

HASTINGS UNITARIAN CHURCH
CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION
REPORT TO CHARITY COMMISSION COVERING THE PERIOD 1
OCTOBER 2023 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2024
SUMMARY OF MAIN EVENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Introduction

The Unitarian Church offers a place to meet and worship in an atmosphere of freedom. Our Unitarian movement has a long and proud history dating back to the mid-sixteenth century. The church has no dogmas or creeds to adhere to and freedom of thought and spiritual inquiry is encouraged with complete tolerance and respect for other faiths or none. Membership is free and open to all who wish to join. Services are held every Sunday morning and subsidiary meetings may be held during the week for meditation, prayer, and discussion. Other community groups and societies also hire the church e.g. circle dancing Narcotics Anonymous, Interfaith Forum etc for their meetings.

Much of the church's work is undertaken on a voluntary basis by trustees and members of the congregation who receive no remuneration except for legitimate expenses.

The church continues to develop and deepen a spiritual path in community with each other; sharing our experiences and drawing inspiration from nature, art, literature, science, and other faith traditions from around the world.

Events and achievements

Our Lay Pastor, Jennifer Sanders left in February 2023 to become Minister at Brighton Unitarian Church. Consequently, the church now has no permanent Minister or Pastor. However, Sunday services are frequently taken by members of the congregation or visiting lay preachers from other Unitarian churches in the area. Their services offer a wide range of experience, knowledge and insight. We are fortunate in being able to call upon them.

The church supports a number of registered charities:

- i. Hastings Food Bank
- ii. Médecins Sans Frontières
- iii. 'Send a Child to Hucklow' (a Unitarian Charity offering holidays for disadvantaged children).

The church is keen to make itself more widely known in the Hastings & Rother area. A number of initiatives are being planned, e.g, more focussed publicity, organ recital in aid of a local charity, working collaboratively with other Unitarian churches and the LDPA (London District & Provincial Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches). A number of the congregation are involved in supporting community-based bodies, eg, St Michael's Hospice, Police chaplaincy, East Sussex Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

The church has recently been given permission to conduct same-sex marriages.

The church is a member of the Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum which promotes community cohesion through dialogue and co-operation between people of different faiths. A number of the congregation are involved in supporting community based

The church is very fortunate in having among its congregation people who are willing to take on essential roles and duties, eg, lettings and treasury, without remuneration, requiring much time and who work together in furtherance of the aims of the Church.

Coinciding with the departure of Jennifer Sanders the church agreed to advertise for a paid Administrator and Clerk. The successful applicant, Alison Forsyth, has been very effective in the role not only in terms of internal organisation but also engaging with outside bodies in furtherance of the Church and Trustees' aims.

The Church is very grateful to Michael Stewart who advises the church on investments and also acts as the Church's bookkeeper. He gives his expertise and time without charge.

The Church would like to record its thanks to Pat Hitchman and Simon Edson for their good offices in maintaining the church.

The following documents, which form part of this report, are attached as annexes:

Lettings Report

Pulpit Secretary Report

Receipts & Payments

Assets & Liabilities

Independent Examiner's report

Lettings Report

South Terrace and the surrounding area have twice suffered extensive flooding, requiring the Church to close, and necessitating refurbishment, such as new flooring and new carpets throughout. During this time the church was unable to offer its space for letting. The church now has some portable flood defence barriers which can be installed quickly.

In contrast this year has run quite smoothly.

Last year the Post Office Pensioners group stopped coming, due to the frailty of some of its members.

However, the acoustics of the building are popular with the choirs using the church on a regular basis -

Harmony One – (Monday evenings)

The Class Choir – (Wednesday evenings) and

The Bach Choir (Friday evenings).

Compared to larger venues our church is blessed with an overall feeling of intimacy and peaceful ambiance. This makes it popular with more spiritual groups such as the Krishna group and the Bhagavad-Gita group who meet alternate Thursdays.

The church has for some time been the venue for Circle Dancing run by members of the congregation and others who meet regularly on Thursday mornings. Dancers each pay £3.00 to the Church.

Narcotics Anonymous meet every Saturday morning. Given its aims the church is pleased to offer them a discount on its standard letting fee.

All other groups hiring the church pay £30 per session (morning, afternoon or evening).

The church is also used for 'Heart and Soul' meetings, held monthly on Tuesday afternoons.

PULPIT REPORT 2023 / 2024

Since September 2023, we have been fortunate in welcoming a wide variety of service leaders to our church and have been able to offer a service every Sunday morning at 11.00 am. As we have no minister or lay pastor of our own, our service leaders come from other Unitarian churches in the southeast of England, notably from Tenterden, Brighton, Lewes, and Horsham as well as London. We also invite the district minister for the Southeast region to come and give a couple of services each year. In addition, we have been blessed in that many members of our own congregation have given excellent services. We have found that the congregation enjoys the variety of styles of delivery and content offered by a different service leader each week.

Occasionally, we have a congregational service during which everyone is invited to contribute a story, thoughts, a poem, a piece of music or even a work of art around a given theme.

We have continued to make our services available via Zoom and most weeks find that three or four people join the service online. However, following feedback from members of the congregation expressing a preference for live services, we have ceased inviting service leaders to give a service remotely via Zoom.

We have an organist who plays for the services on the second Sunday of each month, and the live music is much appreciated by all. For all other services, we rely on playing the hymns from CDs recorded by the Unitarian Musical Society, and service leaders are requested to bring music on CD to play before and after the service.

Hastings Unitarian Church

Finance report section for the Chairman's annual report for the year 23-24

The trustees are pleased to report a surplus of £3,605 for the year, based on income from regular sources of £23,923 less expenditure of £20,318. This surplus increased the bank balance to £11,698 at the year-end 30 September 2024.

Professional valuations of the church building and pipe organ were undertaken during the year and totalled £1,846,880. The Church holds general and restricted investment funds of £212,879 (22-23 £198,522). Total Assets increased to £2,071,707 (22-23 £1,855,865).

The trustees believe that the overall financial position will remain strong in the foreseeable future and there is no significant outstanding or anticipated expenditure at the time of this report.

Hastings Unitarian Church CIO						
Assets and Liabilities as at 30th September 2024						
		Unrestricted		Restricted	Endowment	
		Funds		Funds		Funds
Cash funds:						
Bank Current account		11,698				-
Cash in Hand		250				-
Total cash funds		11,948		-		-
Investment assets:						
	M&G general fund	129,091				
	M&G AH legacy fund (February 2020) for Ministerial Support			26,247		
	TAM MB legacy fund (March 2022)	57,541				
	Total investment funds	186,632		26,247		-
Assets retained for the charity's own use:						
Church building		1,545,600		-		-
Pipe organ		301,280		-		-
		1,846,880		-		-
TOTAL ASSETS		2,045,460		26,247		-
Notes:						
The Church building and Organ are shown at insurance valuations; they were revalued in the 4th quarter 2023. Investment assets are shown at valuations as at 30 September.						
Approved by the Trustees on the..... and signed on their behalf by						
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Chair and Trustee				Trustee		

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