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Making Friends

Setting up a Friends group to support your church



“...the reason for the success of the Friends is that it was never intended to be peopled solely by church goers. The church belongs to everyone in Ash, not just the regular congregation.”

Looking to the future, there is plenty to do. “The church is too big for some of our smaller activities, so our next project is to glass in a chapel off the main church aisle and use it for smaller services and activities. Our Sunday morning children’s work is relatively small, but it would be wonderful for the children to go out to a sound-proofed space while the service goes on. At the moment, during the sermon and hymn singing, they can’t hear a word their teacher says!”

Although the congregation is relatively small (40 – 60 most weeks), Bill is confident that the excellent collaboration between church and community will continue. “I’m convinced that part of the reason for the success of the Friends is that it was never intended to be peopled solely by church goers. The church belongs to everyone in Ash, not just the regular congregation.”



St Nicholas, Ash

How Friends support this beautiful medieval church at the heart of the village both geographically and spiritually

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Helping your Church

The village of Ash in East Kent is a pretty settlement dominated by the beautiful medieval church of St Nicholas. The church is at the heart of the village, both geographically and spiritually. As with all buildings of this vintage, a constant programme of maintenance and restoration is needed, which is where Friends of St Nicholas Church in Ash come in.

Church warden Bill Vennart is very involved with the church. "The Friends Group was set up in 1995. St Nicholas was built in 1400 and is Grade I listed with all that implies. We were very fortunate to receive a generous legacy some years ago which takes care of the main repairs and general maintenance, but the Friends Group focus on sorting out some of the short-sighted additions the Victorians made to the church and other improvements!"

'The church runs an after-school club for primary school children once a week, and you can imagine how hard that was with the pews in the way. The Friends part-funded taking out the pews, levelling the floor and making it all into a big, open space. We now hold small services, concerts and meetings there and everyone loves it.'



Since its inception, the Friends have paid for a pair of solid oak doors for the church, refurbished the porch, complete with new floor and put in disabled access. The church was built in a cruciform shape and one particular Victorian addition needed attention, as Bill explains. "In the 19th century, a wooden platform was built on the crossing near the main aisle between the North and South Transept to accommodate lots of pews. It meant the floor was uneven and it really got in the way when we used the church. The church runs an after-school club for primary school children once a week, and you can imagine how hard that was with the

A lasting Gift



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Friends of St Nicholas Church in Ash is a registered charity with about 80 members. Everyone pays a yearly minimum

subscription of £5 and the mix is about 50/50 of churchgoers and community members. This mix is part of its success as Bill explains. "Ash is a very supportive community. The Friends deliberately run events which everyone enjoys and can engage with. The blend of members from the church and community gives us a really approachable feel. The Chair of the Friends, Denis Blaxland, is a member of the congregation and while the Deputy Chair isn't, we have got him on the church cleaning rota!"

The Friends run a lively social calendar. "They organise three main fundraisers a year. The flagship event is the arts festival which raises somewhere between £4-5,000. Everyone loves it and it's a key part of village social life. We also have a race night which usually raises about £1,500, plus a shuffleboard evening which brings in around £600 - £800. At our last shuffleboard event, we had children from 8 years old to grannies in their 80s with everyone enjoying it so much. It's wonderful to see our village coming together."



Apart from fund raising as an organization, the Friends have an additional purpose of providing educational talks on the various aspects of the church building. Thus at each AGM, experts on stonemasonry, stained-glass windows, statues etc are invited to speak.