

## Summary of the Renewal Meeting held on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2019

**Present:** Fr. Richard, Robina Debnam, Linda Wheeler, Alfred Wheeler, Sheelagh Chapman, Ann Smith, Phoebe Walsh, Fiona Walsh, Damian Walsh, Janet Yates, Catherine Wellingbrook Doswell, David Jarvis, Tamsin Macdonald Johnson, Amanda Waples, Joe Butler, Pauline Butler, Phil Balcomb, Tony Bary, Isabelle Barron, Pam Gale, Michelle Davison, Vince Boneti, Antoinette O'Brien, Robert Synott, Siobhan Evers

**Apologies:** Phillip Slater, Sara Booth

Fr Richard opened the meeting with a prayer.

Robina welcomed everyone and informed them that we were going to watch a concise power point presentation of the Bishop's Vision Document prepared by the Stewards of the Gospel in the Parish Partnership.

At the end of the power point all agreed that it was well put together and set out the Vision Document in a clear format.

Robina then asked for everyone's thoughts on the Bishop's Vision Document. Everyone had a chance to speak as we went round the room taking turns to speak or stay silent if they wished.

One of the first points raised was 'why is the Ginger Group so named and could it be changed to be more relevant to the work we are undertaking now? It was thought we should rename it 'The Parish Partnership Group' but Linda thought this would be confused with the Stewards of the Gospel's work within the Parish Partnership to achieve and put into practise all elements of the Vision Document and to issue Parish Partnership Bulletins to keep everyone in our parish fully informed and not just a particular small group of people. The Stewards have met and decided that the group should be renamed 'The Renewal Group.'

It quickly became clear that although one parish, we are two separate communities with great attachment to our churches. However it was stressed by Linda that to adhere to the Vision Document we must go forwards together as a strong, fully integrated parish working together to achieve renewal and in total support of the Parish Partnership. We are being asked in the Vision Document to share 3 (plus 1 floating) priests between the 9 churches in our partnership, many with much larger communities than ours. It was agreed by the majority that we should forget differences and work together for the survival and common good of our parish.

It was thought the Vigil Mass at Thaxted was very convenient for many parishioners and gave people a choice in their busy lives of when they could attend Mass. Bardfield is not easily accessible to the elderly or infirm. This is something that has to be referred to the Parish Council.

Alfred, Robina and Linda made it quite clear that the Stewards of the Gospel in the Parish Partnership do not have a remit to close churches, we all have to work together pooling resources and discussing the best way forward for all our churches. The ultimate decisions will be made by Brentwood after the Stewards have submitted their Parish Partnership Plan by Easter 2020.

Many people contributed to how we can begin moving forward with the Parish Partnership and renewal in our parish.

Communication was thought key to involving many people and keeping them informed. Amanda and Phil thought we could form a WhatsApp Group to notify people of important events. We must use all modern technical communication systems to the full. We cannot rely solely on Facebook and the Parish Website. Emails and notices in both churches are still good. Fiona said we have to work hard within our two churches in enabling the giving and receiving of information ensuring that everyone is informed.

Robert said he had attended Mass at the church in Henham until it was closed, so he can understand everyone's uneasiness about the future. We have poor transport systems in the countryside and we must ensure that all have access and the ability to get to other places of worship if necessary. Good communication is essential.

We must make full use of people's talents within our church. Builders/decorators, musicians, readers, organisers, administrators with high tech knowledge etc. Robina pointed out that we have need of someone good with accounts who can shadow Mick Hughes, our treasurer, for a few months with a view to taking over this role, as Mick is quite unwell at present.

Phil asked if Brentwood had thought of forming a partnership/linking with another diocese to ease the shortage of priests experienced in our diocese. This was supported by many others. He also said we need to be mindful of all age groups within our parish. Catherine asked if the priests at Brentwood in administrative posts could be replaced by the laity thus releasing the priests to say Mass in the parishes that needed them. Janet commented that she didn't understand why Catholic Priests who had left the church to get married couldn't be allowed back into the priesthood when we accepted married ex-Anglican priests. Linda had asked a group of priests that question and was told that Catholic Priests had made a celibacy vow to God and had broken that vow. Anglican priests do not make the same vow. Janet suggested that we should pray for vocations. Robina proposed that we say a rosary for vocations before/after one Mass per month.

A few people pointed out that we are in the same position as many people in the UK, we are being asked to cut back, reform and make do. Phoebe pointed out that schools are having to form partnerships to survive. Isabelle (also working in education) said 'we must park emotion and look at key skills, what we value. We must be solution focussed, what can we build on? Change is never easy, we need trust and flexibility. We are all on a journey.'

Fr Richard said the Holy Spirit inspires new things or old things in new ways. This is an exciting challenge. We are sent out after Mass to evangelise, to face the challenges of today in full confidence in the Holy Spirit.

Antoinette commented on social action. Our parish is not involved in the twinning with Dundee Diocese in South Africa, nor with Social Justice. Ecumenical aspects of Thaxted Churches Together and Christian Aid must be worked as a joint Thaxted/Bardfield venture. We must look to the future.

Siobhan said she had not got involved before because she didn't read emails. She now felt we should listen in love and be ready to move forward together.

A few people had not yet read the document. We pointed out that this is available to read online on both the Parish Website and the Brentwood Diocesan Website and we have a few remaining hard copies if people prefer a book version.

Pauline must have the closing lines of this summary. She said the key words are flexibility and partnership. She then quoted Oliver Cromwell 'Put your trust in God and keep your powder dry'

After saying the Angelus, the meeting ended with the offer of a hot drink and biscuits whilst people filled in sheets listing the 12 strands we must follow in the Vision Document, with what we have achieved as a community and what is felt we can try to put into action.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 2<sup>nd</sup> and we hope to see everyone there as we get down to the implementation of our renewal.