

The United Benefice of Eynsford with Farningham and Lullingstone Benefice Council Report for year ended 31st December 2010

Role

The benefice council shall meet to consult on matters of common concern. Its function shall be to co-operate with the minister to promote within the benefice the whole mission of the church; pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It shall respect the separate status of the three PCCs with their separate finance and their separate roles in any decisions on the form of service to be used within their churches. The benefice council shall frame an annual budget, take steps to raise the money from the three PCCs, determine how the money shall be spent and keep accounts.

Membership

The Rector (ex-officio)

Five representatives from each PCC (including at least one church warden), elected by each PCC at its first meeting after its APCM.

For the year ended 31.12.10, these were:

Eynsford:	Linda Gwyther, Norman Hamblyn, Gillian Hill, Mike Hill, Ruth Pete
Farningham:	Stella Baggaley, Liz Meachin, Gerald Roome, Beryl Saunders, Vikki Saunders
Lullingstone:	Tony Chapman, George Comer, Peter Hill, Brian Mason, Doreen Spence

The Rector acted as chairman from May 2010. Tony Chapman acted as vice chair prior to May 2010 and Mike Hill afterwards.

Meetings

The benefice council met 5 times during the year. It would have been six, except the December meeting was postponed until January 2011 due to snow.

Committees

The benefice council delegates work with children and young people to the CYP group (currently chaired by the Rector).

Other working groups meet on an ad hoc basis.

The Business of the Council

- Meetings prior to the May 2010 AGM dealt with matters relating to the inter-regnum and preparations for the new rector.
- The Council has overseen the arrangements for service rotas and the planning of services. This has ensured a coordinated approach across the Benefice and appropriate use of the new Rector's time. The Council changed the time of the 10.00am service to 9.30am to allow the Rector to lead services in Lullingstone.
- The Council has overseen staffing, including the appointment of Dale as choir master and organist, Lynda Gwyther as Sunday school co-ordinator and Mel Baker as deputy Safeguarding officer. It has reviewed the working agreement and hours of Tina Sarris as Benefice Administrator.
- A 'listening exercise' has been undertaken to allow the three PCCs and various benefice groups to share ideas for priorities for the year ahead. In the light of responses, the Benefice Council has identified the three areas of:
 - a) Providing attractive, relevant worship services
 - b) Helping church members grow as disciples of Christ
 - c) Reaching out into the community with the good news of Jesus and God's practical loveThe Council is now overseeing specific projects to further these aims.
- A very successful stewardship campaign has been run, involving Eynsford and Farningham, and observed by Lullingstone.
- Link relationships with St Mary's Church, Tartu have been reviewed and a new way of managing the Link involving smaller exchange visits and the sharing of news and prayer requests instituted.
- Benefice publicity (welcome cards, leaflets about our activities and faith, a leaflet for parents bringing children to church) and notelets have been produced.
- The Council have reviewed the Benefice Constitution and rewritten this to bring into one document all the relevant paperwork.
- The Council has managed the Benefice budget.

A personal note from the Rector

I am indebted to the Benefice Council for their wisdom, generosity of spirit, and willingness to work collaboratively for the sake of God's glory in the Benefice. The church wardens, licensed ministers (Gillian Hill, Alan Gillott, Peter Davies and Oscar Bayley) and benefice council have provided exceptional leadership of the churches over the last year and I am privileged to be working with them.

Rector's report

Well, firstly I wanted to say what a privilege it is to stand here tonight, at my first Benefice of Eynsford with Farningham and Lullingstone AGM.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote,

“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

Helen, John, Tomos, Hannah and Georgie and I have certainly found our coming to live and minister amongst you to be a joy.

Since our arrival in a decorated house with mown lawns, with a cottage pie supper freshly delivered, we have experienced nothing but warmth, love and friendship. We have so appreciated the many people who have not told us to over do it, given us permission to take time off, and got on with many of the jobs which have made this possible. For this we are truly grateful.

Over the last year we have found the three parishes to be in good heart.

I especially commend you for your “can do” attitude, your generosity of spirit and your lack of moaning. You all seem very willing to get along together, work together, and where there are differences work them out in a constructive and positive way.

As a benefice, I believe God has blessed us with some excellent leaders. Most clergy only have two wardens. We are fortunate to have six! And how hard they work for us!

The benefice council is the most wonderful invention, enabling me to meet in council with what are effectively the elders of the churches, to pray, discern, plan and order the life of our benefice. I so value their wisdom, support and ministry.

We are blessed too, with three excellent lay readers, Alan, Oscar and Peter, and our Pastoral Assistant Gillian. The lead they give in leading worship, teaching and preaching, and in pastoral care is invaluable to us as a benefice and I hope their example will inspire others to follow into licensed ministry.

So, what might I say about our life and ministry; both over the past year and looking ahead to the year to come?

One of the main pieces of work that the Benefice Council has done this year has been to facilitate a ‘listening’ exercise; allowing the three PCCs and various other church groups to share their priorities for the year ahead.

As a result, the benefice council has identified three priorities for its work at this time. These are:

- a) Providing attractive, relevant worship services
- b) Helping church members grow as disciples of Christ
- c) Reaching out into the community with the good news of Jesus and God's practical love

Under each of these headings, various practical projects have been identified and progress made with each.

I wanted to look at each in turn.

Providing attractive, relevant worship services

We have the great advantage that we are starting from a really good place. In Lullingstone we have a congregation committed to BCP worship and we must not be afraid to promote this as an option for those, in the Benefice and beyond, who find the riches of the BCP helpful.

Our 9.30am services have an excellent organist and choir and we do 'Common worship' well.

The challenge, as we've all noticed, is that attendance at the monthly All Age Worship is considerably higher than attendance at any other benefice service. There is obviously a desire in our villages for family friendly church services.

Over the last 5 months we have tried a number of different things: all age harvests and Christingles, a toddler crib at Christmas, a family carol service. These have all been very well received. On a different tack, there was a full church for Biber's requiem and at Lullingstone for the All Soul's service of Remembrance. These special services are things upon which we would do well to build.

Helping Church members grow as disciples of Christ

The stewardship campaign has give us chance to think about how we might use our whole lives in the service of God; how we might care for creation, how we might serve God in our families, our communities, our neighbourhood; how we might use our time, our talents, our resources.

This Lent we will be learning as a church more about prayer; do get involved in a group.

I pay tribute to Mike, Norman, Philip, Dorothy, and Vikki in their running of the Stewardship Campaign and to all the different people who have volunteered to lead a Lent Group.

Thirteen of us attended the quiet day last Saturday and I think found it helpful.

A church service for pre-school children and a men's breakfast are ideas that may become possible as a result of responses to the Stewardship campaign.

Reaching out into the community with the good news of Jesus and God's practical love

We have no shortage of contact with the communities in which we live. Many of us are involved in different village groups. We have reps on the Eynsford Village Society and Church Hall Committee. I've been able to develop a good relationship with Eynsford Parish Council. I need to do this in Farningham. Anthony Roper School have welcomed me to take a weekly assembly and all the children visited St Martin's for harvest and Christmas.

And people keep coming to us. Three weddings are booked for Eynsford this year; three for Lullingstone and seven for Farningham. Nine of these couples are attending the Marriage prep course.

Another group of people who keep coming to us are parents wanting their children Christened. At present we are operating an open policy; baptising people from anywhere as long as they obtain the permission of their local parish priest. Our hope is that by requiring

couples to attend one of a monthly baptism preparation evening where couples meet each other, get to know members of the Church and are given helpful advice about the Christian faith, church and baptism, some might stay with us. We are also experimenting with proper baptism services (with hymns) rather than ‘private’ baptism services of an afternoon. This is proving difficult for logistical reasons but we need to give it a fair try.

Key to our outreach is providing an enquirers course, so people who want to find out more can do so. I intend to start an Alpha course in May. Help with providing a weekly meal, and with facilitating the course would be most welcome.

Also key is providing accessible services for people who have no church background. Some people will be drawn to the BCP at Lullingstone, others to our regular Common Worship services; but some will not. The new service on a Sunday afternoon will be aimed at children and families with no church background. Please pray for its success, and even if it’s not your cup of tea, invite people for whom it might be helpful.

One mistake we made on the stewardship campaign response form was not to put down “join a social committee”. Having a group of people willing to help organise occasional social activities, both to get us as Christians together and as a means of inviting people in, would be most helpful. Volunteers please!

Finally, let me mention the issue of buildings:

We are so blessed with three beautiful historic buildings and church yards. Lullingstone have just completed major repair work. Both Eynsford and Farningham are looking to complete re-ordering projects within the next 2 years. Eynsford needs disabled access, a loo, tea station, flexible meeting space and new heating system. Farningham needs a loo and tea station.

Both these reordering projects will require significant sacrifice from us, as church members. But they also offer us the chance to grow in faith as we pray and work together and they provide a great opportunity to show our villages what can be done with faith in God. Whilst St Martin’s is talking with village organisations already, the main push will be in the Autumn amongst church members, so as not to interfere with the current village hall project, with whom we are working closely.

So, thank you for allowing me, and the family, the privilege of partnering with you in the gospel, in these three beautiful parishes. Thank you, on behalf of “the church” for all your hard work.

Keep praying for us, as we pray for you.

And “to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”