

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Annual Meeting Documents 2017



Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Life's Charity					
for the Year to 31 December 2016					
Income Payments Account					
		2016			
				2015	
Restricted Funds					
Income receipts:					
Rent from 18 Norah Lane	£	8,127.61	£	6,500.00	
Bank interest from CAF Gold A/C	£	20.58	£	45.86	
		£	8,148.19	£	6,545.86
Other receipts:					
Refund of Walsingham Deposit	£	150.00	£	-	
Transfers	£	18,258.50	£	20,589.74	
		£	18,408.50	£	20,589.74
Total receipts		£	26,556.69	£	27,135.60
Charitable Expenditure:					
<i>1. Charitable Activities:</i>					
Annual Subscriptions	£	467.92	£	377.44	
Music Support	£	150.00	£	-	
Clergy retreat/Conference fees & Expenses	£	735.00	£	872.84	
Visiting Preachers' expenses	£	208.50	£	-	
IT Equipment - Church Office	£	-	£	3,390.06	
Books, Stationery, Printing for St John's	£	250.92	£	634.23	
Set up and Maintenance of St John's Website	£	867.35	£	886.80	
Training Course fees/support for Laity	£	373.10	£	1,035.60	
Drug Awareness Manuals - St George's School	£	-	£	179.00	
Advent Candles for St John's Junior Church	£	-	£	75.00	
Repairs/Update of Sound System at St John's	£	128.26	£	552.00	
Support for Christmas Day Lunch at St John's	£	-	£	87.00	
		£	3,181.05	£	8,089.97
<i>2. Support Costs:</i>					
Insurance for Investment Property	£	471.69	£	557.38	
Utilities No. 18	£	145.15	£	-	
Replacement equipment No. 18 Norah Lane	£	1,773.00	£	-	
Boiler Service	£	300.00	£	100.00	
Remedial work No. 18 Norah Lane	£	4,100.00	£	4,692.38	
		£	6,789.84	£	5,349.76
<i>3. Other Payments:</i>					
Return of deposit No. 18 Norah Lane	£	-	£	650.00	
Transfers	£	18,258.50	£	20,589.74	
Bank Charges	£	10.00	£	-	
		£	18,268.50	£	21,239.74
Total payments		£	28,239.39	£	34,679.47
Net receipts for year		-£	1,682.70	-£	7,543.87
Balance brought forward from previous year		£	16,873.93	£	24,417.80
Balance at end year		£	15,191.23	£	16,873.93
Investment Fund					
Statement of Assets and Liabilities at 31 December 2016					
		2016			
				2015	
Cash Funds					
Bank current account	£	500.00	£	500.00	
CAF Gold account	£	14,864.73	£	16,373.93	
Unpresented cheques	-£	173.50	£	-	
Total		£	15,191.23	£	16,873.93
Investment Assets					
3-bedroom, semi-detached house at 18 Norah Lane, Higham, Kent, which represents the permanent endowment of the Charity	£	145,000.00	£	145,000.00	

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William Rolfe's Charity

Annual Report for the year to 31 December 2016

William Rolfe's Charity, c/o The Vicarage, Hermitage Road, Higham, Nr Rochester, Kent, ME3 7NE, is registered with the Charity Commissioners (No 211689) and founded by will dated 5 January 1485, and comprised in Schemes of the Charity Commissioners of 23 October 1936 and 23 November 1989.

The Charity is administered by three trustees, who are the Vicar and Churchwardens of the Parish of Higham for the time being. The trustees are currently the Revd. Canon J F Southward, Mrs H Walker and Mrs V S Laurens. Mrs K A Haselden retired as Churchwarden and a trustee in April 2016. Mrs Walker was subsequently elected as Churchwarden, and therefore a trustee.

The object of the charity is to provide income towards defraying the cost of services formerly provided by the Parish Clerk in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Saint Mary and Saint John, Higham. If the income is not required for this purpose in any year, then the Trustees shall apply it for the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England in the Ecclesiastical Parish.

The endowment of the Trust is currently invested in No. 18 Norah Lane, Higham – a three-bedroom, semi-detached house, which continues to be let at a market rent.

At their meeting in June 2002, it was agreed by the Trustees that it should be the policy of the Trust to maintain its financial reserves at a sum of £2,650. This equated to the returnable security deposit of £650 paid by the previous tenant of No 18 Norah Lane, plus £2,000 to cover maintenance and any emergency repairs. Following the trustees' decision at the end of 2015 to employ the services of a letting agent for No. 18 Norah Lane, the tenants' deposit has become the responsibility of that agent. It was therefore agreed in March 2016 to reduce the level of reserves to £2,500 to cover maintenance and emergency repairs. This level of reserves was maintained during 2016.

The Trust's current and deposit accounts are held with the Charities Aid Foundation, West Malling, Kent. Funds in the Trust's current account are kept at a level of £500, with any surplus being automatically transferred to the deposit account, so that the greater proportion of the funds accrues interest.

Following the departure of the previous tenant of No. 18 Norah Lane in November 2015, Home from Home Property Management Services took over as the Trust's letting agents and carried out a full refurbishment of the property, including checks to comply with current legislation, at a total cost of £8,100. New tenants moved into the property at the end of January 2016. At the end of 2016, the business of Home Property Management Services was acquired by Amax Estates, based in Gravesend. The accounts for 2016 show an increase in the insurance value of the property to £145,000, as advised by the Trust's underwriters and in consultation with local builders. As the endowment of the Trust is invested in the property at No. 18 Norah Lane, it is the Trustees' responsibility to keep this in good repair, so that a regular income can be provided to assist the Church in its efforts to benefit the Parish.

The Trust supports the standard of worship offered at St. John's by funding additional support at special services. In 2016 the Trust covered the cost of a cantor at the Easter Vigil and an organist and violinist/conductor at the annual carol service. Once again, the Trust funded the cost of expenses of visiting preachers during Lent and Advent, as it was felt that such preachers provided variety in the Church's outreach. A donation was also made to St Luke's, Gillingham, in recognition of the assistance given by Father Paul Matthias, their priest in charge, in helping to cover services during Father James Southward's absence on holiday or at conferences.

In the Summer, it was discovered that the transmitter for the body microphone – used at St John's by the celebrant during Solemn Mass/funerals/weddings, etc. – had been broken. As the microphone was considered to be a vital tool in the conduct of these services, the Trustees agreed to purchase a replacement.

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The Trust continues to fund the attendance of clergy at events outside the parish which are helpful to them in supporting their work in the parish. This year, these included the fees and expenses of Father James' attendance at a priests' conference/pilgrimage, organised by the Federation of Catholic Priests, at Walsingham in October 2016, and a meeting of 'C' parish clergy with the Bishop of Richborough in November. The Trust has also paid the attendance fees for a further such meeting with the Bishop of Richborough to be attended in February 2017 by Father James and Mr Simon Walker, as parish ordinand.

To assist with the smoother administration of St John's annual pilgrimage to Walsingham, the Trustees agreed in 2015 to make a donation of £150 to be used to cover the yearly deposits on an on-going basis. However, it has been found that, owing to the changing ways that people were paying for the pilgrimage, it was proving too complicated to make best use of the 'rolling' deposit, and this has therefore been refunded to the Trust.

As part of the Trust's commitment to supporting church-related training in the parish, the Trustees have continued to fund the fees and expenses for attendance at courses. In the Summer, representatives from St John's attended a day of worship and study, lead by the Bishop of Richborough, at Canterbury Cathedral. The Trust covered the travel expenses for this group. Following the acceptance of Mr Simon Walker for ordination training, the Trustees agreed to fund the cost of books and expenses that might be incurred during his training. Junior Church leaders have also been sponsored to attend First Aid courses.

The Trust has continued support the maintenance costs of St John's website, which is an important development in St John's service to and contact with the wider community. As part of improvements to the website, an Easy Fund Raising page had been established to help raise funds. In order to publicise this more widely, the Trustees agreed to fund the professional production of flyers and posters.

The Trustees agreed again to fund the production, in conjunction with the Parish Council, of a full-colour Christmas leaflet to be delivered to every house in the parish, to replace the one previously produced in house.

Although the ancient church of St Mary is now maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust, the graveyard remains in the care of Higham PCC. The churchyard had become very overgrown in some parts but the PCC did not have funds or manpower to maintain it regularly. The Trustees had therefore offered, as a service to the parish in keeping the burial ground safe and accessible, to fund a programme of clearance of overgrown vegetation. Early in 2017, the Trust will again be assisting the PCC with the costs involved in the annual tree and hedge maintenance and clearance of vegetation in St Mary's Churchyard.

The Trustees have complied with their duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Charity Commission in exercising their powers or duties.

Valerie S Laurens

On behalf of the Trustees of William Rolfe's Charity

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

CHURCHWARDENS REPORT 2016

At the 2016 Annual Vestry Meeting, Mrs Val Laurens was elected to serve for a further year as Churchwarden. Mrs Kate Haselden, who had served as Churchwarden for 16 years, decided not to stand for re-election. At an extraordinary Vestry Meeting, held on 22nd May 2016, Mrs Helen Walker was also elected to serve as Churchwarden. The Churchwardens would like to thank everyone who has helped with the running of our parish church during the past year. It would not be possible to achieve so much without so many willing volunteers. New volunteers are always welcome, so, if you think you could help, please speak to one of the Wardens.

The major item of remedial work to St John's church building during 2016 has been that on the North Aisle Roof. The PCC took the decision, following advice from our architect, to go ahead with the installation of felting under the slates of the North Aisle roof. This was in order to combat the rainwater leaks experienced in this area, which were causing damage to the ceiling plaster, roof timbers and the internal decorations. A major fund-raising campaign took place in aid of this project and we were fortunate in securing grants from several charities. This project was carried out for us by Ellan Gray Contractors Ltd and started in July with the exterior work to install the felting. The contractors then moved inside to replace and paint those ceiling panels which had been damaged and loosened by rainwater. Originally it was thought that 2 panels would need replacing; in the end a total of 12 panels needed to be replaced. The entire project took much longer than had been estimated and was not completed until September. However, hopefully, we now have a watertight roof and safe ceiling to the North Aisle.

Other work to the interior of the church was mostly to increase security, safety and accessibility. Following the loss of a sum of money from the main safe in 2015, a safe for money only was installed in the Sacristy, plus additional, security cameras. To complete this work, an additional security light was added in the Sacristy in April 2016. Following advice from our insurers concerning the use of candles in church, a fire blanket was placed next to the connecting door to the Vestry Hall. A tablet computer, case and bracket have been purchased for the use of a congregation member who has difficulty in using service sheets, etc. Finally, the blue carpet to the Nave Aisle, which was very worn and becoming dangerous, has been removed. This has exposed the original Victorian tiles and improved the acoustics in the church. The tiles are basically in good condition but may need professional attention in the coming year to remove old sealant.

Work on the condition and safety of the Bell Tower has continued this year. Two fire extinguishers have been purchased for the Ringing Chamber. A state-of-the-art bell simulator has been installed by our Bell Tower maintenance team, which will mean that practices can be held virtually in silence, thus causing the minimum of disturbance to our neighbours. We are very grateful to the Kent County Association of Change Ringers, both for their advice on the maintenance of the tower and in training our ringers.

It became evident during the Autumn of 2015 that the flat roof of the Church Office and kitchen was in urgent need of renewal, when the storage cupboards in the lobby turned into a waterfall, following a heavy rainstorm. This work was generously carried out for us at cost by Mr Mark Fish of the Flat Roof Co. Kent Ltd. in July 2016, and funded by a donation from a parishioner. It may be necessary to carry out further remedial work in the Church Office during the coming year to address a worrying crack on the east wall, on which a 'tell-tale' has been placed on the advice of our architect.

Once again this year, St John's outreach work has been financially assisted by Rolfe's Charity. This has included the purchase of a replacement pack transmitter for the lapel microphone used by the celebrant at Mass.

Once again, St John's has been the recipient of some generous gifts during the year. Donations from family and friends have enabled us to arrange for the making of two decorative cloths for use under the War Memorial, in memory of Mrs J Kent, and two, gold high altar frontals in memory of Mrs E Choules and Mrs E Frier. We are grateful to Mrs T Joblin for her help in making these items, as well as re-working some old gold/cream riddle curtains into an altar frontal for the Lady Chapel, with matching tabernacle veil and pulpit fall. A white, Marian, semi-gothic chasuble was also purchased in memory of Mrs Choules and Mrs Frier. A donation from Mrs D Figg enabled the purchase of a selection of poly-cotton altar cloths for use around the church. As a parting gift to St John's, before leaving for the Order of the Resurrection at Mirfield, Mr S-M Trevithick presented St John's with a copy of the Holy Week Missal.

With funding from the bequest of the late Mr J Meldrum, the PCC again carried out general tree work and vegetation clearance in St Mary's Churchyard in January. Maintenance work on trees and shrubs also took place in St John's Churchyard in September. This was in addition to the considerable work already carried out on the flowerbeds on a regular basis by our volunteers. Once again, the south-west corner of the churchyard wall became the target of a passing vehicle and this was rebuilt for us at cost by Mr S Walker.

As is customary, St John's updated terrier and logbook will be available for inspection following the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Incumbent:

The Reverend Canon James F Southward

Principal Address:

The Vicarage
Hermitage Road
Higham
Rochester
Kent
ME3 7NE

Registered Charity No.: 1169926

Independent Examiner:

Natalie Harrison ACA FCCA CTA
Beak Kemmenoe
Chartered Accountant
1-3 Manor Road
Chatham
Kent
ME4 6AE

Banks:

Barclays Bank PLC
Dartford Group
Gravesend

National Savings Bank
Glasgow
Scotland

Santander PLC
Merseyside

CAF Bank Ltd
West Malling

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Kent

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Report on the proceedings of the Council

Aim and Purpose

St. John's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, the Reverend Canon James F. Southward, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

Objectives and Activities

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to use and worship at our church and to become part of our parish community at St. John's. The PCC collaborates with the incumbent in decisions made about acts of worship particularly with a view to involving the groups and organisations that operate within the parish. Our pattern of worship is hinged on the daily celebration of Mass and Morning and Evening prayer. Our worship puts faith into practice through prayer, scripture and Sacrament.

Public Benefit

When planning our activities for the year, the incumbent and PCC have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In particular, we try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the Gospel
- Provision of pastoral care for both those who live within the parish and non-resident worshippers
- Leading our Church into Growth – Missionary and outreach work

To facilitate this work, it is important that we maintain the fabric of the Church of St. John and its churchyard and the churchyard of St. Mary's, Higham.

Administrative Information

St. John's Church is situated in Higham, Kent. It is in the Deanery of Strood: part of the Church of England Diocese of Rochester, and under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Richborough.

The PCC is a body corporate (PCC Powers and Measure 1956, Church Representation Rules 2006) and a charity registered with the Charity Commission.

PCC members who have served during 2016 are:

Ex Officio:

Incumbent	The Revd. Canon James Southward	Chair
Churchwardens	Mrs Valerie Laurens	Vice-Chair/Acting Hon. Secy. until April 2016
	Mrs Kate Haselden	Resigned April 2016
	Mrs Helen Walker	Elected May 2016
	Mr Simon Walker	Parish Reader

Representatives on the Deanery Synod:

Mrs Kim Wood	
Mr Shaun-Michael Trevithick	Resigned May 2016
Mr Christopher Hanson	Elected May 2016

Elected Members:

Mrs Julie Aldous	
Mr Ken Aldous	Served until April 2016
Mrs Tricia Baker	
Mr Edward Hance	Hon. Treasurer
Mr D Croker	Elected July 2016
Mrs E Croker	Elected April 2016
Mrs K Haselden	Elected April 2016
Mrs T Joblin	
Mrs Tessa Packer	Vulnerable Adults Representative
Mrs Linda Peterson	Served until April 2016
Mrs Carole Rough	Elected April 2016
Mrs Ann Utton	Electoral Roll Officer & Stewardship Recorder
Mrs Helen Walker	Assistant Treasurer/Churchwarden from May 2016

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Co-opted Members:

Mr. Dudley Clark
Mrs Liz Croker

Children's Representative/Resigned from PCC July 2016
Website Manager/Elected from April 2016

Recruitment and appointment of New Trustees

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

Induction and training of New Trustees

All new members of the PCC are mentored by serving members and are advised of their duties and responsibilities.

Committees

To manage its time in an effective way, the PCC operates several sub-committees, which meet as appropriate throughout the year. The Incumbent is an ex officio member of all committees and one or both Churchwardens sit on most committees. Committees have the power to co-opt non-PCC members for a specified period of time as appropriate.

Standing Committee: is the only committee required by law. It has power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council. The Churchwardens are ex officio members and usually the Secretary, Treasurer and one other PCC member. This should equate to about one third of the PCC.

Finance Committee: oversees the general financial dimension of the work of St. John's by monitoring income and expenditure and preparing budgets for future expenditure. The committee usually comprises the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Stewardship Recorder and both Churchwardens.

Planned Giving Committee: is responsible for the co-ordination of the annual review of Planned Giving, which takes place during February and discusses matters relating to charitable and missionary giving.

Social Committee: is responsible for the organisation of various fund raising events throughout the year, refreshments after special services and any other social aspects of life at St. John's to bring together our Church and our community.

Working Party to discuss Policy Issues: was established to ensure that matters which require a standard response to any possible enquiries are agreed by the Vicar and the PCC, e.g. baptism, burial, St. Mary's Church and Churchyard, marriage, blessings, St. George's School, content in principle/management of St John's website, etc.

Social Media & Communications Committee: was established to co-ordinate and oversee all aspects of media used by St. John's as tools in furthering the Church's work in the Community.

Volunteers

Members of the PCC act in a voluntary capacity and very much rely on the assistance of people outside of the Council. It has not been possible to quantify the value of volunteers.

Church Attendance

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on 17th April 2016 it was reported that the number of names on the Electoral Roll remained at 97.

Sunday attendance of adults, together with the number of communicants, has fallen slightly over the year due to deaths and illness. The previous noticeable decline in the number of children continues to be a problem, and weekly attendance numbers remain erratic. Daily Mass continues to be offered. Some Masses are only supported by those who live **OUTSIDE** the village but do not attend on Sundays! All-age services on Mothering Sunday, and Harvest Thanksgiving were not particularly well supported this year; the Remembrance Sunday Mass has received a better response from the uniformed organisations this year.

Achievements and Performance

A total of 6 PCC meetings took place between January and December 2016 on a bi-monthly basis with an average of 12 members in attendance. There have been 3 Extraordinary Meetings during the year.

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The Focus on Renewal and Growth Group was established in late 2013 by the Incumbent, as a 'think-tank' to support him in considering new or different ideas for worship, outreach and care both in our Church and the wider community.

Episcopal Care: Following a reorganisation of responsibilities early in 2015, St John's has moved from the care of the Bishop of Fulham to that of the Bishop of Richborough. We were happy to welcome Bishop Norman to St John's to celebrate a Baptism and Confirmation Mass in June. Following on from the Church of England's decision to ordain female bishops, the PCC gave considerable time to considering the way forward for St John's under the new arrangements. Formal application was made to the Bishop of Rochester in 2015 to ask for arrangements for episcopal care to be made in accordance with the House of Bishop's Declaration on the ministry of Bishops and Priests. We have not received a reply to date. However, Bishop Norman has been made an Assistant Bishop on the Diocese which meets our situation in part.

Worship and Prayer: The daily celebration of Mass continues to form our main act of worship at St. John's. Following suggestions from the Focus on Renewal and Growth group in 2014, we have continued to offer a range of services that our community might find beneficial and spiritually fulfilling. 'Holy Hours' before the Blessed Sacrament have continued to be held on the third Saturday of each month, and at varying times during Lent and Advent. An additional Sunday Mass at 11.00 a.m., held on the fourth Sunday of each month was abandoned due to lack of support. A healing ministry is offered during Mass on the second Saturday of each month. The opportunity to request weekly intercession and thanksgiving prayers has continued to be made available. The chance to light individual, votive candles in memory of deceased loved ones on All Souls Day proved to be very popular.

As well as our regular services, we enable the wider community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of life's journey. We have celebrated 9 Baptisms and 2 Marriages in our Church and have led 21 funerals for the Community. While the PCC still feels Baptism is an event at which the whole Church should be present and should continue to be celebrated during the Sunday Parish Mass, candidates have been offered the option of group Baptism at 11:00 on specific Sundays during the course of 2016. The uptake for these was more this year than in 2015.

Music: We do not have a contracted Organist. However, St. John's remains very fortunate indeed in having the services of Mr Douglas McIlwraith, Head of Music at King's School, who plays the organ and works with the Singing Group whenever other commitments permit. We are also thankful to others who have helped us by playing the organ at services.

Mission and Evangelism has continued to be at the forefront of the PCC's discussions, aided and supported by the FORAG group. The Monthly Prayer Cycle continues to be used, ensuring that every road within the village is prayed for along with village organisations. We have also continued with the monthly Coffee and Conversation sessions which provide a meeting place on a Saturday morning for anyone in the village wishing to get out of the house, meet/make friends and have a good chat. Lent Lunches have again been held on Saturdays in Lent 2016, raising money to support Christian Aid.

A Christmas Lunch was held, for the third year running, in the Vestry Hall on Christmas Day 2016 to provide a place for those members of the church and the wider village who might otherwise be on their own to gather for friendship and food.

There continue to be those from among the wider congregation who serve the village community on the Parish Council, in the Women's Institute, cooking at and driving for the weekly Age UK Lunch Club; where many of the volunteers are members of St. John's. In these ways, the people of God and the church of Christ are working for the benefit of the entire community

Our Study Group, M4, has continued to meet on the first **M**onday of the month, for **M**ass, **M**unch and **M**use. During Lent and Advent, the group met on a weekly basis.

Following the success of this event in previous years, a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols was held on the last Sunday in Advent. Once again, this event was well attended and drew in a number of participants from outside the usual Congregation.

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Parish Representative to the Cathedral: The PCC is grateful to Mr Roger Hill who, although having decided to stand down as a council member in April 2015, has agreed to continue as our Parish Representative, attending meetings at Rochester Cathedral and reporting back. He continues to receive fairly regular communications from the Cathedral concerning events, etc. that are taking place or planned. These communications usually contain a poster or flyer which is displayed on the church notice board(s). The Revd. Cannon Dr Phillip Hesketh previously acting Dean and Cannon Pastor at the Cathedral was appointed new Dean in March 2016.

Children and Youth work: All activities for the children and young people throughout the year are approved by the PCC and subject to the usual permission being granted. All volunteers working with children require the approval of the PCC and are DBS checked, where necessary.

Junior Church has continued on a weekly basis during Sunday Mass thanks to its loyal team of leaders. There have been a small number of regular children attending, but unfortunately there have been times with just leaders in attendance. A group of teenagers and over-twenties (TnT) was formed at the end of 2015. The anticipated monthly meetings have not happened. They meet on an ad hoc basis.

Higham Primary School has continued to make use of our church for Christmas and Easter events and both Higham Primary and Gads Hill School have made use of St. John's as an instrument in the teaching of Christianity during Religious Education.

Social Committee: This group continues to organise food following major feasts and solemnities, to facilitate, encourage and foster a greater ministry of welcome and hospitality. This year fund-raising events were organised for Harvest Thanksgiving, Burns Night and St. George's Day.

Stewardship Committee: This committee continued to produce their planned giving appeal in the same format as previous years by distributing personally addressed packs to regular members of the Congregation. They have also provided a recommended plan for the PCC's charitable giving for 2016.

The Working Party on Policies: The Working Party on Policies met to discuss a policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders as required by the Diocesan guidelines. The proposed policy was subsequently agreed by the full PCC.

The Vestry Hall continues to be used by the wider community for family celebratory events, for outreach groups, and others such as W.I. and Friends of St. Mary's for special meetings. We have regular craft groups and an Icon group who use the facilities, as well as the hall being used for study groups and church events which the wider community are encouraged to attend. Due to some leaking to the flat roof of the Church Office and Vestry Hall kitchen in 2015, repairs were carried out and completed in June 2016. The contractor offered his labour for free only charging for materials.

No. 17 Hermitage Road: The PCC are grateful to the Revd. Canon Allan Buik. The presence of an Honorary Assistant Priest in Higham is essential in assisting Father James with daily services and hopefully further and continued outreach to the Parish. Since our last report, there have been no extensive refurbishments undertaken to No. 17, apart from running repairs and a repair to the shower, electrics and stopcock.

St. Mary's Church and Churchyard: Once again, 4 services were held at St. Mary's Church during the year. The continued programme of vegetation clearance, to keep the Churchyard accessible to the community and any visitors, has continued, funded by the legacy of the late Mr Meldrum. Unfortunately, the new double-fronted notice board has not yet materialised and the PCC is pursuing this matter with the Churches Conservation Trust, as the lack of a board is hindering communication in this area of the village.

North Aisle Roof: Following an intensive fund-raising programme, which included a Fun Day in September 2015, a Gift Day in October 2015 and appeals to grant-making charities, sufficient money was raised for this project. Under-felting and re-tiling to the North Aisle Roof were carried out and completed in September 2016.

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Bell Tower: Our group of bell ringers continues to improve and practise, aided by training from the Kent County Association of Change Ringers. An electronic bell ringing simulator system was purchased enabling the bell ringers to practice with more flexibility. Apart from when the bells are rung up and rung down, the bell ringers will be able to hear the bells via a laptop computer but local neighbours will not. The simulator was paid for by a grant from Kent County Association of Change Ringers. The installation of the bell simulator is expected to be completed in January 2017.

The Financial Review

Finance remains a major item on the PCC's agenda. It is increasingly difficult to stay within budget. 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 approximately three months' unrestricted expenditure. This provides sufficient funds to cover administration, maintenance and support costs and to respond to emergency situations. Unrestricted funds were maintained at this level.

Away-Giving: In the past, it has been the policy of the PCC to work towards being able to give away to charitable causes a sum equal to 10% of our disposable income, less expenses beyond our control, e.g. Parish Share, Stipend, Church Repair Fund and Restricted Funds. However, following advice from the PCC, it was agreed at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2015 that, given the growing trend over the last few years for the day-to-day accounts to be in deficit at the end of the year, this should be reduced to 5% of our disposable income, less expenses beyond our control. This alteration to the policy was adhered to in 2016.

The four Charities nominated for 2015 are listed below. Each was allotted the following sum during 2016:

1. Higham Youth Club - £600
2. Bishop of Richborough's Discretionary Fund - £100
3. Diocese of Guyana - £600
4. Rochester Diocese - £500

In addition to this, £1,323 was sent to Christian Aid for their work with Syrian refugees as a result of Lent Lunches and 'fines' during Lent and fund-raising at Harvest Thanksgiving.

Over the Christmas period, £170 was raised from a variety of initiatives and this was sent to Gravesend House of Mercy for homeless young people.

Risk Management

It is the PCC's intention to identify the major risks which impact on the work of the Church in the Parish. We already have in place a Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, a policy on the Recruitment of Ex-offenders, a set of financial procedures, a grievance procedure for employees and a Health & Safety Policy. Health and safety risks are also monitored on an on-going basis and are dealt with as they are identified.

The Council has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 to have due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The PCC has appointed Officers to deal with the requirements of the Disclosure and Barring Service, Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection.

The Diocesan Child Protection Policy: Mr Dudley Clark continued in his role as the Parish Children's Representative.

The Diocesan Vulnerable Persons Policy: Mrs. T. Packer undertook the duties and responsibilities as Parish Vulnerable Person's Representative.

Disclosure and Barring Service: Mr Shaun Trevithick resigned from his role as Lead Recruiter for the Disclosure and Barring Service in April 2016. Mrs C Rough was then elected Lead Recruiter during an Extraordinary meeting held on 17th April 2016.

Mrs Wendy Hance carried on in her role as Second Lead Recruiter until she resigned in November 2016. Mrs Catherine Ody has agreed to take on the role as Second Lead Recruiter.

There is a standing DBS item on the PCC agenda, and the PCC receives regular updates from Mrs C Rough. Members of the PCC are looking into updating their safeguarding training in 2017

Health and safety: We have a CCTV system to help minimise the risk of leaving the Church building unlocked during the day. An asbestos check and a fire risk analysis on the church buildings have been

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completed and recorded. Fire evacuation procedure is outlined on occasion to the congregation and large groups, and there are signs and notices on display. Full details of this procedure are also given to organisations using the church building for events. All Sidesmen are aware of the procedure. Maintenance of fire extinguishers and PAT testing of electrical items is carried out on an annual basis. A full electrical inspection takes place every five years.

Policies: The PCC has agreed and recorded local policies regarding burials, baptisms and marriages, the use of St Mary's Church and Churchyard and St John's Churchyard, which are additional to the Diocesan Regulations. Local policies have also been agreed regarding the signature by the Incumbent of application forms for entrance and free travel to St George's school, and the use of social media. Also policies regarding the personal safety of lone workers and legacies to St John's are in place.

Sarah Wright
Hon. Secretary

Rev. Canon James F Southward
Vicar of Higham and Rector of Merston

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Deanery Synod Report 2016 – 2017

Strood Deanery is a group of parishes working in collaboration with the Bishop, Diocesan Officers, Area Dean and other members of the Deanery to forward the mission of the Church. The Synod is a helpful mechanism for the communication of information both up and down the Church's hierarchical structure. The Parish's Deanery Synod representatives are Kim Wood and Christopher Hanson (replacing Shaun-Michael Trevithick in May 2016)

On 3rd March 2016 at Hoo St Werburgh a presentation was given by representatives of WHOO CARES, a Community Interest Company with the intention of addressing the concerns of people on the Peninsula including Social Isolation and care.

On 4th July 2016, at St Francis Church, Kristin Stephenson of the Bible Society, spoke of that organisation's work in bringing the Bible to life both for people in the UK and abroad. This involves translations of the Bible in many languages and formats. The Diocesan Synod report focused on the financial situation facing the Diocese, and the steps being taken.

At All Saints Church Allhallows, on 18th October 2016 Suzanne Carlsson, Co-ordinator for Spirituality in the Diocese, addressed the synod on the topics of her spiritual journey and her work as Co-ordinator for Spiritual Direction. Issues in the Diocese and Church more broadly were discussed including the delayed appointment of the Bishop of Tonbridge and the approaching General Synod. The forthcoming visit by Bishop James to the Deanery was discussed. Brother Fabian's being clothed as a Novice was raised, as many there remember him as this Parish's Deanery Synod representative.

Area Dean, Revd. David Green is now moving on to other areas of ministry and will be replaced by Revd. Sharon Copestake.

Mr. C. Hanson