

Annual Report of the Trustees for the year 2015

to be presented to the Annual General Meeting on

12th July 2016 at 2.15 pm at

High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts

Office address:

22 The Kiln, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 OLU

Website: www.modernchurch.org.uk

Email: office@modernchurch.org.uk

Registered charity no: 281573

ABOUT MODERN CHURCH

Modern Church takes an open-minded and thoughtful approach to Christian faith.

We understand that

- genuine faith is committed to the search for truth, wherever it comes from
- it is possible to think and talk about God in ways that make sense in our time and culture

We encourage

- open discussion: freedom to explore ideas, ask questions and change our minds without fear of disapproval
- critical scholarship: keeping up to date with good research, examining the implications of new insights and discoveries
- willingness to change: so that what we believe now can be expressed in the things our churches do and say.

We expect our theology to be

- public: talking the language of ordinary people, not that of a religious club
- relevant: engaging with what is going on in society, informing our faith and how we live
- respectful: willing to learn from others, within and outside Christianity, since we accept that we don't have all the answers.

Public benefit

As a charitable organisation we consider that our aims and objects have the following public benefits:

- we have a duty within our present-day society to present Christianity in a way which can be understood by ordinary people
- we encourage all church people, both ordained and lay, to play a full part in the governance and activities of their churches and foster greater engagement with the mission of the churches to support the poor, sick and needy in society
- by engaging in research and study we can help our fellow Christians come to a deeper understanding of their faith and how it has developed
- our approach to theology will encourage people of all faiths to better understand one another thus promoting better relations between the faiths.

Report from Chair and General Secretary

This was a year of continued, purposeful and busy activity in Modern Church. Our annual conference, 'Seeking the Sacred', chaired by Alan Race and run jointly with the World Congress of Faiths, was full and stimulating with many inspiring and diverse speakers.

The journal Modern Believing, took up themes addressing current issues and concerns, including an issue launched during the parliamentary debate on Assisted Dying, and another on the Future of Society at the time of the General Election. Jonathan Clatworthy completed the second year of his transitional work as editor of Modern Believing at the end of 2015, and we are most grateful to him for his wise and tireless work on the journal over that period. Steven Shakespeare was appointed as his successor and we began to work with Steven as he prepared to take over in 2016. His vision for the journal is that it should be dialogical, experimental and a show case for theology at the cutting edge.

Another significant change of personnel was when our Administrator Christine Alker retired at the end of 2015. We said goodbye to Christine as administrator with grateful thanks for her many years of skilled and committed work. Christine's shoes are very hard to fill! But after a successful selection process we were delighted to appoint Diane Kutar as Administrator and we welcomed Diane into her new role with us at the beginning of November.

The annual residential Council meeting considered how better to communicate liberal theology through all our activities, including social media, with support from Kieran Bohan, and through the development of the new 'liberal Alpha' course. Our President Linda Woodhead gave the keynote speech, 'The silent majority speaks; reclaiming the churches for the majority of believers' encouraging us that there are many people 'out there' who would benefit from Modern Church if our presence were more generally known.

Signs of the Times continued to play an important role within the organisation as a place for the exchange and growth of theological opinion and as a forum for members.

The website continued to grow throughout the year, under the care of Kieran Bohan. Alongside this, Kieran continued to develop our social media impact, with

several updates each week, bringing Modern Church to the attention of many people, especially in the younger generations, whom we would otherwise not reach.

We continued to work on the plans for a Modern Church course ('liberal Alpha'), with Guy calling together a working group who volunteered to prepare materials that could be trialled.

Further new initiatives included discussion of how to widen student participation, including special conference rates; what the policy of Modern Church should be towards gender inclusive language in worship; and whether it is now time to revisit our charitable Objects and consider whether and how they might be revised.

Jan van der Lely, Chair. Guy Elsmore, General Secretary

Modern Believing – "The Journal of Liberal Theology"

The founders of what is now Modern Church [MC] created it as a learned society, promoting liberal Christian scholarship that opposed dogmatism and engaged with developments in science and society. A high-quality journal was and remains central to this project, and subscription to Modern Believing [MB] is an integral part of MC membership. In view of this, and to avoid duplicating administration, membership renewals are now handled by Liverpool University Press. 2015 was the second year of this arrangement, and particular thanks are due to Christine Alker and Rosalind Lund for the extra work they put in to familiarise members with the new system.

2015 was Jonathan Clatworthy's last year as Editor, and the first two issues of MB continued his emphasis on topics of moral and social concern. The January number, with an eye to the upcoming General Election, took as its theme The Future of Society. Theologians were invited to reflect on the big issues—economics, welfare, health, the environment—and apply insights derived from sources including the Christian scriptures, doctrine and liturgy.

The April issue was dedicated to the debate on Assisted Dying in the light of proposed new legislation. Another former editor of the journal, Paul Badham, gathered an impressive array of clinicians, parliamentarians, theologians and others to provide a rounded picture rooted in practical experience.

The July number printed talks delivered at the previous year's MC annual conference, Exploring Spirituality for the 21st Century, while October marked fifty years since the completion of the Second Vatican Council.

Steven Shakespeare officially becomes Editor of MB on January 1st, 2016, so it is timely to thanks Jonathan Clatworthy for assuming the role temporarily at short notice in 2013. He has been no 'caretaker' in the negative sense, but maintained the momentum built up by his predecessor. The other key member of the editorial team is Michael Brierley, who brings a creative talent to what can sometimes be the humdrum business of book reviews.

Rev Anthony Freeman, Assistant Editor Modern Believing

Modern Church Website

The biggest change in Modern Church communications in 2015, after I presented on the potential of online communication for Modern Church at the Council meeting in March, is the increase in social media engagement. Prior to this meeting, Modern Church was on Facebook and Twitter but communication was sporadic. Since then communication on Facebook and Twitter has been more regular, planned and scheduled, with up to four posts a day of a mixture of content from the Modern Church website (blog posts, news items and content from the quarterly publications plus signposting to existing pages on the site such as the Resources section) and articles from other sources which I believe are broadly of interest to the Modern Church membership. As a result of this, the number of people 'liking' the Facebook page grew from 97 at the start of January to 268 at the end of December, while on Twitter we started the year with 364 followers and ended with 630, with increasing interaction on both sites. I explored with the trustees and administrator ways of planning social media activity as soon as possible after events e.g. sharing photos and blog posts, and 'live tweeting' from events, which we did for the first time at the Council meeting in March, with significant impact on the amount of online engagement. We also carried more news stories with a higher profile, particularly Martyn Percy's article calling for an apology to LGBTI Christians from the Archbishop of Canterbury, which quickly became the most viewed article and the most downloaded resource on the site with thousands of interactions within days, in part because we also issued it as a media release, which led to Martyn Percy speaking on BCC local and national radio.

In distributing the media release I updated our media contacts list as some contacts were out of date.

Website security and moderation became an issue this year - I piloted a secure area on the website for Modern Church Council members to share information prior to the Council meeting, but had to remove this later in the year after it led to a vulnerability causing the site to be hacked on two occasions. I sought advice on improving site security and remain vigilant. Similarly, I had enabled a comments feature on the website but found it was not adequate as I did not always receive notifications when a new comment was posted, plus, due to the large volume of views of Martyn Percy's article, the number of comments requiring moderation increased beyond my capacity to respond, so I consulted on a decision to disable this feature until a better solution could be found.

Also in March 2015 I transferred the website to a new host to reduce costs and improve technical support, which proved its worth within months in response to the hacking of the site.

The 'house style' guide I created for bloggers has required updates as I receive feedback from those using it, and as the website hosting software makes updates to the control panel which bloggers log into to post articles. This has meant that some people are not confident in posting their own blogs and will either send them to me for posting or have stopped trying. Our aim to empower more people to add content to the site needs more work.

In November there was also a significant increase in traffic to the website generated by additional activities such as Church Times advert in November and the accompanying new leaflet, with which I assisted with design.

In addition, improved communication with Liverpool University Press and the Modern Believing editorial team has led to the suggestion that, for the first time, the abstracts of the journal articles also go on the Modern Church website, which will begin with Steven Shakespeare's first issue in 2016.

I believe all of this demonstrates the value of Modern Church taking a more proactive role in campaigning on current issues when resources allow, as this higher profile may engage with a wider demographic of potential new members.

Kieran Bohan, Website Editor

Sign of the Times Report

Our popular newsletter continues to flourish, despite the increasing importance of other forms of communication (notably the Modern Church blog).

2015's issues began with a continuing focus on interfaith themes, leading up to our Annual Conference. But rapidly a new theme took over: the Church of England's Reform and Renewal proposals, and the defective theology which various correspondents saw as lying behind them. This complemented in a remarkable way the enormous impact of the online contributions of Martyn Percy on the same and related themes later in the year.

Another increasingly common feature, sadly, is obituaries and recollections of past members. All too many of those who worked so hard for the revival of our organisation over the past decades have now reached the end of their lives on earth. But the pages of our newsletter have given us space to honour them and share in inspiration from them. At a time when, it seems, some in the C of E are happy to jettison the past in a frantic search for a future, we in Modern Church are enriched by remembering the rock from which we were hewn – great figures such as the Tebbutts and Elizabeth Darlington.

A wide range of members, including some from overseas, have contributed over the year. However, we could be still more representative of our diverse membership.

An increasingly prominent feature of the newsletter has been reviews of books which might not be as academically rigorous as those reviewed in Modern Believing but which are thought to be of interest to the membership. Alan Wolfe, our Reviews Editor, is now stepping down. We need a replacement!

Contributions on any issues of potential interest to the membership, of a less academic kind than would be appropriate for our learned journal, are always welcomed. For technical reasons, as well as in recognition of the increasing volume of contributions, deadlines are now earlier – around the 7th of March, June, September and December. The quality of the material depends on our members, and lively, concise and if possible illustrated contributions are particularly appreciated.

Anthony Woollard, Editor, Signs of the Times

Membership Report

2015 was the second full year for which the subscriptions to Modern Church were managed by Liverpool University Press (LUP) and operating on a calendar year subscription. All practical details were carried out by LUP's agents, Turpin Distribution who sent out invoices and processed payments. It had been hoped that the new system would be fully embedded with members this year but there is still significant work involved in contacting members who have not cancelled standing orders.

The numbers of subscribers at the end of 2014 and 2015 were as follows:

Subscription type	2014	2015
Individual member	344	322^{1}
Joint member	31	9 ²
Life member	10	10
Honorary member	10	10
Total members	395	351

Notes

- 1. Of which 125 paid the concessionary rate (154 in 2014).
- 2. Of which 21 paid the concessionary rate (21 in 2014).

Diane Kutar, Administrator

Annual Conference: 13th to 16th July 2015 Seeking the Sacred: Christianity in Dialogue with Other Religions and the World

The MC conference in 2015 was a shared venture with the World Congress of Faiths and was the first occasion of sharing from both organisations. WCF supplied experience and knowledge of speakers and MC was keen to re-visit a subject area last explored in 1993.

Attendance achieved maximum and expectations from the attendees was high and they were not disappointed. The emphasis was mostly on bilateral dialogues between Christian faith and other faith commitments, and these covered relations with Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews. Some generic topics were also explored, such as the religions and the story of evolution through the film 'The Story of the Universe', religions and violence, the experience of dialogue and personal involvement, the meaning of religious pluralism, and the future of interreligious relations.

The programme was rich in content and presentation, with interaction between speakers providing a welcome dynamic of encounter. There were two speakers from outside of the UK – Dr Nikky Kaur Singh from the USA and Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel from Germany. The chaplain, who has a strong background in Islamic Shi'a tradition, provided some sensitive worship, incorporating elements from different religious traditions into Christian liturgy. Workshops, led by WCF delegates, provided opportunity both for group work discussing the experience of interreligious work on the ground and for painting ceramic tiles in an art class. Feedback on the conference overall was very positive, though of course not everything which was presented suited every attendee. At the end, it was clear to the Chair of the conference that Christian reflection on relations with other traditions was a subject area which could no longer be treated as marginal to the developing story of MC or to theological education and the life of the church.

Canon Dr Alan Race Chair of conference

Treasurer's Report 2015

Membership subscriptions and Turpin/Liverpool UP

I had hoped that by now I would be able to report that everything is running smoothly. Unfortunately this is not the case. Some members still have continuing standing orders direct to the MC bank account. This is involving a lot of work for both the Administrator and myself as we have to check whether or not a member has actually renewed their membership with Turpin and if they have, to send them a refund by cheque. The Administrator is contacting all these members by phone if possible, but if not by letter to encourage them to maintain their membership. Turpin do now run a direct debit system and I would urge all members to arrange to pay by direct debit as it is the simplest way of paying your annual membership subscription.

As you will see in the notes to the accounts, receipts from Liverpool UP covered subscriptions for both 2014 and 2015. Receipts relating to 2016 were received in the early part of 2016 so receipts in future should only relate to one financial year, making it easier to compare year on year.

Gift Aid

During the course of this year we reclaimed the Gift Aid money due to us from HMRC for 2013. I hope to reclaim the Gift Aid for 2014 and 2015 during the course of 2016 – the records for 2014 were complicated by the transfer to Turpin.

Reserves

As part of our reporting responsibilities to the Charity Commissioner, we are now requested to review our Reserves policy regularly. Our policy has been that the funds invested in the Central Board of Finance provide an important part of our annual income to pay running costs. In the 2016 budget I have assumed an income of £8000 for the year. In addition to the value of these funds – currently valued at £218,019 – we have £26,888 in the CCLA Deposit Account. Our Independent Examiner has advised that we should maintain up to two years' running costs available in case of emergencies – this would be about £110,000. Because of our need for income above that generated from subscriptions and conferences, the Trustees have agreed that for the time being at least we should treat the whole £218,000 currently held as investments as untouchable reserves. The £26,888 in the deposit account, however, should be used as an ongoing development budget. Therefore the Budget for 2016 includes the sum of £5000 from Reserves to add to

the £1500 to make a total of £6,500 for "Projects". Thus we will have funds for the development of the Liberal Alpha course and for promotional work to raise the profile of MC and which the trustees hope will result in new members.

The policy will be reviewed annually by the trustees.

We were fortunate to receive £8,500 in legacies during the course of 2015 and these funds were used to purchase income bearing shares in the Church of England Central Board of Finance Investment Fund.

Administrator

During the course of the year we said Goodbye to Christine Alker and welcomed Diane Kutar as our new Administrator. While we were sad to lose Christine, Diane is already proving a worthy successor with useful financial experience for your Treasurer to call on.

Publicity and Website

As part of the continuing review of our website and the wider profile of MC, I am delighted that Kieran Bohan, who has done so much work on the website already, has agreed to come onto the payroll of MC as Communications Officer. He continues to manage and edit the website and also has a running brief to keep up to date with current issues on Twitter and other social media sites.

Independent Examiner

We are grateful once again to Jonathan Rudge for acting as our Independent Examiner for the Accounts. Please note that the pages he has examined are the Income/Expenditure Account and the Balance Sheet (Pages 12 and 16).

Rosalind Lund, Treasurer

Modern Church Treasurer's Report 2015 Income and Expenditure Account		2015	2015	2014	2014
	Note	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure
Income					
Annual Conference	1	£24,196		£24,568	
CCLA		£8,156		£7,860	
Conferences (inc Liberal Alpha project meeting)		£698		£2,455	
Council contribs to residential (set against admin costs)		£256		£1,588	
Donations	2	£9,620		£561	
Gift Aid	3	£2,683		£4,931	
Greenbelt		£0		£266	
Interest		£145		£133	
Membership subscriptions 2015	4	£14,759		£9,152	
Membership subscriptions 2014 and earlier	4	£300			
Membership subscriptions 2016	4	£75			
Miscellaneous	7	£229			
Publishing (inc Joint Publications)	8	£2,110		£1,165	
Expenses					
Administration costs meetings etc			£6,477		£6,990
Administrator (inc membership admin)	5		£8,083		£7,655
Advertising			£1,683		£2,647
Annual Conference	1		£21,709		£17,739
Greenbelt	6		£0		£1,348
Member refunds			£1,264		£2,229
Modern Believing and SOTT	4		£8,927		£2,718
Other	7		£592		£127
Projects and other conferences (inc Liberal Alpha)			£507		£1,349
Publishing - Joint Publications	8		£1,054		£1,104
Website			£3,647		£5,911
Total		£63,227	£53,943	£52,678	£49,817
Surplus/Deficit (-) for year	_	£9,284		£2,862	

Notes to the Accounts

- 1. Please see separate account for conference income and expenditure accounts for 2014-16. The advertising heading also includes some expenditure explicitly advertising the conference and this is detailed in the separate account. The totals for Annual Conference in the Income and Expenditure account are strictly the income and expenditure incurred in the financial year 2015 hence the request by members for a separate note to show the profitability or otherwise of each conference.
- 2. Donations include £8,500 of legacies received which have been used to purchase additional shares in the CBF investment fund.
- 3. Gift Aid is accounted for on a cash basis. The amount shown relates to the claim in respect to 2013
- 4. Membership subscriptions were shown as receipts from Turpin/LUP net of printing costs in the 2014 report. These items are now grossed for 2015 and the 2014 comparative. A further reason for the difference in membership income between 2014 and 2015 is that Turpin and our members were settling into a new system of accounting and income received in 2015 was for two financial years, which has falsely inflated the income for 2015 over 2014 when the changeover occurred. However, subscriptions paid to Turpin at the end of 2015 were received by MC in early 2016 and in fact this matches the year for which subscriptions apply. Subscriptions received via LUP during 2015 for 2015 were £13,463; for 2014 £300 and for 2015 £75. The difference is accounted for by the Expenses figure under Member refunds plus adjustments for gift subscriptions.
- 5. Administrator for 2 months we paid both Diane Kutar and Christine Alker
- 6. Greenbelt it was agreed that MC should not have a presence at Greenbelt in 2015
- 7. Other expenses includes two payments in 2015 totalling £70 to the Information Commissioner with the remainder making up MC's farewell gift to Christine Alker with donations earmarked for that coming under Miscellaneous income.
- 8. Joint Publications please see separate report.

Budget for 2016	2016 budget	2015 budget	2015 actual
Income			
Annual Conference	£20,000	£21,500	£21,709
CCLA	£8,000	£7,700	£8,156
Conferences	£1,000	£2,000	£698
Council	£1,000	£1,500	£256
Donations	£1,500	£1,600	£9,620
Gift Aid	£3,500	£4,000	£2,683
Greenbelt			£0
Interest (Other)	£100	£1,000	£145
Membership subscriptions	£10,000	£6,000	£15,134
Miscellaneous			£412
Publishing	£2,500	£3,000	£2,110
From Reserves	£5,000		-£967
Total	£52,600	£48,300	£59,956
Expenses			
Administration costs meetings etc	£6,000	£7,000	£6,477
Administrator (inc membership costs)	£7,500	£7,500	£8,083
Advertising	£2,000	£3,000	£1,683
Annual Conference	£18,000	£18,000	£21,709
Greenbelt			£0
Membership fees refunds			£1,264
Modern Believing and SOTT (inc refund members)	£7,000	£5,000	£8,927
Other	£600	£800	£592
Projects and other conferences	£6,500	£1,500	£507
Publishing (including Joint Publications)	£1,000	£1,000	£1,054
Website	£4,000	£4,500	£3,647
Total	£52,600	£48,300	£53,943

Annual Conference, Joint Publishing and Other Projects

Annual Conference	,	Expenditure	Receipts	Deficit
2015	Deposit paid 2013	£200		
	Christian Conference Trust 2014	£1,850		
	Christian Conference Trust 2015	£18,092		
	Expenses	£910		
	Advertising	£756		
	Receipts (2014 and 2015)		£20,446	
	Restricted donations		£820	
	Total	£21,808	£21,266	-£542
Annual Conference				
2016	Deposit paid 2014	£200		
	CCT deposit paid 2015	£1,452		
	Receipts 2015		£3,575	
	Advertising	£754		

NB - restricted donations for 2015 paid for two student places at a nominal cost of £215 per place which leaves £390 in restricted donations to carry forward for 2016

Joint	publications
0045	•

2015	Balance due to PCN brought forward		£159
	Receipts		£1,164
	Paid to PCN	£1,054	
	Paid to PCN Jan 2016	£268	
	Loan repaid during 2015		£750

At end Jan 2016 MC and PCN are in a state of balance.

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2015

Uncashed cheques at 31-12-15 = £299

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2014		Note	2015
£237,322	Balance as at 1 January		£250,648.00
£2,862	Surplus (Deficit) for year		£9,284.00
£10,464	Investment appreciation (depreciation)		£2,549.00
£250,648.00	Total Funds		£262,481.00
Depresented by			
Represented by:			
£11,751	Barclays Bank current account - cash	3	£12,917.00
£1,044	Paypal		£516.00
£26,742	CCLA Deposit Account		£26,888.00
£4,141	Estimate of Gift Aid tax reclaimable	1	£4,141.00
£206,970	CBF Investment Fund - year end share value	2	£218,019.00
0050.040			6000 404 00
£250,648			£262,481.00
	Notes:		
1	Gift Aid claims for 2014 and 2015 not yet processed are		
•	shown as an estimated value		
2	CBF investment fund brought forward		£206,970.00
	Purchase from legacy income		£8,500.00
	Revaluation for the year		£2,549.00
	Carried forward		£218,019.00

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of The Modern Church

I report on the accounts of the Modern Church for the year ended 31 December 2015, which are set out on pages 1 to 2 and show a revenue surplus of £9,284, together with funds totalling £262,481.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner:

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act;
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act; and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- (1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:
 - to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act; and
 - to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act

have not been met; or

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached

Jonathan H. Rudge MA FCA 20 Blackthorne Close Solihull B91 1PF

Jonathan Ruly

12th June 2016

Modern Church Officers and Post-holders: 2015

President Prof Linda Woodhead

Chair of Council Rev Dr Jan van der Lely

Vice Chair of Council Rev Tim Stead

General Secretary Canon Guy Elsmore

Treasurer Mrs Rosalind Lund

Vice Presidents:

Prof Paul Badham

Ms Joan Dorrell

Prof Elaine Graham

Rev Dr Nicholas Henderson

Rev Prof M McCord Adams

Dr Peter Mills

The Most Rev Barry Morgan

The Very Rev Prof Martyn Percy

The Rt Rev Dr John Saxbee

The Rt Rev Brian Smith

The Rt Revd Tim Stevens

Rev Canon Richard Truss

The Rt Rev Martin Wharton

Council Members during 2015

Rev Dr Jeyan Anketell¹

Mrs Jean Barnett

Helen Burnett¹

Mrs Pat Boyd

Rev Dr Lorraine Cavanagh

Rev Jonathan Clatworthy¹

Rev Canon David Driscoll¹

Canon Guy Elsmore¹

Rev Ruth Fitter

Rev Anthony Freeman¹

Rev John Goldsmith

Mr Richard Hall¹

Rev David Howard

Rev David James

Rev Tom Keates

Rev Franklin Lee¹

Mr Patrick Lewin¹

Mrs Rosalind Lund

Rev Clare Nicholson

Canon Trevor Pitt

Canon Dr Alan Race

Mr Hugh Rock

Rev David Simon

Rev Tim Stead

Prof. Adrian Thatcher

Rev Dr Jan van der Lely

Mr Anthony Woollard

In bold – current trustees

¹Term of office ends at the 2016 AGM but can stand for re-election