church plate collections (£3035 to £2357) and Gift Day income. (£5050 to £4135), but these still performed to anticipated levels. Wedding and Funeral income remained steady at £1,883 (£1,658 in 2017).

Our Fundraising activities have been very strong, both for internal and external causes. The Dragonboat once again proved the mainstay of our external fund raising efforts (£4,800 of a total £8,071 raised), whilst events, concerts and the 150th anniversary celebrations raised a very impressive £7,151 for the Church (£4151 in 2017).

Levels of expenditure were largely flat or reduced. The Diocesan Parish Contribution rose to the agreed offer of £19,903 (from £19,109 in 2017), but the previous year's Vicarage improvement works were reflected in a very low annual maintenance figure of £1,789. The lack of rainfall also helped keep Churchyard maintenance costs down (£1100 vs. £1,816 in 2017). Church upkeep did rise by £1,000 to £5,127, but much of this is attributable to an incident regarding a faulty heating timer, so hopefully will lessen in 2019's figures.

Regarding our investments, our equity-based reserves mirrored a mixed (and ultimately negative) year for stock markets: Church of England Investment Funds fell slightly from 2017's £88,513 to £87,186 in 2018, but dividends from investments did hold steady (£3,034 to 2017's £2,947). The cash-based Church Repair Fund was increased by £500 to £17,752.

Reserves Policy:

It is PCC policy to maintain a balance of unrestricted funds that equates to approximately six months unrestricted payments to cover emergency situations that may arise from time to time. The cash balance in unrestricted funds at the year-end comfortably exceeded this target. These, together with other fund balances, are invested with the CBF Church of England Deposit and Investment Funds as well as in a deposit account with CAF Bank Ltd.

Raising funds and charitable giving:

The St Lawrence Finance Sub-Committee continued to oversee and help organise successful fund raising activities to support both Church and charity funds.

It only requires a relatively small increase in unexpected Church expenditure to cause havoc with the preparation of a meaningful budget. We are indebted to the Treasurer for factoring in most contingencies and providing guidance throughout the year.

Dragon Boat Racing has again featured strongly, enabling us to make significant donations to four selected local and overseas charities. This year, contributions (of £950 each) were made to Sevenoaks Area Youth Trust (SAYT), The Kenward Trust, Children in Distress and the RDM India project.

The Kenward Trust offers drug and alcohol awareness training as well as training in a range of life skills.

Children in Distress is the most recent charity to receive our support. It pioneered the opening of paediatric hospices in the Balkans with the opening of St Lawrence, Cernavoda for infants affected by HIV and Aids. Volunteer nurses and carers from the UK provided help initially, when local staff were too frightened to provide love and care.

Our contribution to Rural Development Movement in Parakkanvilai, India helped to keep a beacon of hope shining in a very poor rural area.

In addition to contributing food parcels in support of the Sevenoaks food bank, we now make a £40 monthly financial contribution to this charity.

Proceeds from the Christingle service and carol singing in the parish were donated to The Children's Society, totalling £711.46.

Our Carol Service collection totalled £433 and was split equally between the local Scott Project and the Bridge Trust. The Hospice in the Weald received support from SSL Stitchers group who gave up time during lent to knit and sell Easter chicks.

The Remembrance Day collection raised £597 for the Royal British Legion, and a £250 donation was made to the Church Army.

The annual Christian Aid envelope collection was again organised around the parish and raised £1091. Our close links with St Lawrence School continued with the purchase of bibles for school leavers and monthly £30 donations towards the Ash classroom appeal.

A bridge afternoon raised £860, which was shared equally between Demelza House and church funds. Specific church-only fundraising activities that included the 150th Anniversary celebrations, the Harvest Supper, auction and raffle, the Christmas Fayre and another highly successful Christmas concert raised £5,500!

As we reflect on a good year of giving and receiving, we should remember Matthew:

“how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him”.

The Deanery Synod:

Sevenoaks Deanery Synod met twice during 2018.

Agenda items included a presentation on the Homelessness Crisis in Kent - "The One Week Without" campaign, and the work of Porchlight.

As well as reports from General Synod, Deanery Synod also discussed The Archbishop's Council paper on Parish Resources - Giving and Millennials.

Diocesan Synod elections took place during the summer.

The main agenda item during our autumn meeting was a presentation by Reverend Richard Williams, Diocesan Director of Finance, regarding the proposed Indicative Offer scheme for payments by Parishes to the Diocese.

Towards the end of the year, Martin Booth announced his plans to retire as Area Dean. Subsequently, Revd Chris Smith has taken over the role.

Parish mission and beyond:

St Lawrence Church's mission continues to church members, the people on the fringe of Church life and also extends beyond those who live in the parish. Ongoing work includes regular visiting of the sick and housebound, Holy Communion at home, including the regular "Party Girls" home Communion service and visiting those who are bereaved. Practical support is also given, as necessary, e.g. driving people to hospital appointments. Our parish mission also involves organising events that bring the community together: these range from concerts in the church, carol singing and the annual Harvest Supper. We also support the work of the Brownies, with whom we have close ties.

We had a special year with our 150th celebrations, a packed weekend of events to which many people came. This was in close collaboration with the school as they celebrated 150 years also. Please see separate report.

The Textile group, known as "The Stitchers" has an extensive mission beyond textiles for the church. These have included stitching, knitting and crocheting for a variety of charities, including Hospice in the Weald, Children in Distress, Crisis, Demelza House, Project Linus and St Thomas' neo natal unit.

This year as part of our mission outreach members of the congregation knitted sheep for a sheep trail which culminated in a special service on a Sunday morning. The uniqueness of each sheep created much enjoyment and fellowship as well as giving us the opportunity to attract families from the wider community for something to do in Half term. Please see report.

Please also see the report on the Centenary Weekend, a well-organised series of events to mark the end of the First World War.

The twice monthly prayer group continues in its mission of prayer for the wider world and for the local community. We are fortunate in having St Lawrence C of E Primary School next door and, as a church, we have been working on strengthening the already well-established links with the School. The Vicar is on the Governing body and the Headteacher is a regular member of the congregation, encouraging the school community to attend too. They have also performed as a school group in church. Several children from the school also attend the twice-termly Messy Church. There are now regular monthly services of Holy Communion for the Staff before the start of school as well as a new initiative called Coffee Croissants Communion, a termly service for parents and carers to attend after drop off at school, have breakfast and a short communion and prayer time. Before the school Harvest Festival service this year parents, grandparents and carers enjoyed breakfast in Church as the children arrived – it was a lovely occasion.

We now have a dedicated space on the weekly school newsletter to highlight church events, in particular Sunday School and Messy Church, and we are also able to send out the Sunday School newsletter and publicity flyers to the school community as required. We are raising our profile through posting details of events on the school Facebook page and via posters on the school noticeboard and school gate. Recent successful collaborations include the Christmas Fayre, where a significant proportion of volunteers and donors came from the school community, and an increased attendance by school families at the annual carol singing evening around the parish. The church community regularly supports school fundraising initiatives, including raffle ticket sales and donations to stalls. We are also working on initiatives to regularly update the church information section on the school website, encourage pupils to write articles for the parish magazine and to display art and school work in the church.

During the year we have continued to support the Sevenoaks Food Bank with a regular monthly donation. This we feel is an important part of our giving and mission.

We are fortunate in having a recently refurbished set of church bells and a dedicated band of ringers whose support is appreciated by the whole community.

United Benefice

We continue to forge and enjoy links with St. Margaret's Church through regular joint services, joint prayer meetings and shared social events. A joint Lent course was held with St. Margaret's, entitled "Finding a Voice" which was based on the film: The King's Speech. There were 14 participants who came to the course, subtitled Pudding and Penance!

There is a move to form a Benefice working group but this is in the early stages of discussion as a great deal happens naturally between the two Churches in our united Benefice and so we will see if we need to formalise it any further at present.

4. Special events

a.150th Anniversary of St Lawrence Church and School

The Church and School celebrated their 150th Anniversary with a series of activities over the weekend of June 15-17, 2018 which were enjoyed by parishioners, the local community, school pupils, former pupils and parents.

On Friday evening there was a display of St Lawrence School through the decades and refreshments on the school field.

The church was open all weekend for displays of current activities together with the history of the church illustrated through photographs and historical items which had been borrowed from Maidstone archives. The displays were augmented by beautiful flower arrangements.

A celebration quarter peal was rung by the St Lawrence bellringers.

On Saturday evening the church was full to capacity for an Anniversary concert given by musicians from the Royal College and Royal Academy of Music. A hog roast was served in the interval.

On Sunday The Ven Julie Conalty, Archdeacon of Tonbridge was the preacher at a service of Praise and Thanksgiving for 150 years of worship and service to the local community with music provided by an augmented choir.

Following the service a 30 minute video compiled by former St Lawrence Vicar Rev'd Michael Cooke was shown illustrating, through photographs and captions, the history of the church, of the school and the people associated with them. Background organ music was provided by Alex Trigg, St Lawrence's organist.

The celebrations finished with a Beating of the Bounds walk, followed by a picnic in the field.

b. First World War commemorations

To commemorate the centenary of the end of the First World War we held a weekend of events in the church, which brought together our congregation, local residents and our school community. Central to the weekend was the successful grant application for the There But Not There 2018 Armistice Project. Following the widespread acclaim of the placing of 51 transparent seated military figures in Penshurst Church over Remembrance 2016, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund created the There But Not There project to fund the costs of similar installations for schools, places of worship and charities across the country.

As a recipient of such a grant, it meant that St Lawrence Church was able to display 10 of these transparent silhouettes in church over the Armistice weekend. The aim of the project was to create representative figures for those names on local war memorials across the country, to raise awareness of the work of the Armed Forces and also to create a time for reflection, as part of the centenary commemoration.

We seated the figures amongst the pews, and they formed part of a wider community Remembrance project, involving St Lawrence School, St Lawrence Pre-School and the St Lawrence Brownie Pack as well as our church and local residents. St Lawrence School provided several displays on WW1 that the children had created, and also each child had painted a Remembrance stone with a poppy on it which lined the path up to the church for the weekend. St Lawrence Pre-School created their own poppy display which was put up in the porch of the church, and the St Lawrence Brownie pack too created a floral display and another poppy display that was on show in church. Other aspects to the project included the installation on the front of the church of over 100 large poppies – this attracted many visitors and walkers into the church, and created a big impact. In addition, working with local historian and author Matthew Ball, we were able to trace each war grave of those listed on our WW1 memorial, and also collate stories and research on several of the fallen, and their photographs, background and memorabilia were included on large presentation

boards in the church. We were able to contact the great nephew of Ernest Bailey, a member of our parish, and he spoke movingly at the Remembrance Service.

On the Friday afternoon the school children had their afternoon assembly and prayer time in church and were able to enjoy the installation together with the pre-school children who had also come to visit. Earlier in the week, Rev Serena had taken one of the silhouettes to the St Lawrence Brownie Pack meeting and had discussed the installation with the children. It meant that the installation and displays were accessed by people of all ages, in different ways, and brought so many people into the church.

On the Saturday morning we opened up the church for people to view the displays, and we served coffee and cake. Over 60 people attended, many not regular churchgoers, and all the displays were very well received.

The silhouettes had a busy weekend! On the Saturday evening they were also displayed as part of a Remembrance concert in St Mary's Kippington in Sevenoaks. They were returned in time for the Remembrance Service on Sunday, which was very well attended, the church taking double the usual takings on the collection plate.

c. Sheep Trail

In October we ran our second Lost Sheep Trail. An appeal went out to people in the parish and congregation for knitted sheep. They came flocking in, with some 99 eventually being hidden in and around the church. Children from the church, Messy Church, school and Brownies were invited to come along and hunt for as many lost sheep as possible. The Trail ran for three weeks and culminated in a special Sheep Service on 4 November, with each child who took part receiving a small "prize" in the form of a sheep pencil. After the service the sheep were rounded up and sold at the Christmas Fair.

John Morris

PCC Secretary

April 2019, on behalf of the PCC