

Annual Report for 2015. (February through to November)

Pastor's Report.

Our very first worship service was on February 1st. 24 people attended and 12 people were brought into membership. Once that had been achieved we held our very first general meeting where both the pastor, (Rev. Michael Hydes), lay delegate, (Jean Hatton), and board members (Nigel Utting, Ann Wilkinson, Wendy Foster, and Keith Fish) were voted into office.

PUTTING The following are the main events that have been of note over the year.

PEOPLE FIRST

On March 14th there was an LGBT Network gathering in Prestamex House. 6 people representing The Village MCC staffed a general information stall. Representatives were there from all the grass root LGBT organizations in the area, and the council and police were also represented.

Easter week events included a well attended special Palm Sunday service coordinated by Mary Bacchoo, a Seder meal (a full lamb dinner with stories of liberation), walking with the *Churches Together Walk of Witness* on Good Friday, and Sunday morning worship on the beach with *One Church* and *MCC Brighton*.

Then on April 25th 5 Village members met with THT (*The Terrence Higgins Trust*) and spent 4 hours cleaning up the Dukes Mound gardens. This is a local cruising area and THT spend time each spring ensuring that the area is safe and clean for tourists.



One Voice held an open market event on May 21st from 2-5pm. Thank you to Jean and Simon who staffed *The Village MCC* stall: It was great to network with other grass root organizations.

At the end of May I had the honor of Officiating at the wedding of church members Ann and Linda. Simon very kindly made a beautiful wedding cake so the church family could celebrate together after worship. Linda's 99 year old mother was maid of honor which warranted an article in the local paper and a section on the southern TV news!



The Golden Handbags event is held every June and is a huge gala affair with local performers giving out awards. We were nominated for a community service award. To be nominated someone has to put your name forward and be approved by the committee; then the community all votes online. We didn't win an award but we were up against over a dozen local charities that all do great work, and it was good to be recognized as a part of the community.

At the end of June we held a special service exploring poverty. It was brought together and led by Mary Bacchoo. The service was set cafe style, with a basic meal, and lots drawn for which table we sat at. Some tables were rich, some very poor, and some extremely poor. The dynamic was an education for all of us and really showed how unfairly wealth is distributed around the world.



Trans Pride was held at the end of July and was well attended. Thank you to Simon, Keith, Wendy, Jan, Will, and everyone else that helped out. A special 'Thank you' to Will who helped design out Trans Pride poster. We were joined by members of MCC Brighton and MCC North London and although we were in the church away from the main celebration we did have folks come to us for support. We were visible at the main event as both Rev. Sharon Ferguson and I wore clergy collars and met with group leaders. There were about 3,000 in attendance. Trans poet Alice Denny recited some of her poetry and was very well received. I invited her to come and speak at church.

At our PRIDE event in the park Chris, Simon, Keith, and Jan all dressed Steam-Punk style and looked great. Thank you to Jaz, Jean, Simon, Wendy, Nicki, and everyone else that gave out free game tickets around the park. They worked a treat and at one point we had an eager queue of children (of all ages) waiting to have a go. Thank you to Keith who designed a wonderful steam-punk style stall, to Chris who designed a great banner, and to both Simon and Keith who spent most of the day retrieving the cans that were knocked off the shelves. They looked amazing in their costumes! There were hundreds of participants and one new couple came to church the following day.



The aim was to simply provide a service for the community, a bit of 'free' fun. In reality I think we achieved more in the way of visibility and awareness that we would of had we aimed to create it. The Village MCC is certainly becoming known in the community and as a support and resource, not just 'another church'.



Over the Pride season *The Village MCC* had good coverage as I was on the cover of BOYZ magazine in London, and there was a full page interest story in G-Scene. Folks are finding us through our advert in G-Scene, and my bi-monthly article went into G-Scene July and September so all told we have good visibility through the magazine over the quarter.

Our Pride service was a real celebration, and despite many of our regular attendees being away we had 23 in attendance. Chris sang for us, Robert brought prayers, and Nigel led a wonderfully inclusive communion celebration. Of the 23 in attendance 6 were from Eastbourne or the surrounding area. I am looking at ways in which we can support this group who, because of the distance, are only able to attend church intermittently.

On Sunday September 27th Trans poet Alice Denny came and spoke, performing some of her poetry . She spoke a little about her life and calling to be a poet. I'm pleased that we are connecting well with the Trans community, which has historically completely rejected any church outreach in Brighton. Alice wrote a lovely article about *The Village MCC* on Facebook.

We held the annual church retreat on Saturday October 10th. Nine of us gathered in the communal space by Wendy and Sarah's home in Newhaven. The day went well and despite being short of time a vision for the church did emerge that everyone there was happy with (below). Thank you to Wendy and Sarah for facilitating the event space. We all went home with very cool temporary tattoos.



Over the year we have received many calls for help in the community. Some are to talk to someone about their sexuality and faith, others because they have a personal or financial emergency. For example; One Friday evening Jaz and Jean had hosted a wonderful movie evening at their home, and as I left I picked up a voice mail from a young man who was in some distress. He had been released from a two week hospital stay and had come home that afternoon to his bedsit to find that the electricity had run out whilst he'd been away, and because he'd been unable to sign on there was no money in his account. Food in the freezer had all gone off. There was no heating, food, or even a fridge in which to store medications.

Agencies were either closed or unable to help him until Monday morning. On behalf of the church I was able to offer immediate financial aid and to simply reach out and help, making sure that he had what he needed until the agencies were able to respond.

On the weekend of Trans Pride a young woman visited Brighton where she found that her offer of accommodation had fallen through. She met another trans person visiting from *MCC North London* who brought her to *The Village MCC* service. We found a volunteer willing to offer accommodation for the night and she was able to catch a ferry to France the following morning.

During October I was made aware of Tara Hudson, a trans girl in Bath who had been sentenced to 10 weeks in a men's prison. Through facebook and email messages *The Village MCC* was able to help with applying pressure. Many telephone calls, letters, emails later Tara's case was reviewed and she was allocated to a women's prison.

These are just a few examples of how the church is making a real difference in the community. There are many more examples.

On Saturday October 17th I spoke at the anti-hate rally on the Old Steine, and my husband Chris sang. The weather was kind to us and the police rolled out a new app for reporting crime. It is now possible to submit video and picture evidence without having to be there in person – the app uploads everything to the police. To download the app go to: www.witnessconfident.org. (Presently only available on apple or android).



At the end of the month I attended the annual LGBT Community Safety Forum general meeting and learned that according to their annual survey hate crime in Brighton and Hove is up 50% on last year.

Since *The Village MCC* was born I have been meeting with community leaders to discuss the homelessness issues in Brighton and Hove. LGBT community members are hugely over represented in the homeless demographic. After months of work it became apparent that the process for rehousing the homeless is desperately inadequate and there are many people sleeping rough. The age expectancy for someone sleeping rough is 47 and according to the city's own report the situation is desperate:

According to the council's 2015 housing strategy report *Around 8% of LGBT people have specialist housing needs and over 1/3 LGBT people have a disability or long-term health problems, with around 15% finding found themselves homeless whilst living in the city.....*

.....For LGBT people who find themselves homeless, being found ineligible for housing support is a barrier to finding suitable accommodation. Count Me in Too reported that 22% of LGBT people who took part in the research had been homeless at some point in their lives and many found themselves sleeping rough, sofa-surfing, staying with friends or living in temporary accommodation or hostels. (www.brighton-hove.gov.uk and see the Housing Strategy 2015 report)

According to the council report at least 6,000 LGBT people in the city will at some time experience being homeless, whilst the *Count Me In Too* report suggests that figure is nearer 9,000. It is a reality that a disproportional number of people sleeping rough on the streets are LGBT*.

Ann, Jaz, Mary, and one of Brighton's rough sleepers case workers; Greg, and I, have set up a group called '*Sleep Safe Brighton and Hove*' which will be supported by the *The Village MCC* but work independently of the church, (necessary in order to meet funding requirements). This group is tasked with ending homelessness within the LGBT population of Brighton and Hove. See www.sleepsafebh.org. (NB, the site is still being built as this is being written).



In response to community need for out of hours crisis aid the church has set up an emergency fund which can be accessed by people in need. Aid of up to £20 can be given independently by anyone on the church support team, and any amount over this figure will need to be agreed unanimously by the appointed group. The team is still in formation and there are as yet no funds available - even though the church has already met some emergency needs from general funds.

Church giving obviously dictates the church budget. As pastor I am currently paid for just over six hours work a week, although in reality I often work over 40. The board set the full time salary for a pastor at £31,200 pa. The church is currently able to pay £4,800, which is 15% of the full time salary. When we first began this figure was set at just under 10% so there has been an increase over the year. The board were able to achieve this because of the monthly gift we receive from Northern Light's MCC, and because 6 members have set up standing orders - which helps the board to budget more effectively. The board reviews the stipend quarterly. Please see the attached sheet for the 2015 report and the 2016 proposed budget.

Throughout the year the church has been active in the community. We are a member of 'Churches Together' and 'The LGBT Network of Brighton and Hove'. We are also members of 'One Voice', a multicultural and diverse community group that represents many religious groups as well. We support the work of the anti hate campaign where I have spoken at events, and the LGBT Community Safety Forum, where we are actively included in helping to keep LGBT community residents safe.

Social events have included a movie night, a walk followed by a pub lunch, a bring-and-share meal, ad hoc suppers at the pastor's home after worship, and since many of our members are also the members of local choirs we regularly have events run by The Rainbow Chorus, Brighton goes Gospel, The Brighton Gay Men's Chorus, and many others.

Church life continues to be rich and full, and each week Chris uploads our sermons to YOUTUBE where they can be accessed through the Village MCC site. (www.thevillagemcc.org). The site traffic peaked in the summer months with just over 1,000 visits a month, and then has gradually fallen to around 200 a month as seasonal visitors to Brighton have dropped off.

We received a very encouraging comment on one of the online sermons: *Is the bible the word of God*. Mr. Owen Clutton of Robertsbridge wrote: *This is a fantastic, fascinating, honest, truthful and utterly illuminating presentation. Brilliant and I cannot recommend it highly enough. The speaker is superb*. It's nice to see that our work as a church is appreciated – thank you especially to Chris who films each sermon as well as publishes them online.



The average worship attendance over the year has been just under 18, with a low of 7 and a high of 26. Mid-week attendance ranges from a low of 2 to a high of 9. The average is around 6.

Average attendance on a Sunday has not changed since we began, which means that the church is not yet growing. There are some new attendees joining us but others have either left or their visits have become less regular. This is disappointing.

On a positive note church members generously donated towards our music ministry so we now have a piano and Will Mason has very generously agreed to be our music minister. Will is a wonderfully Spirit led and talented worship leader and he makes a huge difference to the quality of our worship.

I want to thank our board members Ann, Wendy, Nigel, and Keith – especially Keith who has been acting as both treasurer and secretary. Thank you to Jean who does a great job as Lay Delegate. Thank you to Linda and Simon for taking care of refreshments every week, they do a wonderful job and Simon makes the most amazing cakes and scones – all gluten and dairy free! Thank you to Mary for the special event services. Thank you to Robert, Nigel, and Sarah for their wonderful preaching; and to everyone who takes some part in our worship services. Thank you to Will who brings the most wonderful Spirit in the music he plays. Thank you to Chris for our web site. Thank you to Jaz and Nigel for heading up our route to becoming a registered charity. Thank you to Ann, Jaz, and Simon for their work on the events team Thank you to Ann and Linda for offering their home each month for board meetings, and to Jaz and Jean for offering their home for meetings too. Thank you to everyone who helps to set up and take down the church each week, volunteers on a team, or faithfully supports the work and ministry of the church.



Thank you to Northern Lights MCC for their support. Not only does 2% of their denominational tithe come to us each month, (Thank you to UFMCC), but they offer us resources and advice. I connect with Cecelia regularly and she is a great source of wisdom and support.

Thank you to the Somerset Day Center who so graciously allow us use of their space every Sunday.. This very generous gift on their part is greatly appreciated – especially as the low rent they charge us allows us to use money for advertising etc. Their support is greatly appreciated and without it we would no doubt struggle.

Below you will see the five year vision for the church that members of the retreat envisioned, a vision that even now is starting to be revealed. I do not believe it is our job to create it, but to grow into it. I believe that when we are ready then the vision will reveal itself in our midst. I look forward to it and to further serving the God I love with the people I love.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Rev. Michael'.

Rev. Michael.

Planned events for the new year include....

A year for change - change your life: A book club with a difference. One book a month for a year starting in the new year. Each book has been chosen because it is recommended for personal development. Books that help us to develop relationships with others, books that help us develop a relationship with ourselves, and books that help us develop a relationship with our higher power. Some of these books are 'how to' books and some are story books. Each one is a part of the group because together they provide the tools with which to change our lives.

Questions of faith: A one day exploration of faith from an LGBT perspective. (Set for the beginning of Lent)

Holy Conversations: A ten week course covering - Ministry (Laity, Clergy, etc.), Sexuality & Spirituality, Ecumenical / Interreligious Issues, Trans-formations & Trans Experiences, Baptism, Holy Communion , Who is Jesus?, Global Justice, Ecclesiology (Church). No dates have been set for this yet but I think a Saturday or Sunday morning breakfast group might be nice. (To be filmed and published on YOUTUBE).

Five year vision for *The Village Metropolitan Community Church*.

(Visioned at the first annual retreat October 2015)

By October 2015 *The Village MCC* will be the core of an exchange based community hub, a fully integrated LGBT* community resource in the heart of Kempton.

We have a cafe, with a well equipped kitchen, adjacent to a multi-use space that hosts worship every Sunday. Both spaces are used by various voluntary groups for meetings and events throughout the week. (There are folding window-doors between the two spaces with privacy blinds available for closed group meetings. The cafe and meeting space can be combined for large events). There is a small room used for general office and filing needs. Parking is available and there is a remunerated building services manager.

The building has first rate audio and media equipment that facilitates both excellent worship and a variety of group needs. It is a safe space staffed by well trained volunteers. We offer free wi-fi access. All facilities are non gender specific. The building is fully accessible.

We have a full time pastor who is remunerated a full time salary. The pastor oversees all aspects of *The Village MCC's* spiritual life and support processes, and liaises with local businesses and groups who contribute to the larger community through us.

The Sunday service has both a music/worship group and a choir. Average Sunday worship attendance fluctuates between 50 and 80. We have a strong Spirit led board that does a great job fund raising and grant writing. We budget realistically so that our annual income exceeds budget with expenditure under budget.

We have a well trained and grounded pastoral team who, with the Pastor, are responsible for spiritual life of the church. There is also a hospitality team that ensures that everyone in the area that wants to come to church or access our services is able to do so, and that those we serve feel welcome and valued. All volunteers are well supported and opportunities to volunteer are always available.

We run our own excellent training and spirituality courses, as well as facilitate a broad spectrum of affinity groups. We hold an annual weekend retreat, (in a rural setting), and an annual one day leadership retreat, which are both always well attended.

*as well as anyone disenfranchised because of sexuality or gender expression.

Ministry in 2015

Date/Month	Activity description and location
01/02/15	First worship service of <i>The Village MCC</i> – 12 members installed, followed by a general meeting where the Pastor and Lay Delegate were appointed.
Sundays	We meet for worship every Sunday at 6pm. Attendance low of 12, high of 26.
Tuesdays	A small group meets every Tuesday from 7:30pm – 9pm. Attendance ranges from 2 to 9.
14/03/15	LGBT Network gathering in Prestamex House. 6 people representing <i>The Village MCC</i> at a general information stall.
01/03/15	Seder meal, 9 present.
02/03/15	Good Friday walk around town with <i>Churches together</i> .
05/03/15	Meet with <i>One Church</i> for a service on the beach – 4 attend.
18/04/15	LGBT Network meeting – for Brighton grass-root LGBT groups.
24/04/15	Volunteer with Lunch Positive – 2 of us. (We continue to volunteer twice a month with at least one volunteer)
25/04/15	Volunteer with <i>The Terrence Higgins Trust</i> to help clear up Dukes Mound area.
03/05/15	First <i>Event's Team</i> meeting. Team has 4 members and guests.
30/05/15	Church members wedding
04/06/15	Attend Older LGBT Housing forum led by Stonewall housing.
21/06/15	Attend <i>Golden Handbag Awards</i> where we were nominated for a community service award.
07/07/15	Attend <i>One Voice</i> community meeting as an LGBT presence.
27/0715	On the cover of BOYZ magazine in London
25/07/15	Trans Pride with MCC North London and MCC Brighton at the Dorset Gardens Methodist Church. Around 3,000 in attendance.
29/07/15	Support fund raising event at <i>PROUD for the Sussex Beacon</i> .
30/07/15	Support the <i>LGBT Community Safety Forum</i> setting up at <i>PRIDE</i> .
31/07/15	Set up <i>The Village MCC</i> Steam punk Carnival game stall at Pride.
01/08/15	Pride event at the park, serving approx. 300 adults and children.
02/07815	Pride service at <i>The Village MCC</i> – 24 in attendance.
13-16/08/15	European Network Gathering – 4 people from <i>The Village MCC</i> in attendance.

15/09/15	Walk with Dogs – pub lunch. 8 attended.
27/09/15	Trans poet Alice Denny comes to speak at the Sunday worship service
30/09/15	First meeting of <i>Sleep Safe Brighton and Hove</i> – a group we are setting up to address homelessness issues among the LGBT community in Brighton and Hove.
05/10/15	First meeting of the Charity status application group.
10/10/15	The Village MCC annual retreat. Once day of workshops, visioning and worship. 9 people attended.
16/10/15	Movie and conversation evening. <i>PRIDE</i> . 8 attended.
18/10/15	Generous donations allow us to buy an electric Piano. Will mason agrees to be our musical director. We hold our first worship service with live music.

Plan and goals for the ministry in 2016

Date/Month	Activity description and location
01/12/15	World Aids day reading of the names
24/12/15	Christmas Eve service.
24/03/16	Seder meal.
25/03/16	Good Friday walk around town with <i>Churches together</i> .
27/03/16	Meet with <i>One Church</i> for a service on the beach.
30/07/16	Trans Pride stall.
06/08/16	Marching at Pride and stall at the event.
TBA	Weekend retreat
TBA	One day leadership retreat
TBA	Various social and fund raising events.

Ministry Leader/Pastor in 2015

Continuing education undertaken by the ministry leader during 2015	Activities undertaken during 2015 that support the ministry leader's spiritual growth and self-care.
The challenge of maintaining healthy boundaries in ministry – The Faith Trust Institute.	Bi-monthly meetings with a spiritual director.
MCC and the path to a new Statement of Faith Rev Dr. Axel Schwaigert – Network Gathering	Clergy retreat at Ammerdown.
Romans 1:18 – 31 as parody Niklas Olaison – Network Gathering	Monthly counseling sessions.
The Gospel According to Jesus Queen of Heaven (Movd discussion): Rev Maxwell Reay + John Todd – Network Gathering	Booked a short vacation for January 2016.
Governing Board, Council of Elders, Network Leader – Who Does What and What's New? SJ Ramage, Rev Elder Darlene Garner, Jochen Gewecke Russell.	
Media Training – by <i>One Voice</i> . (4 hours)	