

## **REPORT FROM STEWARD OF THE GOSPEL**

following Consultation Process earlier this year.

### **Our initial thoughts and ideas**

This is still a thriving parish in which Mass attendance remained constant at about 1000/week (2011-15), having fallen from an average of 1130/week (1206-10). Baptisms, confirmations and, slightly less so, marriages have remained at a steady level. Whilst there has been some new homebuilding in the area and migration from other London boroughs, its impact upon the parish has been relatively limited. There has been some diversification of the parish community, providing a welcome balance to its traditional Anglo-Irish core.

Our parish has an established network of spiritual, administrative and social groups which have thrived for many years. We have both a Parish Council and Finance Committee. There is a commitment to serve the needs of parishioners and to raise levels of involvement by making people more aware of all that is available and how to become involved. Recent priorities have been our sacramental and RCIA programmes, improving facilities for our primary schoolchildren and addressing a more challenging financial position following urgent repairs.

Mass is said on Saturday at 6:30 pm and on Sunday at 8:00 am, 9:30 am and 11:30 am. We have many people involved in elements of parish life. However, now would be a good time for everybody to reflect upon how they wish their parish to continue and provide them with the opportunities for spiritual growth and social involvement that they desire. We provide good training programmes. However, we need to make more use of diocesan programmes as well as working more closely with other parishes in the deanery. This is true at all levels. It would be possible for the clergy to act in smaller 'clusters' within their deaneries and support each other in their core roles, perhaps even sharing residences whilst maintaining working spaces at the smaller churches. Some parishioners also attend Mass at other local parishes on occasion and closer links could be established with English Martyrs and Christ the Eternal High priest, as well as St Alban's, St Edward's and St Joseph's. Such familiarity could be put to good purpose in co-ordinating deanery events, as already happens to some extent eg Good Friday and Passion Play events. This could be further developed in training and Youth activities.

Much of the life of the parish has centred around its excellent and popular primary school. Many of the leaders of the parish have been recruited through their initial involvement in helping with school matters. Following a short period of divergence, our relatively new parish priest is working hard to re-establish the principle of Parish/School/Home which had always formed the core of our approach. This is seen as being important both for the children and for helping parents to grow in their faith, to support them where they have gaps in their own knowledge or where one is a non-Catholic. It is also important given that there are more non-Catholic teachers than used to be the case. Our newly re-introduced May Procession is seen as a small step forward.

The general state of repair of the church and its facilities is good. However, the parish's finances, which until 2010 were seen as good, now need replenishing. Income no longer meets outgoings. With an average weekly offertory of £5/head and less than half Gift Aided, there is a need to explain the situation to parishioners with detailed consequences made clear.

We must reach out to the Youth of our parish, deanery and diocese. There are clear challenges in society for them. We have many excellent facilities for children and young people – schools, brownies, cubs, youth clubs, sacramental programmes, Walsingham House, Mersea Island and, of course, Lourdes. However, we do not provide enough support for the 16-30 age groups so that they have the means to counter the array of conflicting messages from society. We must modernise the way in which we provide ready access through various media to the information about beliefs and values (especially responses to information questioning their veracity and validity) which they need so that they may counter the criticisms of a sceptical world. We must ensure that these groups have a real voice in ensuring that our community remains relevant to their evolving needs.

Jack How

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