

LDCF 2016 AGM Reports

CHAIR'S REPORT

by Elizabeth Jewkes, Chair of LDCF

I took over as Acting Chair in June last year before being elected Chair at the AGM.

Party Conferences:

Prior to autumn conference in 2015, the party asked us to hold our annual Prayer Breakfast in an official conference venue and offered us a free room. The downside was that we would have to pay hotel prices for the breakfast. I took the decision to accept the offer as it meant that the event would be included in the conference directory. Usually, about 40 people attend our Prayer Breakfast, all of them members as it is only advertised to members. This time, 88 people came, some of whom were not members, some were not Christians. Thanks to generous donations, we were able to cover the cost of breakfast and gained some new members. It was a big success. We decided to also hold a breakfast event in an official conference venue at spring conference for the first time and this was also well attended. This year, we will be holding our Prayer Breakfast at the Hilton Hotel on Tuesday.

Director changes:

Our former Director, Claire Mathys moved on to a job within the party last summer and in September, Claire and I interviewed for her replacement. The most impressive candidate was Sarah Dickson and I am really pleased she accepted the job, starting work with us in October last year. Sarah is an outstanding Director. She has built relationships with Green Pastures, who sponsored our Prayer Breakfast at spring conference and are sharing our stall this autumn. She has continued Claire's work with Christians in Politics and has been a great support to me as Chair. With the loss of a major donor who left the party, we needed to fundraise to continue to be able to employ Sarah for 4 days per week. I am thrilled that the membership has dug deep and committed sufficient donations to enable us to extend Sarah's contract for another year. Thank you to everyone who has given and to everyone who continues to contribute.

Training sessions:

The party have asked us to deliver two training sessions at this conference on how to engage with faith communities. I am very excited about this as it will be a great opportunity to talk about the work churches do in the community to people who may not be aware of the scope and the value to society of the voluntary work performed by churches.

Membership:

The party's membership has increased substantially since May 2015 and our membership has more than doubled, making us one of the largest party membership organisations.

And finally...

I want to thank the exec for all their hard work over the past year. Several people were elected to the exec for the first time at the last AGM and I really appreciate their commitment and enthusiasm.

DIRECTORS REPORT

by Sarah Dickson, Director of LDCF

It has been a jam-packed but exciting first year in the role of Director of LDCF. It has been great to meet lots of inspiring LDCF members and help strengthen relationships between the Party and the Christian community. Here's some of the highlights:

Policy influencing:

Housing campaign

Soon after I began at LDCF, the Government was proposing drastic cuts to social and affordable housing. We decided to launch a campaign to try and engage the Christian community in the issue. Housing quickly became our policy focus for the year. We had a good response to our online petition and, since then, held one brilliant fringe event on the issue at Spring Conference and, at the time of writing, are about to have our policy motion on homelessness debated at conference. If passed, it will become Lib Dem Party policy. Through the campaign we have established relationships with several Christian organisations working on housing and we have helped introduce them to our Parliamentarians and advisors.

Other issues

Refugees – With the escalation of the refugee crisis, we have supported churches and Christian organisations in responding to it. We have linked up our Parliamentarians with organisations such as Home for Good who have then been able to work with Lib Dem policy advisors in developing the Party's refugee campaign.

Counter extremism – With new counter extremism policies being proposed by the Government, we have helped link concerned Christian organisations up with our policy advisors so that their voice is heard in the Party's response.

Syria airstrikes – After the vote in Parliament to extend airstrikes into Syria, Lib Dem Lawyers Association invited us to join with them in holding a day conference for Lib Dem members to discuss Parliament's decision with experts. The sessions helped improve understanding between members and Parliamentarians.

Paris attacks vigil – Following the terror attacks in Paris, LDCF approached the Conservative Christian Fellowship and Christians on the Left to organise an inter-faith prayer vigil outside Westminster Abbey for Parliamentarians. Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin led prayers and we were joined by representatives from the London inter-faith network, as well as Parliamentarians from both houses.

Election campaigns:

EU Referendum

We joined with a former Dean of Durham Cathedral (Michael Sadgrove) who had started a Christians for Europe Twitter feed to co-lead a 'Christians for Europe' campaign. I built a website (christiansforeurope.org), gathered endorsements from relatively well-known Christians from across the political spectrum to list on there and kept the blog updated with guest blogs.

The profile of the campaign grew rapidly. We became the main Christian 'IN' group (whilst a Christians for Britain group formed for 'OUT'). This meant we gained an increasing amount of press attention from Christian and secular press, we had invitations for speakers at

approx. 20 events across the country (of which I have managed to send Lib Dems to all of them) and Britain Stronger IN approached us for help on different tasks.

Although the result did not go our way, our commitment to the campaign and our positive statement released after the result led to a membership surge. It also helped raise our profile and strengthen our reputation within the Party. We now need to discuss what our role (if any) is in the EU debate going forward.

Local elections (May 2016)

For the local, regional and PCC elections in May, LDCF encouraged prayer and campaign support for LDCF members. I also helped the London campaign team engage with churches, briefing Caroline Pidgeon ahead of the main church hustings and taking Lord Newby out to visit another church. So far I have heard of one successfully elected councillor (a new member after May 2015) but there may well be more I haven't heard from.

Events:

Lib Dem Conferences

Federal conferences - We have had a good presence at 2015 Autumn Conference and 2016 Spring Conference. At both we organised well-attended breakfast events, ran busy exhibition stands, introduced faith-based organisations to conference and joined with local churches for services. Through doing so, we have been able to recruit many new members, speak to lots of existing members and raise our profile within the Party.

Regional conferences - In autumn 2015, LDCF had a presence at six regional conferences. Local volunteers ran exhibition stands and, as a result, we recruited some more supporters and members.

Gladstone Lecture

As part of our work on the EU referendum, our Gladstone Lecture was held on Monday 13th June in St Matthew's Westminster with Dr Julie Smith. The title was *The European Union: a question of faith, morality or pragmatism?*. The audience was small but engaged and the lecture offered a very useful contribution to the EU debate. A recording can be found on www.ldcf.org.

MP/Peer church visits

Tim Farron to !Audacious, Manchester – Also in the run up to the EU referendum, the Party asked us to organise a church speaking opportunity for Tim Farron. We arranged to take Tim to speak at two services at !Audacious Church in Manchester (a mega-church that attracts approx. 600-700 people each service). He shared about his experience of being a Christian involved in politics and encouraged the congregation to participate in politics – specifically to vote in the referendum.

Baroness Sal Brinton to Spring Harvest – Sal Brinton was invited to speak in a seminar at Spring Harvest in Minehead. To an audience of approx. 500, Sal encouraged people to participate in politics through sharing her own experience as a Christian in politics. She was very well received and we have had lots of positive feedback since.

Press coverage:

Over this year, LDCF's presence in Christian press has grown. We have been approached for comment for radio, TV, online and print press on numerous issues and we have proactively promoted our own and the Party's campaign messages through press releases.

Christians in Politics:

Our cross-party work with Christians in Politics has continued this year. We have delivered training sessions and workshops for different church groups. It is exciting to see more and more Christians take steps to participate in politics!

Weekend away

Together with Christians on the Left and the Conservative Christian Fellowship, we hosted a weekend away last November. The weekend aimed to inspire and equip Christians to take steps to participate in politics. The 100 (or so) delegates heard from theologians and politicians and connected with one another to share experiences and encouragements. It was a great weekend and there was lots of appetite for another event this year. As a result, we are hosting a day conference in Manchester 'SHOW UP NORTH' this November. Details on www.christiansinpolitics.org.

Campaigns Roadshow

As Christians in Politics, we joined Christian Aid's and the Children's Society's national roadshow of campaigning workshops earlier this year. At each one, we delivered a session on why, as Christians, we should get involved in politics and how you go about it. Following our workshop, lots of attendees made decisions to join political parties (including the Lib Dems)!

Disagree Well campaign

Ahead of the EU referendum, Christians in Politics launched a campaign to encourage Christians to 'disagree well'. To spread the message, we made [a video](#) which was shared in churches across the country. The campaign was very well received!

And finally...

Thank you! I am so grateful for all of your support, both financial and prayerful, this year. It really has been a pleasure to work with you.

TREASURER'S REPORT

By Claire Mathys, Treasurer of LDCF

The story of LDCF has always been a story of stepping out in faith and seeing God provide. In 2015 we made the decision to employ our director Claire for an extra day a week in the lead up to the General Election, so we could increase our activities at that crucial time. This led to a membership surge after the election which increased our finances to such an extent that we could employ our next director Sarah for four days a week. This in turn has led to more LDCF activity, which attracted more members, and we have continued to grow.

Our 2015 Accounts show total income of £23,500 and total expenditure of £26,800. This meant a net deficit of just over £3,000. This was intentional, as we had an opening bank balance of £12,000 and it seemed right to draw down some of this prior to the election.

While the post-election surge in members (and therefore income) was enough to be sure we could employ Sarah for one year, it did not take us beyond that. So in the summer of this year we appealed to members for additional funding to renew Sarah's contract. I am pleased to say this resulted in over £2,000 worth of one-off donations, and nearly £300 of monthly standing orders. We were delighted to renew Sarah's contract and thank all our members for their generosity.

We are still on something of a tight-rope with our current finance levels and are very vulnerable to subscription cancellations, especially of the handful of people who give over £50 a month. But we trust that God will provide so we can continue this ministry and thank you for joining with us in praying for LDCF and giving him the glory for it.