

BACKGROUND

At Seal Parish Church, with God's help, we seek:

- To enable a wide range of people to engage in worship that is varied, joyful, brings all life to God and permeates all life;
- To be open and welcoming, making it possible for people to join us at any time;
- To show that Christ makes a difference, by caring for ourselves and each other within and outside our Church.

CHURCH STATUS

The PCC of Seal Church is a charity that is authorised by Act of Parliament and is excepted from registration with the Charity Commission.

PCC MEMBERSHIP

Members of the PCC are either ex-officio or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) in accordance with the Church Representation rules.

During the year the following served as members of the PCC:

EX OFFICIO

Chair: The Revd Anne Le Bas Priest in Charge
The Churchwardens: Mrs Hilary Coffey
Mrs Christine Wightman
Reader: Kevin Bright

MEMBERS OF THE DEANERY SYNOD (UNTIL 31/5/2011)

Matthew Bell
Jill Myers
Margaret Mountfield

ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE PCC

Until 2011

Mr Malcolm Fox
Mrs Maggie Fox
Mr Ian Gough
Vacant

Until 2009

Mrs Victoria Wyatt
Mrs Marion Gilchrist
Mrs Sally Thompson
Mrs Linda Wellington

Until 2010

Mary Evans
Rebecca Jones
Mike Harvey
Vacant

TREASURER

Mr Mike Harvey

SECRETARY (non-voting)

Mrs Jennifer Kent

CO-OPTED

Tanya Wright
Sophia Michael

ANNUAL REPORT 09

This year, just like the two years before it, has shown modest growth in the congregation. Our average Sunday attendance continues to rise (it stands at about 80 now) as new faces come to join us. Not everyone comes every week, of course, so the official “head-count” doesn’t always reflect the actual number of new people around. People seem to be coming for all sorts of reasons; at a time of pastoral need, through contact at baptisms and in preparation for marriage, when they move into the area or with a friend who is already a regular. I am encouraged by the fact that quite a few “visitors” have turned into regular worshippers over the year.

Families

Contact with young families has increased, partly through baptisms – there were 22 last year, compared to 16 in 2007, 11 in 2006, and 6 in 2005 – through work with Seal School and through the monthly “Faith and Fun” sessions. Although these only attract a few families on each occasion, it is not always the same families who come, so it provides a useful means of keeping in touch with those who might otherwise have drifted away. The welcome which families with small children are given when they come to church also contributes to the likelihood that they will keep coming and the warmth of this welcome is often commented on. Thank you to sidespeople and all who get alongside visitors to help them when they first arrive.

Ministry

Our Readers, Kevin Bright and Rosemary Clary, continue to provide invaluable ministry within the parish. Kevin preaches and leads worship regularly and is also leading a Lent group this year. Rosemary, though she has taken less part “upfront” in leading worship and preaching because of her family commitments, works very hard behind the scenes, taking Communion to those who cannot come to church, and writing the monthly prayer bulletin for those who are part of the Diocesan “pray-ers” scheme among many other things. She also keeps an eye on many practical details of church life – it is Rosemary who makes sure we have stocks of bread and wine, for example!

I am delighted that we also have a new Pastoral Assistant in training on the Diocesan training course. Nicky Harvey is already active in all sorts of ways in the church and the community, but training for this licensed lay ministry is giving her a sound theological base for her work and helping her to feel more confident in what she does. Please pray for her as she fits in a demanding academic course around all her other activities.

Community

The “get to know your neighbours” evenings which took place last April were a roaring success. Not only did many people come along and chat on the three evenings concerned, but ideas shared at those meetings took wings and flew during the rest of the year. The Seal Fete, which took place on what seemed like the only fine day last summer, was a “neighbours” initiative, as are the very popular belly-dancing classes now running in the church hall on Tuesday nights. Several new bell-ringers have come forward after discussions begun at the meeting too. Many thanks to Marion Gilchrist and others whose vision this all was. We look forward to future developments.

Seal School

Our links with Seal School continue to develop. Two new foundation governors have been appointed in the last year – Nicky Harvey and Lise Michaelides (Marion Gilchrist stepped down after many years of service – thank you Marion!). My work with the school has grown too. Over the last year, as well as leading regular assemblies, I have delivered staff training on spirituality and collective worship, given the Y 5 an 6’s an introduction to classical Greek (during a topic on the Greeks), hosted some visits to the church to study things like rites of passage, and led an informal “prayer walk/blessing” of the school for staff and governors. Most of these activities have been at the direct request of the school and are an encouraging sign of their openness to make use of the resources the church can offer them.

Music at Seal

We’ve had a good year musically, with regular Choral Evensongs for which we have often been joined by members of Kemsing Choir. We joined with St Lawrence and Underriver for a joint Advent service with music which all three choirs had worked on together too. All this was in addition to things like the Carol service and regular anthems at the 10 am Communion services. The junior choir has grown under Dan’s enthusiastic and committed guidance.

Sadly, from our point of view, Dan has told us that he will be moving on at Easter. We are already in the process of looking for a new organist and choir director, but we are aware that it will be very hard to fill his shoes. It is inevitable that it will take a while to appoint someone new, and in the interim, we will do the best we can to keep the musical standards (and enthusiasm) up. We are enormously grateful to Dan for all he has done during his ten years with us. He will be greatly missed.

Parochial Church Council

The PCC has met six times during the year. An important part of its work has been to discuss the various work needed to the fabric of the church which came out of the quinquennial report, including the investigation of the beetle damage in the roof timbers, the repair of the table top tomb near the front door and the boiler chimney and the replacement of the lighting on the church path. Other matters for discussion have included the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation, for which the PCC resolved to request permission, new hiring agreements for the church hall and the sponsorship of Nicky Harvey for training as a pastoral assistant.

Much of this work could not have been done without the hard work and perseverance of our two churchwardens, Hilary Coffey and Christine Wightman, who are now coming to the end of their three-year term of office. I am very grateful to them for their diligence and care and for their personal support. They have given up many hours in organising repairs, liaising with the Diocese and keeping on top of the various administrative tasks that have come their way, as well as helping out in numerous other ways, including getting the church ready for services and welcoming visitors.

Looking forward

I have two major concerns for the future, both of which are related to the fact that we are clearly a growing church, with much happening within it.

1. To sustain this growth takes a great deal of time and effort. Many people are already involved in some way – thank you for all your labours – but I would like to encourage everyone to ask themselves whether there is some talent they have to give, or something they would like to try. If we value the activity of the church, it is important that the work is shared as widely as possible. Everyone has something to offer, and help can be given if training or advice is needed. But it is important that people are prepared to “have a go”, whether that is by volunteering to help with Sunday School, sing with the choir, get together with others to form a Bible study group or come onto the PCC. If we want our church to continue to grow, both numerically and spiritually, then we are all part of the answer to our prayers!

2. In the current economic climate, we will need to increase our income simply to stand still. Our income has more or less met our outgoings in the past – I would like here to record my thanks to Mike Harvey for his oversight of our financial affairs, and to all those who already give generously. However, costs are rising for the church just as much as they are at home. Fuel bills, insurance, ministry costs and so on are increasingly demanding to meet, and we face large outlays for things like the repair of the beetle damage as well.

While special fund-raising efforts and grants can help with some of the “one-off” costs, like the beetle damage, the running costs of the church can only really be met by increased regular giving on the part of the congregation. We do not like always to be asking for money, but it would help if everyone could review their level of giving on a regular basis, and see if they can give any more. “Gift-aiding” donations brings in a considerable extra sum, so please do that if you are a tax-payer, and, if you are not in our planned giving scheme it is very helpful if you join, so that we can more easily predict our income when setting budgets. Our Treasurer, Mike Harvey (01732 457118) will be glad to tell you more about this. Ultimately, whether it is a matter of time, effort or money, the continued growth of the church depends on us all.

Anne Le Bas

DEANERY SYNOD

Sevenoaks Deanery Synod met three times this year. Our first meeting, at St George’s, Weald, was an introduction to the work of the Synod at the start of a new three-year cycle of meetings. The second, at Halsted church, featured a presentation on lay training in the Diocese, with an outline of courses for Readers, Pastoral Assistants and Parish Evangelists. The third meeting included a presentation from the

Diocesan Treasurer, and the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance explaining where our Parish Share goes in funding the work of the Diocese, and looking towards the future needs of the Diocese which is facing the same financial constraints as we are at parish level.

CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT FOR YEAR TO APRIL 2009

Fabric, Goods and Ornaments

During the year to April 2009 your Churchwardens have continued to work their way through the items highlighted as being in need of repair in the Quinquennial Report of October 2007 as well as attended to regular general maintenance. These can be summarised as follows:-

General maintenance comprised-

- Secom alarm maintenance;
- Boiler serviced;
- Fire extinguishers serviced;
- Review of the fire risk assessment;
- Rewiring of the church hall following which we have been issued with a inspection certificate;
- Inspection of the Church records by the rural Dean. Following this inspection all Marriage, Baptism, and Service records not in current use have been placed with the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone.

Quinquennial Items comprised-

- Erection of scaffolding to enable inspection of the Beetle Damage in the Nave by Structural Engineers, Adrian Cox. Following the recent receipt of the report we are now getting specifications drafted after which we will be seeking tenders for the repairs.
- Repairs to the West Door, Vestry Doors and Kissing gate.

Other works are still in the planning stage. We have recently obtained Faculties from the DAC to enable us to dismantle and rebuild the boiler chimney and to lower the dangerous Table Top Tomb to the right of the Church Porch. We hope these works can be started in the next few weeks.

In early January we discovered the boiler was leaking and have been told that it needs replacing. We had been told by the servicing engineers that it would probably not need replacing for a further 15-20 years. Further inspection suggested that the heavy frost had caused the cast iron core of the boiler to crack and we contacted our insurers. We have now obtained confirmation that our claim has been successful and hope to rebuild the chimney and replace the boiler concurrently in the near future. We are also seeking grants available in the area to community projects from a waste management company to cover part of the cost of the works.

We are also in the process of obtaining quotes and getting initial DAC approval to replace the Church path lighting. It is proposed that the current lighting is replaced by bollard lighting on the East side of the path. This will require a further Faculty and work will probably not commence until Summer 2009.

ELECTORAL ROLL

There are 143 members on the electoral roll 67 of whom are not resident in the parish. 3 people were added to the list during the year and 3 were taken off (either through death or moving out of the area.)

J Myers (Electoral Roll Officer)

SEAL CHURCH CHOIR

This year has been another successful one for the church choir. The junior choir continues to grow steadily and there are now nine regular members. We are fortunate that three of our members David, Sophia and Grace are experienced enough to have a go at the Deanery and Diocesan Awards which take place in April; we wish all three luck. The adult choir also continues to do well and we are indeed fortunate in having such a dedicated, enthusiastic and loyal choir in our church.

The highlights for the year have included the Christmas Carol Service, regular Choral Evensongs with the choir of Kemsing Church and a joint Advent service with the choirs of St Mary's Underriver and Seal St Lawrence. It has been good to see links with other church choirs growing and this is something which I hope will continue in the future.

Three of our choristers took part in a three day RSCM course during the Spring half term run by David Leeke based at Hadlow church. Theo, David and Sophia had an excellent time and were a great credit to the church and to themselves.

After nine and a half years as Organist at Seal I have taken the very difficult decision to leave on Easter Sunday. Being Organist here has been a hugely important part of my life for the past decade and it is something I will always remember with great affection. I would like to thank all the members of the congregation, the church wardens, Rosemary and Kevin and, in particular, Anne and Keith who have made my time here hugely enjoyable and immensely rewarding. Above all, however I would like to thank the choir for their hard work, loyalty, enthusiasm, sense of humour and their unending patience with me over these past years. The choir has become hugely important to me personally and I will miss the great many friends I have made as well as the regular Wednesday night banter and the Sunday morning rush to find a suitable anthem! I do hope a new Organist can be found quickly so that the choir and the musical life of this church continues to flourish.

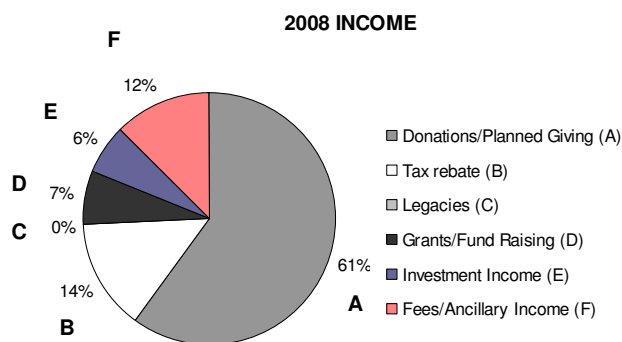
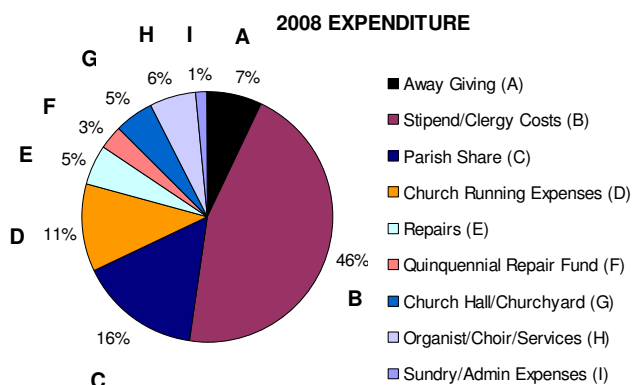
Dan Eaton

FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES OF THE PCC (TREASURER'S REPORT)

The Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2008 are provided separately. These have been examined and approved by the Independent Examiner, Anthony Llewellyn, and a copy of his Report is also attached thereto together with a statement of the Church's accounting and reserves policy and the usual graphs for those who prefer pictures to pages of numbers.

Last year a small surplus was predicted for 2008, but in the event we made a deficit of just over £3,500. This was due to lower than expected donations, planned giving receipts and tax recovery partly offset by higher fund raising, resulting in total income of £60,615. Expenses overall were as predicted, at £64,192.

For a snapshot breakdown of both income and expenditure in 2008, please see the pie charts below.



Capital expenditure was incurred on various essential

works – including upgrading the Tower and Church Hall lighting, repairing the vestry doors and investigatory work for the beetle infestation in the Church – totalling £6,750.

During 2008, the Church took over the running of the Friends of Seal Church bank account and also the Flower Fund, both of which will be kept separate from our other accounts and funds. The net effect of all of this is that total assets (cash and invested funds) decreased by just under £10,000 from last year.

Still awaiting us this year are major repair works to the roof structure due to the beetle infestation, to the chimney adjoining the organ loft (£3,650) and to the table-top tomb east of the path in the Churchyard (£550). Estimates will be obtained for the beetle infestation repairs during this year, but we believe that this is likely to cost well in excess of £10,000.

Otherwise for 2009, we are predicting another loss of £2,000 in terms of income and expenditure. Ministry and Parish Share costs will increase, but we are hoping to increase income from existing and new members (including some new gift aid commitments) and Church Hall income should be higher again thanks to some major, new lettings.

2009 is likely to be a very challenging year financially for Seal Church. In addition to trying to increase our regular income and tax recovery to put our annual finances in better order, we will certainly have major capital commitments on essential repairs which we cannot hope to fund out of income. Certainly we have enough money to pay for these, but the majority would have to come from invested savings which generate an annual income of more than £3,700 and this would merely make it harder to break even in future years. We will therefore be looking at some major fund raising and grant applications to meet these one-off capital expenses.

As always please remember that, aside from the tax rebate on Gift Aided donations, Seal Church receives no financial support whatsoever from the Government so that we have to pay for all annual costs and capital expenditure out of our own resources.

Mike Harvey (Hon. Treasurer)