

Churches Together in Farnham Annual General Meeting 2016

Wednesday 12th October at Farnham Pentecostal Church

MINUTES

Present:

Roy Beard, Dora Murdoch and Michael Hopkins (Farnham URC); Russ Gant (St James', Rowledge); David Uffindell (St Andrew's, Farnham); Juliet Greene (Jubilee Church); Rose Williamson (Farnham Foodbank); Andy Marriott (Jubilee Church; CTF treasurer); Amber Delves (Signposts); Ann and John Edwards (Church of the Holy Family); Margaret and Bob Skinner (Weybourne Community Church); June Trantom (Farnham ASSIST); Rosalind Forsyth (St Peter's, Wrecclesham); Hannah Moore (Badshot Lea and Hale); Thea Parsons (All Saints', Crondall); Susie Duffy, Ceri Potts and Michael McDonnell (St Joan of Arc); Margaret Emberson and Carol Le Page (Open the Book); Stella Walters (St Thomas-on-the-Bourne); Jenny Floyer (Friday Focus); Mary Clarke (All Saints', Tilford); Conrad Hicks (Farnham Methodists); Andrew Partridge (St Andrew's, Farnham and CTF Secretary); Michael Hall (Farnham Pentecostal and CTF Chair)

Apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from Alan and Lesley Crawley (Badshot Lea and Hale), Tara Hellings (All Saints', Crondall), Karen Fewster (Christian Aid), Michael Gittins (Farnham Quakers) and Graham Sly (Farnham Methodists).

Minutes of AGM 13.10.2015: The minutes were reviewed and adopted, and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

WHAT HAS CTF BEEN DOING THIS YEAR?

Chairman's report - *Pastor Michael Hall* reported as follows:

As in previous years, 2015/16 has been really a time of just ticking over for Churches Together in Farnham, with the regular events successfully taking place as usual, organised by individuals, and coming under the umbrella of CTF.

As far as the Steering Committee is concerned, most of the work is carried out by the secretary and treasurer, Andrew Partridge and Andy Marriott respectively, and of course Mary Clarke with the website etc. and my thanks goes to them for all their hard work. My main activity has been the organisation of clergy and church leaders for the prayers before Farnham Town Council meetings throughout the year, which I believe, with the increasing secularisation of our society, is an important activity to maintain. Although some ministers/leaders have been quite enthusiastic about being involved, others have been less so. Consequently I have ended up covering a lot of the meetings myself. Although I have been happy to do this, it would be good to get as many ministers/leaders involved as possible to give some variety, as I'm sure we each have a different way of approaching it.

As you may have heard, I am standing down from the Steering Committee as from the date of this A.G.M. and I know others would like to as well, so we do desperately need volunteers to come forward if C.T.F. is to continue.

Secretary - *Andrew Partridge* reported that, in addition to the activities reported below, a Prayer Vigil for Refugees was held on Saturday 28th November last year, from 3-4 pm. This was a suggestion that arose from the 2015 AGM, following a request for community prayer events made at the end of 2014 by the then Town Mayor, Jeremy Ricketts. A very thoughtful programme was put together and conducted by Laura Mead of Christian Aid, to whom we were most grateful. Regrettably the turn-out was very modest – possibly the date was too close to the Christmas shopping rush. To those who attended, though, it was a very moving occasion and it is felt to be a concept worth re-visiting.

Treasurer - *Andy Marriott* presented the Accounts which showed funds at the end of the accounting year (31 Aug) standing at £88.03. Subscriptions of £15 per church would therefore be requested over the year 2016-17.

Friday Focus - *Jenny Floyer* reported that contributions were received from 18 churches 2 or 3 times per year, with a further annual contribution from Christian Aid. The articles appeared on p2 of the Farnham Herald, and coverage for the year was high but not 100%. As the Herald now appeared on Thursday, suggestions for a new title for the piece were sought.

Prayer Meetings - *Bob Skinner* reported that the meeting continues to be held on the third Tuesday of each month from 11am at St Joan's Church Centre, Tilford Rd. It normally commences with refreshments and then after a brief devotional reflection proceeds to prayer for any current needs of the churches in Farnham of which participants are aware. Duration is 1 hour maximum. Anyone wishing to join the meeting would be warmly welcomed.

Good Friday Walk of Witness - *Stewart Dakers* reported that this now 'organises itself' – but we are all in fact very grateful for Stewart's organising oversight. He remarked: 'The Walk does not bring the town or its businesses to a stop, but the sight of a couple of hundred people walking silently along its streets must give the onlookers pause for thought. It is an act of witness made the more powerful for its absence of noise and of explanation. For the second year we managed without police support, so I think we can walk on confidently into future years.'

Christmas Day Lunch - *Michael McDonnell* reported that last Christmas the Christmas Day lunch was once again over subscribed - by both guest applications and by volunteers offering to help. Around 80 Farnham people were guests at the Lunch and transport was provided for around 50 of these guests. It's extraordinary how generous people are with their time on Christmas Day and the coordinators of the lunch are eternally grateful to the volunteers - many of whom are not church goers. We were blessed to have a wonderful chef – David Beale – and are most grateful to him for his amazing cooking. David is a former army chef and he has kindly offered to cook again this year. We were blessed also to have wonderful help from John Goodman and FCCT, printing colourful posters and menus. A treat for the guests was a visit by the Mayor and Mayoress of Waverley – Mike and Val Band - their visit delighting guests and helpers. Most generous support was received also from: Morgans Butchers, The Dempster Trust, Farnham Hedgehogs, Care Farnham, The Bourne Show, Sainsbury's and Waitrose.

There has never been a problem attracting volunteers to help on the day or help set up – but finding volunteer drivers has not been easy. However the small steering committee – five people – has not changed for a number of years and it is important new people come through to ensure the Christmas Day Lunch continues. At one time the coordinating was passed on each year from one church to another and the present steering group was formed when no one church came forward. However the present steering group cannot go on for ever and Michael appealed for people to consider coming to a meeting with a view to being part of the Christmas Day Lunch steering group and ensure its future survival.

He concluded by requesting that church representatives check that the notices for the lunch actually go up. This did not happen in some churches which meant that needy people on their own in our community did not know the lunch was available for them.

Library Christmas Crib – *Michael McDonnell* reported that the Nativity scene in Farnham Library in 2015 was created by pupils at St Peter's School, Wrecclesham. In 2016 it would be created by pupils at a Farnham primary school. The crib will be set up at the beginning of December and will be in place until after Christmas. It's important that visitors to the Library – if they like the crib - make known their thoughts to Library staff. It's important we give positive feedback to the Library. The Nativity scene in Farnham Library is a Christian statement in a public place - and is therefore of importance to us all. Michael intended to send a picture of the crib and a press release to the Farnham Herald – as another Christian statement in a public place. He concluded by stating that he had been the link person for this initiative for over ten years and that he would welcome anyone stepping forward to take over from him.

Service during the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**, Sunday 24th January 2015 – *Michael McDonnell* reported:

Rev Canon Andrew P B White, the “Vicar of Baghdad”, was guest speaker at the service which was titled “Salt of the Earth” and held at St Joan of Arc Catholic Church and led by Father Niven Richardson. The material was prepared for worldwide use by the Christians of Latvia based around the verses 1 Peter 2: 9-10 “But you are a chosen race...a people set apart to sing the praises of God...” It was a truly ecumenical service with Ministers and laity from across the town taking part and almost filling the church. In excess of £1,700 was raised for Canon White’s Charity - The Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East. The shared tea which followed the service was a celebration of the warmth which Farnham Christians show each other.

CTF Website and E-News- *Mary Clarke* reported:

The CTF Website offers member churches, associated organisations and other Christian related bodies fantastic free on-line publicity - readily accessible to all on Google.

Many of you already make use of this facility but a number do not. Month by month when I prepare the CTF E-News, I have to trawl the various church websites individually to find events to include in the newsletter. Most of these open-to-all events would benefit from the additional publicity of being on the Churches Together in Farnham website. Please let us know as soon as possible of any such events you would like us to publicise.

As I said last year, we owe a tremendous debt to John Goodman of FCCT, who hosts our website, which is provided by Churches Together’s central body.

Apart from a lapse in the past few months due to illness, I aim to keep the website site right up to date, week by week, or even day by day when possible. John and I have been checking it through recently and have given it a thorough face lift. Please become a regular visitor to the site and a regular contributor to it as well.

As Andrew Partridge said in a previous newsletter, Churches Together in Farnham needs new blood. Nowhere more, I would add, than in the field of digital communication. Surely this is the future way to reach out beyond the immediate Christian circle to offer a welcome to those outside the church. To connect with the younger generation in particular, we should perhaps consider again additional on line vehicles, such as Facebook. This has its perils, we know, but in the hands of a responsible volunteer with good knowledge of IT, it could bear much fruit. Is there anyone out there who would be prepared to take a hand in the development and possible expansion of our on-line role? I would be very happy to hand over to such a person and I believe that this would be a most rewarding task.

WHAT HAVE ASSOCIATES OF CTF BEEN DOING?

Christian Aid - *Karen Fewster* was not able to be present but her report is reproduced below:

2016 has seen a continuation of the unprecedented numbers of peoples displaced by conflict and many thousands of people migrating across several countries to escape the frightening situation in their home land. Christian Aid is still working among these people helping in the refugee camps and wherever there is a need. Work also continues in many other countries wherever there is injustice, poverty or natural disaster. Christian Aid remains in many countries for the long term, places like Haiti where the work goes on after the devastation of a few years ago.

The need for funds to support this work has never been greater!

Fortunately, the capacity to give has not diminished and Farnham has been very generous in supporting Christian Aid again this year.

Christian Aid Week 2016 focused on the plight of the poorest people living on the Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh. They build homes on sand spits in the river which are regularly washed away by floods. The money raised in Christian Week will be used to raise the level of the land under each house above flood level and to provide simple agricultural aids to help with food self-sufficiency.

This year our special Christian Aid Week service was held at St Mary's Church, Frensham. Reverend Jane Walker gave her address standing up to her ankles in water to bring home what the Bangladeshis on the river bank suffer on a regular basis. Her words and actions were a thought provoking start to Christian Aid Week.

This followed a similar watery event when back in April, 3 ministers (including Rev. Jane) and assorted CA supporters stood in icy water at Frensham Great Pond, to highlight the plight of the Brahmaputra river dwellers, and carrying out everyday tasks such as ironing. This received good coverage in the press and on radio.

We again collected at Farnham station during the morning rush hour throughout Christian Aid Week and collected £380, which was down on last year but possibly due to the lack of car parking at the station because of building work.

The now familiar Lent recitals at St. Thomas on the Bourne, plant sales, coffee mornings, soup lunches, cake sales and other events across our area contributed to the £26,300 total raised across the year.

The total raised in Christian Aid Week was just under £19,300 which for the first time in some years is down on last year. The cashless society and a reduced number of collectors was in part responsible for this drop. We will be considering other ways of supplementing the envelope collection money for next year's Christian Aid Week.

The catchphrase for the 2016 Christmas Appeal is 'The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light'. The appeal will focus on the peoples of Democratic Republic of Congo who have had their lives violently uprooted by civil war. They have been forced out by the darkness of violence and fear. Money raised will help families rebuild their lives in safer areas and bring them back into the light.

We hope also to sing carols in Farnham in December, details have yet to be decided but ask your CA church rep for more information and come and sing with us!

Farnham ASSIST - *June Trantom* thanked Farnham churches for their continued support, and explained that Farnham ASSIST is a Christian organisation established as a millennium project by Christians from churches across the town to make a difference in the community by serving the older people in Farnham, especially those who live alone. It provides regular activities, weekend lunches, special events and outings to combat the social isolation and loneliness which is an increasing problem in our fast-moving technological world. Volunteers aim to get alongside people and give them time, extending Christian love and practical support. She expressed her gratitude to those churches who give use of their premises for services and activities, and indicated that she would be seeking to start new partnerships with churches in the town and surrounding villages in the coming year to extend the range and reach of activities offered. She continued:

Last year we supported 690 individuals and of those 419 accessed our services and activities. Our footfall of those who came through our office by calling in or phoning was over 3000 (not counting letters or emails).

We have had a busy time and I was very pleased to welcome two new staff to the team in August – Diane Berry as Activities and Volunteers Co-ordinator, and Susie Blackwood as Fundraising and Marketing Co-ordinator. We are all part time but together ensure the office is open and all activities run smoothly.

We have been truly blessed in the last year having been the Charity of the Year for both the Mayor of Farnham and the Inner Wheel, and the recipients of the proceeds from Weyside Rotary's Farnham Duck Race.

For 2017 – more helpers are desperately needed for the Praise and Worship team. We are a Christian organisation and although we work successfully with other organisations such as Age UK, Care Farnham, Farnham Lions and the Hedgehogs, what sets us apart is that as well as activities and practical support we direct people towards the good news of the gospel. We visit residential homes and the Gostrey Day Centre once a month and lead a service with hymns, prayers, a Bible reading and talk. We also hold a Silver Service once a month. We are openly welcomed and regularly asked about our faith.

June concluded with a request that all those present enquire if anyone in their churches would be available to join the Praise and Worship team on whatever basis would suit them:

‘Please encourage them to speak to us; it would be such a blessing to us’.

Farnham Foodbank - *Rose Williamson* gave the following report:

The year has been another busy one for us and one where we have seen a number of changes. The beginning of the year started with us moving our warehouse to a new location in Upper Hale. This has been a significant but positive change.

We are extremely grateful to St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church for accommodating us for 5 years but overtime we outgrew the garages and required a more suitable environment for our team to work in. Our new location has provided us with storage that meets our needs and provides our volunteers with much improved working conditions. We would like to express our thanks to Farnham Christian Community Trust who were instrumental in making this happen.

The last few months have been challenging for us as food supplies fell to the lowest that they have ever been; this saw us having to regularly buy in some food products. Harvest is now in full swing and we are relieved to find that many of the churches and the majority of the primary schools have chosen to support us again. Nearly 3 tons of food has already been processed – this is food that we very much need, especially as Christmas is fast approaching.

Last Christmas we issued over 100 hampers to local families who are living on the breadline; this is in addition to our usual referrals. The hampers are always well received; preparations have already begun for this year!

The New Year will see us launch Eat Well Spend Less; this is a 6 week course that teaches budgeting and practical cookery skills. Our first course is being hosted by a local children’s centre but we plan to run future courses in a variety of different venues in order to reach people in their local areas.

As foodbank continues to grow and develop new projects such as Eat Well Spend Less, it is important that we have the financial backing to support the work taking place. Monetary donations are as important as the food that we receive, without them we won’t be able to continue.

I would like to thank those who have supported us and those who continue to support us with regular donations, both of food and of financial giving. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful and committed team that give their time freely to ensure that we run a professional service, meeting the basic needs of those in crisis.

As Christians we are called to feed the hungry and stand beside the broken. Foodbank is a practical way of serving God and reaching out to those in need; that is why we do what we do.

Rose concluded by thanking everyone for the opportunity to update them of developments.

Signposts Schools work – *Amber Delves* showed a video describing the activities of the Signposts team. In addition to support for lessons and prayer spaces in schools, the team carries out three tours of primary schools in the Farnham area each year, one presenting the Christmas story, another presenting the Easter story, and the third assisting with the transition to secondary schooling. 13 schools are visited and the Easter and Christmas tours involve 34 separate sessions over a period of two weeks. A team of 25 from 7 churches create the shows, make and deliver the props, and perform. She concluded by reminding all that prayer support was always appreciated.

‘Open the Book’ events at Badshot Lea and Hale – *Hannah Moore, Carol Le Page* and *Margaret Emmerson* reported that the Bible Society’s Open the Book initiative was now in its third year at Badshot Lea and Hale, and involved visiting Folly Hill and Badshot Lea schools every fortnight to lead an assembly bringing the Bible to life. William Cobbett and Hale schools have also expressed interest. A team of nine people is involved, with children also taking part each time. The Lion Storyteller Bible is used as a basis for the sessions.

Farnham Christian Community Trust - *Andy Marriott* updated the meeting on developments. FCCT, which was started in 2000, is now a legal and charitable framework to support Christian initiatives in Farnham and its surroundings. It shares premises with Farnham Foodbank at Gorselands in Upper Hale. It recently (3rd July) organised a major prayer event at Weydon School covering all the town's ecumenical Christian activities.

Bible Society – *Margaret Freeman* advised that the Farnham branch had formally been wound up in 2015, but that collections for the Bible-a-Month club were still being taken.

Update on Pilgrim Project – *Michael Hopkins* updated the meeting on plans at the United Reformed Church for a significant redevelopment of its buildings. This would aim both to improve the facilities provided for the 30 groups who already use them, and to provide a town centre hub offering welcome and hospitality for many others in the future.

Reflections from newcomers to ministry in Farnham. *Revd Hannah Moore*, the new Curate at Badshot Lea and Hale, *Revd David Uffindell*, the new Rector of Farnham, and *Revd Russ Gant*, the new Vicar of Rowledge gave uplifting accounts of how God had led them to their new posts. It was particularly encouraging, in view of the subject matter of this meeting, to hear that Russ Gant's Christian journey started as a result of schools work such as that described above.

Election of Officers. No nominations for the post of Chairman had been received following Michael Hall's announcement of his intention to stand down; the post therefore became vacant. The other officers – *Andrew Marriott* as Treasurer, and *Andrew Partridge* as Secretary, together with *Mary Clarke* on the Standing Committee, agreed to continue in these roles for the time being.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - 18th to 25th January 2017. It was decided that the Unity Service would be held at Farnham Methodist church on 22nd January, with *David Ashby* presiding.

It was decided that the 2017 CTF AGM would be held on Tuesday 10th October; venue tbd.

The meeting concluded with the offering of very warm thanks to Michael Hall for his seven-year stint as Chairman; after which Michael closed the proceedings in prayer.

Andrew Partridge, Secretary

27 September 2017