

FROM THE VICARAGE

I didn't quite know what to expect at our event on Saturday 12th October, *Your Church in 20 Years' Time*, so I was delighted (and I admit, surprised) that over 20 people came to listen, reflect, dream, plan and pledge. The impetus for this was realising that all of our most active members are now in their 60's (or older!) and won't be here in 20 years - and if they are, they won't be very active! We need to start building for the future now.

We were led very skillfully by the Venerable Robin King, Archdeacon of Stansted. There were three sessions - the first revolved around two questions:

- *What is the best thing about St Mary's?*
- *What is your biggest fear about St Mary's?*

The responses to Question 1 were heartening: the warm welcome people received, the sense of community here, and the concern for the wider community: in short, 'love, prayer and care'. The sense of calm and peace offered by both our worship and our church building ('always open') were also valued. The fears were the opposite: that in 20 years the church would be closed, and that many in the village either wouldn't know or be indifferent. There were fears that St Mary's projected a 'self-righteous' image, that 'we' were somehow 'better' and that 'outsiders are not welcome'. Not for a moment do I think this is true - we warmly welcome anyone to our services - but I understand the fear that this may be how some who have little or no contact with St Mary's may see us. The clear lack of children and young people in our regular Sunday congregation were also great concerns.

In Session 2 we were invited to dream or imagine what the church might be like in 25 years. This resulted in some imaginative and even wild ideas. There was quite a lot about new technology, such as every worshipper having their own screen/iPad, and the church being open 24 hours via an access card for the door! Due to environmental issues, some thought we may be worshipping outside, or that our main service would no longer be on Sundays, or we'd be meeting in small groups in people's homes rather than in St Mary's. There'd be more lay-led services and most likely no resident vicar, but still a demand for 'traditional' things - baptisms, weddings and funerals. It was also pointed out that by then our Burial Ground would be completely full and closed for burials.

In Session 3 we were asked to be more concrete and realistic: we had to pretend we were part of the PCC (Parish Church Council) and write St Mary's Annual Report for 5 years' time - 2024! There were some intriguing ideas. One was that St Mary's couldn't run the summer fete on its own any longer, so had joined with the Parish Council - to great success! A new and successful venture, a monthly farmers' market, brought many people to the church. There had also been outreach to the new housing that had been built, and a church presence was now established there.

Then we had to make our own individual pledges - promises of actions we would take to ensure life at St Mary's continues. Everyone was given two cards with 'I pledge' at the top and was asked to fill in the same pledge on each card (which could remain unsigned), handing one in and keeping the other as a reminder. It was touching and humbling to see what people had written and promised.

We left with a good deal more energy and hope, plus some ideas to develop - such as a Welcome Pack for the new housing, developing a farmers' market and other links with the local community, and looking to make links with one or more of our local secondary schools.

Of course, there's still much we can do to ensure St Mary's has a bright future. Will you join with us?

Just a quick reminder of our **'In Loving Memory'** bereavement service on **Saturday 2nd November at 4.00 pm**. This is a service for **anyone** (and we do mean anyone) who is grieving. It doesn't matter however long you have been bereaved, whether the funeral was in church or crematorium, near or far. You're guaranteed a quiet, reflective service, an opportunity to light a candle and space to grieve and remember - plus some understanding company and plenty of very nice cakes afterwards.

With every blessing,

Simon

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From the Parish Registers, October 2019

Baptisms *We send our congratulations to:*

20 October – Eleanor Elizabeth Catherine Gooding, and Finley John Peter Gooding, Ralfy George Arthur Gooding and Jesse James Matthew Gooding

Wedding *We send our congratulations to:*

5 October – Jade Vickery and Michael Patrick John Luke Brennan

We offer our prayers for and condolences to the families and friends of:

Funeral

1 October – Brian John Chittock (Kelvedon United Reformed Church and St Mary's Burial Ground)

Burial of Ashes

7 October – Derek George Warner (St Mary's Burial Ground)