

CHRIST CHURCH LEWES (URC and METHODIST)

ANNUAL REPORT 1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018



The Methodist Church 

Made to the Annual Church Meeting on Sunday April 8 2018

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Interim Moderator's Report

I have been interim moderator for Christ Church Lewes since your minister Rev John Gordon moved to Banstead in June 2017. In that time, we have completed a Local Ministry and Mission Review, put together a living document or snapshot of the church as it is now and produced a church profile. Obviously the other two churches within the pastorate have done the same exercise and all three churches are now praying and searching for a new minister.

The moderator of the Southern Synod has been busy on our behalf sending the profiles out to clergy seeking a call to a new pastorate but without success at the moment. But the search goes on and as I write this report another minister will be receiving the details of our three churches and we pray that this will bear fruit.

In the meantime church life has to go on and I would like to thank all the members of the church council especially Neil Fisher in his role as church secretary and Lindsay Frost as Admin Secretary, who put in many hours of hard work to complete the church profile. I would also like to give a huge thank you to all the church members who are working so hard during this time of interregnum.

I have been privileged to have been involved as your interim moderator and will do my best to complete the work before I finally retire in the autumn. But if, of course, the search continues after that time another person will be brought in to complete the task.

I look forward to leading worship here by- monthly until August and will continue to pray for the whole pastorate as we seek God's will for His church in this area.

Every blessing

Rev Jim Thorneycroft

Secretaries' report

2017 has been a difficult year for Christ Church. Our Minister, Rev. John Gordon, left unexpectedly in June 2017. We were very sad to lose John and Alison and will always be grateful for their work at Christ Church since 2010. We wish them well in John's new ministry at Banstead and at Christchurch, Walton-on-the-Hill in Surrey.

Since that time, we have not had a Minister, although we have had the welcome assistance of the CSUA, who have appointed an Interim Moderator, Rev. Jim Thorneycroft. Jim has been extremely supportive over recent months, both as a link to the CSUA and in pastoral work in our church. The process of recruiting a new Minister has begun through the CSUA. We worked quickly to put a Local Ministry and Mission Review (LMMR), and a Pastorate Profile, in place so that the recruitment process could begin as soon as possible. The LMMR decided that Christ Church should share a minister with Cross Way LEP and Chyngton Methodist Church, both of which are in Seaford (about 12 miles from Lewes)

In addition, we have also lost a number of prominent and active church members through death and relocation during the year. Many of these were stalwart members, who contributed greatly to the life of the church over the years. In particular, we remember the passing of Rev. Geoffrey Whitfield, Peter Cane, John Phillips and Margaret Townend.

Whilst we have missed our own dedicated Minister over recent months, and have fewer active members, the church has not stood still. It is good to record a number of successful initiatives:

- we have changed our pattern of worship to experiment with a new “**Messy Sunday**” service each month offering breakfast, craft activities and worship. This has attracted increasing numbers of young families to the church .It has now been consolidated into a regular feature of the church calendar and continues to grow. “Messy Sunday” is in addition to the “Messy Church” sessions we continue to run in school holidays and half terms
- Since April 2017, we have been hosting a new food bank at Christ Church every Monday (**Fitzjohn’s Food Bank**), which offers food packages, help and advice, to needy local families. We have supported the setting up and running of the food bank in a number of ways. This is detailed in an extended report by Helen Chiasson towards the end of this annual review.
- **Christ Church Tots** welcomes pre-school children and their carers for a morning session every Friday in term time. This strengthens our links with young families in the local community and can act as a “feeder” into other church activities
- our “**Holiday Club**” for school children from 5-11 – “Polar Explorers” - ran for four days in August 2017. In the absence of a Minister, we worked closely with the Brighton & Hove City Mission on the Holiday Club and will aim to develop this relationship further in the future
- our “**Think Tank**” sessions offer speakers and discussions on a wide variety of contemporary issues – religious, social,

economic, environmental and scientific - and attract a diverse audience, some of whom would not normally come to a church activity

- we have raised £2,000 for our 2017 overseas charity, **Rwanda Aid**, with the funds allocated for a project to assist street children in south-west Rwanda. Our home charity for 2017 was the **Bevern Trust**, which assists people with profound disabilities in Sussex, their families and carers. Again, we raised £2,000. Special Sunday morning services were held to launch fund raising, with representatives from the charities speaking at Christ Church. Our **Christian Aid Week** collections in the Wallands area of Lewes raised almost £1,500. All three charity collections were supplemented by Gift Aid donations
- we have reviewed our **safeguarding policy** for children and adults, and followed this up with new and refresher training in July 2017
- we have reviewed our **pastoral care** arrangements and provided a new advisory note for all those involved in providing pastoral care in September 2017
- we have reviewed our **hall lettings policy** and pricing to ensure that our buildings continue to serve the local community for a wide range of activities compatible with our Christian ethos and are available at attractive and affordable rates
- the good condition of the **church buildings** has been sustained by a regular programme of maintenance and improvement activities. Special thanks to Alan Pett for all the work he does throughout the year.

We continue to pray for a successful outcome to the current ministerial recruitment process and that we may soon move forward again with renewed energy and purpose under a new minister

Neil Fisher and Lindsay Frost

Church Secretary and Administrative Secretary

Church Treasurer's Report (for the calendar year 1 January - 31 December 2017)

(to be read in conjunction with the Financial Statement for 2017 which is printed separately)

Our overall net receipts for 2017 were £17,148. Included in this amount was a legacy of £8,557 and just over £4000 from the sale of Rev John Gordon's car after we had refunded Hailsham Methodist church for their share. Following the loss of our minister, Rev John Gordon, at the end of June we have paid less to the URC Trust and also have not had the minister's and manse expenses we have had in previous years. This has led to approximately £7,000 less expenditure than would be normally spent in this area. (The URC Trust payment in 2016 was inflated due to arrears from 2015 being included.)

Our income from planned giving and loose collections has continued to decline which reflects the lower number of church members.

The income from letting the church premises to various community and interest groups has increased to £19,945, partly due to an increased number of lettings and partly from recovering some late payments. This is now the largest source of income for the church.

We have had refurbishments to the lighting outside the church and also inside the church. We have also purchased a new dishwasher for the kitchen and a new handrail for the steps by the entrance.

These have been the major works on the maintenance of the building.

Our giving to 'other causes' is similar to 2016. We have given £2,000 to Virtual Doctors (our Overseas charity) and £2,000 to Bevern Trust (our Local charity); £3,060 to Christian Aid, £216 to Embrace Middle East, £300 to Commitment for Life, £1,600 to the Fitzjohn's Food Bank, £1,300 to Homelink and £1,071 to other causes.

The General Fund stands at £56,886, which is a decrease from last year as we have topped up the Building Maintenance fund back to £50,000. In the Legacies Fund we now have £89,264 following the further legacy this year. It has been agreed this fund will be used to fund a Children and Families' Worker but the Church Council decided to defer recruitment to this position until a new minister has been appointed.

We appointed Steve Brentnall to act as Independent Examiner to our accounts. We are extremely grateful for his help in assisting us to comply fully with the Charity Commission legislation in reporting our charity accounts.

Irene Gannon
Church Treasurer

Mission Committee

The remit of the committee comes under four headings.

- 1. To plan and review a programme of worship so that it provides for the spiritual life and needs of the existing congregation, as well as those currently on the periphery of the church family**

We are grateful to Norman Vance for the excellent job he carries out as Pulpit Supply Secretary, liaising with the Central Sussex United Area (CSUA) to ensure that there is someone to lead our

worship each Sunday. This year, his job has been made more difficult by the fact that our minister, Rev John Gordon, left us in June, and Rev Geoffrey Whitfield, who was a regular preacher in our pulpit, sadly died suddenly in May. We are fortunate that Gwyneth Watkinson has been willing to step in to fill some of the regular appointments, and other members of the congregation have also stepped in at other times. Attendances at morning worship (excluding Messy Church) have averaged around 30 people over the year. Our fourth Sunday Messy Church has continued to develop (see below).

Following the departure of Rev John Gordon and the death of Rev Geoffrey Whitfield, both of whom were regular preachers, we felt unable to sustain our monthly evening services for an ever smaller congregation. The final service was in May. However, we are pleased that the choir, led by David Smith, has been able to organise **An Hour of Music and Prayer** services approximately every other month to provide for those who prefer a more traditional style of worship.

2. To arrange outreach services and other events which will provide opportunities for people in the community to discover and explore the gospel message

Carols on the Green, which first started in 2005, was held last on 10 December 2017 on Nevill Green. In the absence of our own minister, Canon Richard Moatt from St. Anne's Church agreed to lead the proceedings. Unfortunately, the weather on the day was windy and rainy, although it was forecast to be dry but windy between 1 pm and 4 pm. It was thus decided to go forward in faith and proceed with the programme, but to call off the brass band accompaniment, as the gazebo which provides their cover would be unsafe in the forecast winds. This proved to be a correct decision and Richard Moatt led the service with carols sung a Capello. Numbers were obviously down on previous years, being

about 30-40 hardy souls, including Rev John Gordon and Alison, who came down from Banstead to join us, but it was felt to be a worthwhile act of witness in the area and continuing of the tradition.

3. To help the congregation see how all its activities can be opportunities for mission, and to encourage all its members to bring the gospel message to the local community, so that they may ultimately make a commitment to Christ.

The committee has oversight of Messy Church, which meets six times a year on a Friday and once a month on a Sunday as Messy Sunday, and this provides an outreach opportunity for families in the area. Attendances at Messy Church services far exceed those at any of our Sunday. The Friday Tots (see report elsewhere) also provides an outreach opportunity for local families.

4. To enable the congregation to discover the needs of our community and how to respond to them.

The church continues to support the Fitzjohn's Food bank which opened at Easter 2017, and continues to try to satisfy the ever growing needs of the surrounding community, under the leadership of Helen Chiasson (see separate report) .

Neil Fisher

Property and Compliance Committee

Four meetings were held in the year and points discussed at Congregational Meetings.

Items discussed/implemented were:

- Fire alarm testing has taken place
- New sanctuary and emergency lighting installed
- Clearance of land at the rear of buildings

- Repairs to toilet door locks
- Replacement of plumbing maintenance firm
- Hedges have been cut twice and grass cut regularly
- Driveway widening to be costed as the sewer hatch (to standard KD340S) does not need replacing as suitable for slow moving traffic
- The search goes on for suitable replacement sheds
- Fire extinguisher testing to take place in 2018. Kitchen shutters fault to be traced
- High level fans for large hall to be sourced
- Hall hirers small shed has reverted to the church
- Concourse carpet to be repaired. All carpets then cleaned
- Concourse and large hall to be redecorated
- Large hall to be sanded and treated
- Automatic doors to be safety checked and maintained

Thanks to all the committee members and our church cleaner.

Alan Pett
Convenor

Safeguarding

Helen Chiasson led two sessions of safeguarding refresher training in July 2017. They were attended by nearly all the volunteers involved in children's work at Christ Church.

Helen plans to offer the safeguarding training to food bank volunteers later this year with a focus on safeguarding vulnerable adults.

At present all involved in children's work at Christ Church have up to date DBS checks. Christ Church follows the URC safeguarding policy which does not require volunteers to have a DBS unless they take part in regulated activity. None of the activities that are run at Christ Church involve regulated activity so in theory we would not need to update the DBS checks in the future. However, the Methodist Church recommends doing basic DBS checks on all volunteers and there is now a DBS update service which makes it easier to renew the check.

The safeguarding policy is reviewed annually by Church Council so the area of DBS checks can be discussed and a way forward decided on.

The safeguarding pages on the church website are up to date. You can read the complete safeguarding policy statement on the website if you go to christ-church-lewes.org, then click on *info*, then *safeguarding* and *supporting documentation*.

There have been no safeguarding incidents reported.

Liz Lunt

Messy Church

Messy Church is held at Christ Church on Friday mornings during the school holidays. Messy Church has been well attended with an average attendance of 47, including an average of 12 helpers. There are some families who attend Messy Church regularly, which is very encouraging as we get to know them and share the Bible stories with them.

Each session starts with an introduction to the Bible Story which leads into the craft activities. The craft activities relate to the Bible story. There is then a time of celebration in church, followed by sharing lunch together.

The material used is from the 'Get Messy' magazine produced by Messy Church BRF. The six sessions held during the past 12 months have been:

- Palm Sunday story
- The Lost Son - Luke 15; 11-24
- The Soldier's Faith- - Luke 7:1-10
- The Ten Bridesmaids - - Matthew 25: 1-13
- True Family Matthew - -12: 46-50
- The Christmas Story

Our fourth Sunday Messy Church has continued to develop. This started as an experiment in January 2017, meeting on the fourth Sunday at 9 am, with breakfast, followed by a craft session and finishing with a worship time. This is now an established part of our worship pattern as **Messy Sunday**, meeting at the slightly later time of 9:30 a.m. and we pray the attendances will continue to attract families who would not normally come to Sunday services. Attendances are around 35-40 people of all ages (0 to 87).

Thank you to everyone who helps to make Messy Church a happy, fun time.

Glenda Pett

Christ Church Tots

Christ Church Tots meets Friday mornings from 9.30 to 11.30 during term time. This is a group for Mums/Dads/Grandparents/Carers to bring their babies and toddlers. There are toys, refreshments, story and singing time. There is a different craft activity to do each week too. When the weather is fine and not too cold we use the grass area outside for riding bikes, jumping on the trampoline etc. or just sitting in the sunshine.

We have once again had a very busy year with many children coming through our doors. Some come to almost every session and others not so regularly which means we can accommodate more in total. For example, as I write this at the beginning of March about 80 different children have attended our sessions since Christmas. We have a limit of 40 children (plus their carers) and our helpers, so if they all arrive on the same day we would have to turn some away.

In November we held a cake sale for 'Children in Need'; which raised £200.

It was good to see some of our families attending the Christingle Service on Christmas Eve and our service on Christmas morning. We are also starting to see families coming to our Messy Sunday services.

Many thanks are due to our loyal team of helpers, who give up their time each Friday morning.

Once a month, usually the second Friday after the Tots session, some of the Tots team meet in the church for prayer. It is a good to take time to share news and pray for any concerns, especially any relating to our Tots families.

Glenda Pett

Holiday Club

Our holiday club was held over three mornings from 2 – 4 August. The theme this year was "Polar Explorers", which seemed a bit odd for the middle of summer, but we decorated the building into icy wastes with an igloo, which transformed its appearance.

Twenty-four children, attended including two 12 year old helpers, who had both been to previous holiday clubs and didn't want to miss out this year so came back as helpers.

The Polar Explorers met in their cabins every morning with their husky leaders where they got to know each other while decorating their cabins.

We were extremely fortunate to have Kerry Evans and Lloyd Cummins from Brighton and Hove City Mission to be our Up Front Leaders. Their characters for the club were Bare Feet and Sir Random Finds. They introduced the theme for the day, led us in singing and helped the children pick up the 'key data' from the bible story which we watched from a DVD.

Our Scripture Union material focussed on three early Christians: Peter, Stephen and Timothy.

The children enjoyed a craft session each day making cockerels, flame headbands and decorated back packs or shoulder bags.

The games sessions are always popular. Two of these sessions had to be held indoors this year due to the weather but this didn't spoil the fun

The drama this year was called 'The Ice Adventure' .The drama is always a highlight of Holiday Clubs.

Each session ended with a quiet time; this included a prayer activity followed by a prayer:

On the Saturday we held a 'Show and Tell' session for the families and friends of the children followed by a (very wet) barbecue. This was attended by 71 people.

We all enjoyed getting to know the children as we shared the bible stories with them. We pray that this friendship will continue, that

those who don't attend other churches will come and join us at our Messy Sunday worship as well as Messy Church held in the holidays.

My thanks to all who made Polar Explores a success, everyone worked hard, it was a great team effort.

Glenda Pett

Junior Church

Our Junior Church meets during the second part of the service every Sunday morning apart from the 4th Sundays. We have a small group of children varying in age up to 11 years of age. We follow the Roots material, which now has resources on line as well as the books. Our team of leaders comprises Glenda Pett, Graham Purdye, Alison Byrne and myself. Thank you to all of them for the work that they do over the year. The new Messy Sundays have proved popular and it is good to see so many families attending there.

Irene Gannon

Prayer

Prayer is a source of strength for our members, individually and as a community. Those who can, meet at 9.45am on the second Sunday of each month to pray for those in our Prayer book in the Quiet Room. We have a small group who meet on alternate Friday mornings to pray for HMP Lewes. The Tots team meet once a month to pray for the work they are doing and the concerns of the Tots group. House Groups also include prayer as part of their meetings.

We also have a prayer leaflet so we can pray individually for all the members of our community on each day of the month.

Members of our congregation also contribute the intercessions on the 2nd Sunday of the month. This enables us to share our prayers and concerns in a united way.

Irene Gannon

Traidcraft Stall

Sadly, this is the last annual report from the Traidcraft Stall after nearly 20 years of serving the Christ church congregation: we opened our bank account on October 26 1998.

On Sunday 14 January 2018, the Congregational Meeting approved our suggestion that due to reducing footfall on Sunday mornings, we should be brave and declare that the stall should finish.

We have had a closing down sale that was wonderfully well – supported, gave a few remaining packets of tea to the food bank, and will send a cheque for £537.45 to Traidcraft Exchange close the stall's bank account . This is a little more than we usually send them at this time of year from our trading, but – with winding up the stall- we do not need to set aside cash for our next order.

This is the second or third time I have had to take part in this sort of exercise, but each time it released human resources to take up new things. May it be the same again.

Our thanks are due to Helen Smith, Sue Tillman and Mavis Elliott, who set it up in 1998, and to Joy tasker and others who filled in at time of need. Thank you to you all.

Mavis Elliott

Cliffe House Group

Cliffe House Group continues to meet on the 1st and 3rd Thursday afternoon of each month, from 2.15pm until 4pm, at 28 St Thomas Court. At present we have a total of 8 members, although ill health and transport problems can make it difficult for some members to attend regularly, and occasionally meetings have to be cancelled.

Over the last year we have been studying 'The Upside Down Bible' by Symon Hill. This is a series of Bible studies on the teachings of Jesus, arranged under the topics 'money, sex and violence'. Each chapter begins by drawing on the impressions of non-Christians who are unfamiliar with the Bible passage. This gives us plenty of food for thought and discussion as we consider these well-known texts presented to us in an unfamiliar way.

Our continued thanks go to Daphne for her hospitality, and to Irene and Dennis who provide transport when possible.

Janet Cooper

Nevill House Group

The purpose of the Nevill House Group is to help us grow in our faith as individuals, learn about how we can put that faith into practice, and to provide prayer and support for each other, meeting once a month.

The group has around nine members, and currently meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month, generally meeting on the Nevill estate at the home of Tom and Liz Lunt, or Linda and Neil Fisher. Anyone wishing to join us in discussion and study please contact me or any member of the group.

For our first meetings in the spring we completed our study of Job, following which we studied the Bible themes behind the Holiday Club. For the next meeting, some of us went to Crawley URC to a seminar called "Eight Ways to Engage with the Bible", led by Rev. Andy Twilley, the Synod's Training and Development Officer. This provided interesting insights into different ways of studying the Bible.

Then, starting in the autumn, we followed a York Course entitled "Tough Talk – the hard sayings of Jesus" which is a course of five sessions using a study book and an accompanying CD. This has now been completed and we will be starting another York Course entitled "New World, Old Faith", which looks at how our faith relates to the modern world.

Neil Fisher

Ecumenical House Group

Two of our longstanding Anglican members have retired because of ill health, but we have recruited one replacement. Our membership is now 3 Anglicans, 4 from Christ Church and 2 Catholics, with typical attendance 7-8. Our overall approach remains the same. We download articles from current Christian journals, e.g. *The Tablet*, *The Church Times* and *Reform*, read them aloud paragraph by paragraph, and discuss the content. We choose them to cover topics in church life and contemporary society so that the house group is the working through of our Sunday worship in our everyday lives. From April 2017 to March 2018, we have met 11 times and have talked about the following subjects:

- Lent, Charity and Prayer, as understood by Leo the Great (450) and Giles Fraser (2017)
- Martin Luther: A new historical perspective

- The Common Good and going to Church: views from *The Tablet* and *Reform*
- Spirituality, described by Eamon Duffey, Giles Fraser and Basil the Great (450)
- Religion extremism in the 21st century by Jonathan Sacks
- The Holy Spirit as understood by Benedict XVI (2016) and St Columbanus (ca 600)
- The authority of Scripture by Derek Stanesbury
- The Reformation and the Origin of the Church of England: articles in the *Church Times*
- The meaning of worship as shown by the 2017-8 British Museum exhibition
- Reason in Religion and Religion in Public Life: Pope Benedict XVI in Westminster 2010.

David Smith

Choir

The choir continues as an enthusiastic and mutually supportive group who meet each Friday to sing music that has been written as part of Christian worship. Of the 12 members, it is rare to have less than 10 at practices. This has enabled us to listen to each other and given us confidence.

Following the suspension of formal evening services in May 2017, we have arranged a series of occasions for reflection on the lectionary readings. We have called these 'Music and Prayer.' So far, we have held these on five Sunday evenings; the service on 7 January was arranged jointly with St Anne's and sponsored by Churches Together. We are grateful to Revd Richard Moatt, who led the service and preached.

We have interleaved hymns and short choral pieces with prayers and the four lectionary readings. We have attracted 4-5 people from Christ Church, 4-5 from St Anne's and a few visitors. The average attendance has been 21 (18 if 7 Jan is excluded). Appreciative comments have suggested that for a small number of people, particularly those living alone, there is a continuing place for occasional evening services.

We thank all who have contributed to our Music and Prayer: singers, readers, those who have led and joined in our prayers, and Norman Vance who wrote a new anthem that we sang in March.

David Smith

Thinktank

Between April 2017 and March 2018, we have had eight meetings with an average attendance of 29. Since the topics vary widely from month to month, the number of different people coming to meetings over the year is considerably more than is indicated by the average attendance. This comprises 6-8 regulars from Christ Church, people from other churches and some who are not regular churchgoers. The meetings therefore serve as a reminder that the boundary of the church lies out in the community, rather than at the church door.

We are lucky to have a range of authoritative speakers to draw on, and are very grateful for their willingness to tell us about their professional experience, to ask us challenging questions, and deal patiently in a jargon-free way with our questions. Several speakers have offered to provide summaries of their work (We had 36 requests for one talk!), and one speaker presented a copy of her latest book to the church library.

The programme was as follows.

- Revd Dr Andrew Wingate *India revisited*
- Dr John Haigh *Some (easy) mathematics in everyday life*
- David Hutchinson *Diesel: unintended consequences of public policy*
- Lyn Smith *Only listen. Interviewing for the Imperial War Museum*
- Dr Graham Mayhew *The changing face of Local Government*
- Professor Liz Hill *Chemical pollutants, wildlife and human health*
- Dr Liz Somerville *Touching the past: why archaeology matters*
- Reg Lanaway *Over sixty years in farming: how things have changed.*

David Smith

Use of Halls

This year our Halls have continued to be busy and to generate a useful amount of revenue to support the Church's activities. Although some of our neighbour churches have opened new and improved facilities, other facilities in Lewes have been lost. Consequently I find myself increasingly making bookings for our smaller halls as well as our Main Hall. The constant footfall has led to some problems over cleanliness and increased irritation over those who fail to leave the place tidy or take re-cycling and rubbish away. But in general the church benefits from its raised community profile and the continuing goodwill of our Hall Users.

As this report goes to press, we are wrestling with GDPR (the General Data Protection Regulations coming into force on May 25 2018) which impinges on our bookings system, as on many other things. Also, URC Southern Synod has discovered that they need oversight of

our Halls Usage. It is frustrating to find that new procedures are being demanded just after Irene and I have completed an overhaul of the system to make sure communication is good and we work with consistent rules, efficiently, and without generating paper waste.

New ventures this season include Hartbeeps, Feldenkrais and a request for space for a home-schooling group

Brenda Vance

Fitzjohn's Food Bank

Christ Church helped with the setting up of a new independent food bank to serve this end of town, which we have hosted in the church every Monday since April 2017.

Here is an extended report by Helen Chiasson on progress over the last year on this important new community initiative.

We are nearly at the end of our first year of providing a food bank for our neighbours in need. During the first few months, 14 or 15 households collected food parcels for 40 – 45 adults and children. We have seen this rise to 20 – 22 households collecting food for between 70 and 77 adults and children presently. Due to our locality, 80% of our members are families, with one or two parents and up to five children. (By contrast, Malling and Landport food banks' have only one third member households that are families with two thirds being individuals or couples.) Most of our member families have a wage coming into the house. Seven of our 22 regular households are unwaged, which means that 70% of our members live in a waged household.

Our system of allowing our members to choose their own food is very popular and cuts down on waste and work for the volunteers. Members also tell us that they appreciate the friendly atmosphere and some have even started to socialise outside of food bank.

When we first opened we wanted to be more than 'just' a food bank as we saw food poverty as a symptom of a much larger issue. We now have a barrister-trained volunteer who attends most weeks who gives advice on benefits and some legal matters. She has recently helped two members get benefits increased to the appropriate levels, which has been a huge weight off the member's minds and greatly reduced their stress. One of our volunteers also advises on disability issues. During March we have had a volunteer from the local independent energy charity, OVESCO, visit the food bank. This has provided Smart Meters and reviewed members' bills in a bid to reduce out-goings. Already two members have changed their energy providers to get better tariffs. Every little bit helps...

FareShare continues to be our main supplier and due to our increased membership, we took the decision to pay for a 'large' delivery from December 2017. This, weekly collections from Tesco and Waitrose and occasional, all-day Saturday collections at Tesco, (the last of which netted 2300 items shared between the three food banks), items people put in the collection box in the church concourse and hoc donations, mean that the cupboards are reassuringly full. This is, of course, achieved by a great deal of local generosity and effort by many volunteers.

While FareShare tries to send us as wide a variety of food as possible, we have gluts of certain items during the year. To help our members cope with what might be unfamiliar items, we create illustrated recipe sheets and give out samples to great success. We told FareShare this and shared our recipes and they made us Food Bank of the Month in their February Newsletter.

Continuing our commitment to providing eight to ten portions of fresh fruit and vegetables each week, we have applied and received grants from Lewes Town Council for £1270 in 2017 and £1500 this month for the next financial year. Following Debbie Twitchen of Landport Food Bank's talk to the Headstrong Club, many of their members have set up monthly standing orders to Landport Food

Bank. This is shared quarterly between the three Lewes Food Banks. Also spurred on by Debbie's talk, Raffie Kaplinsky applied to the Chalk Cliff Trust on all our behalf and we have all received £1500! We will also need to apply for grants to buy fresh food weekly, but we are- thankfully- not destitute.

At Christmas, we were overwhelmed by the generosity of local schools, businesses, churches(ours included) groups and individuals and so were able to give our members bumper food packages that included fresh chicken, sausages, lots of fresh vegetables and fruit, and some seasonal goodies too! We worked with St Pancras RC School and provided Christmas parcels to nine of their referred families and 38 of our member households, meaning we gave out 47 Christmas parcels.

Special mention must be given to Lewes Rotary Club, who provided all households with a £30, £40, or £50 Tesco gift token, depending on the size of the household. Members were overwhelmed. There were many tears and a lot of gratitude. We heard people say: "Now the kids can have stockings!", "I can put an extra £20 pounds each on the gas and electric so we won't have to go to bed early." This is real impact.

Our concern is not the number of people who access the food bank but those who do not. With this in mind, we have recirculated our referral forms to local GPs and make contact with the local Children Centres. To help them respond to emergencies, we have given the Lewes and Ringmer Children's Centres food parcels of long-dated items.

The Future

We need more storage and will be looking at other areas of the church in which we can store our ambient goods. This is a good problem to have.

Look in Tesco this summer and please vote for our Fitzjohn's Food Bank Fruit and Veg Garden project. We plan on bringing the scrub area at the top of the car park under the plough, planting sustainable crops such as herbs, fruit trees and bushes as well as seasonal vegetables. Members are keen to get their hands dirty and help support the food bank.

We are committed to continue working with the local Churches

Against Poverty group and will be lobbying our local decision makers about the issues that have created, and are leading to, an increase in food poverty.

Finally

Thank you for all your continued prayers, support and generosity this year and a special, heartfelt thanks to the kind person who made the anonymous donation of £500 back in March 2017- this allowed us to start the food bank.

Helen Chiasson