

**The Church of the Holy Spirit, Great Bardfield, Essex**  
**The Church of the English Martyrs, Thaxted, Essex**  
**Stewards of the Gospel - Parish Questionnaire: Chrism Mass one-page summary**

**Our Community's Initial Thoughts and Ideas about the Future**

**A. Initial Thoughts:**

1. Our current lay leadership is viable and very effective; newcomers have felt that they have been made very welcome.
2. The Children's Liturgy is particularly successful; Fr Richard's homilies and his talks with children help to deepen spirituality; the altar servers are strong and enthusiastic participants and are working towards their St Stephen's medals; the music and enthusiastic singing adds to the shared celebration and the monthly fellowship at coffee mornings is very successful. The regular coffee mornings give the young a feeling of belonging to a wider family. Young people are encouraged to join the parish council to express their views and to become readers and Eucharistic Ministers. We also have good contributions to the Food Bank, Mission Boxes and Christmas Shoe Boxes and communion is provided to the sick regularly.
3. We have a parish website with prayers and readings to encourage regular prayer and we distribute booklets with prayer and reflection for Lenten preparation to all the parishioners. We also have an up to date Youth Notice board with national and international youth events next to a Children's Library and play area. Families with babies and small children and their parents are made to feel comfortable.
4. Parishioners attend the Deanery Day of Recollection and silent prayer group in Clare and have been on parish pilgrimages. We have been involved in Easter Walks of Witness, Christingle services, ecumenical carol services, Family Fun Days and have been a major participant in the village Garage sale. We also participate in other functions organised by "Churches Together" which encourages ecumenical links and will be participating in the "Big Breakfast" in Christian Aid Week. Sacrament preparation is ongoing and draws participants from neighbouring communities. We are also lucky to have mixed faith couples who are very supportive and involved.
5. Our churches in Great Bardfield and Thaxted currently form one parish served by one priest and parish council. The Children's Liturgy as well as First Holy Communion and Confirmation Preparation are shared by both churches. All social events and meetings, published in a common newsletter and our joint website, are held in Great Bardfield but are supported by both churches.
6. We currently have a growing number of people who choose to come to our parish for various reasons as well as families coming regularly for the Children's Liturgy and First Holy Communion and Confirmation Preparation and we would be happy to welcome any one from neighbouring parishes. We have extended our contacts through the Ginger Group and Stewards of the Gospel from other parishes have attended our meetings, strengthening connections and building friendships. We continue to have North Essex Deanery meetings through choice in order to maintain contacts and this works well.

## **B. Ideas for the Future:**

1. We feel that to raise the profile of our church we should encourage the existing strong community to strengthen their faith by encouraging study and prayer groups for adults as well as social interaction for all, including the youth and to be even more welcoming to all Christians and non-Christians, of all ages in our community. There have been many practical proposals for specific events which have received a lot of support and could be implemented.
2. We believe that more volunteers can be trained to carry on some of the existing roles and for future Stewards of the Gospel and other lay leaders to take on roles that the shortage of priests will necessitate. Our parishioners have "hidden resources" and they will be encouraged to contribute more by existing volunteers.
3. While Confirmation Classes will start in October 2017, there is strong support in future for regular prayer groups, scripture study and discussion groups as well as "Godly Play" or "Messy Church" groups to encourage children in their faith. There is also interest in family retreats. We are improving our communication of youth masses to schools and school masses at our church and will have a new form of newsletter and an improved website to share information on events. We are also planning to hold an event open to all, called for by Brendan Cox, widower of the late Jo Cox MP, as part of the "Great Get Together" on 18 June 2017.
4. We currently have rooms in the presbytery which could be let as flats or as rooms for long or short term use to provide income to enable us to look after the fabric of the church and use all facilities wisely to enhance and make welcoming our parish to the community in which we worship. The rooms could also be used by visiting overseas priests, or retired, convalescing priests and religious.
5. Looking towards 2030, there is enthusiasm for the creation of a "North Essex Super-Parish" uniting the parishes of Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Thaxted/Great Bardfield with a new Church, school and community facilities to build and strengthen our future communities. We are concerned however that any alternative parishes are not situated at a distance too great for travel for the elderly and busy families and we would like to ensure that all those with infirmities are able to access transport to reach churches by creating a transport rota.
6. We are considering extending links with schools and giving them a voice on the parish website to extend youth participation in a variety of activities in parish life. We are also keen to ensure transport is available (at parish cost) to take young people from surrounding parishes to events such as young people's retreats. The role of the priest is crucial in making young people feel welcome and engaging with them. Maybe BRES could offer advice and training for priests who lack confidence talking to young people. How can we encourage our male youth to dedicate themselves to God and the priesthood? (Perhaps a question for Pope Francis!)

***Overall the majority of the parish are keen to keep our vibrant and active community; we would welcome other parishes to join us whether in our existing geographically centrally located churches or a newly built parish centre. We would also welcome clarification from Brentwood on the outcomes of questionnaires to reassure those who may have become despondent and unsure about the future of our Church.***