

PARISH of SPRINGFIELD

Steward of The Gospel

You will have seen the flyer put into your newsletters in the last couple of weekends and I do not propose to repeat what is in it today. If you haven't read it; please do. This is important for all of us so sit back for just a few minutes while I set the scene for you.

In Evangelii Gaudium Pope Francis began by exhorting us to be people of joy, to rejoice in the Gospel Message.

He tells us that everyone has a right to hear the Gospel Message and everyone who knows it has a duty to proclaim it. We must be a church that attracts people by our witness.

That is a message very clearly reflected by the discernment process started by Bishop Alan.

Pope Francis dreams of a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs and ways of doing things can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world.

He makes it clear that he values the parish because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. However he goes on to say that missionary parishes seek to abandon the complacent attitude that says:

"We have always done it this way"

and he invites everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities

Our Pope stresses that the important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters under the leadership of our bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

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He reminds us that today's vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness

He reminds us that Lay people are the vast majority of the people of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at our service and that there has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in our Church.

He sets out a challenge for us all when he writes:

Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!

Picking up on this theme and that of Proclaim 15 our Bishop Alan has set out a process for us all to take part in for the next couple of years.

What will our church look like in the mid-21st century?

How will we proclaim the Gospel message to the next generations?

What ideas do we have that will help our Bishop to organise our church in Essex and East London so that it can be the best church that it can be?

To help with this process he has appointed Stewards of the Gospel in each parish. For better or worse you have me as your Steward of the Gospel. I will do my best to make this work in Springfield and Chelmer Village but I cannot and must not do it alone.

It has often been said that I need help and it was never more true than in this case.

The key tasks for the Stewards of the Gospel will be:

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- **To examine their own parish, to find out what is going on and to pave the way for a plan for better evangelisation in and by the parish.**
- **To begin to discern “which parish belongs to which” when it comes to working together in future.**
- **To be a source of creative inspiration, looking for new ways to evangelise.**
- **To be the voice of the laity when it comes to discerning the principles and priorities on which future plans will be based.**
- **To be the voice of the laity when it comes to implementing the agreed principles in the particular local situation of their own parishes.**

To start our work we have been asked to look carefully at our own parishes.

To consider what resources we have, to reflect and pray on who and what we are, where we are succeeding and where we are failing.

The process is thorough and comprehensive. I have a 52 page questionnaire for us to complete between now and November but it is important for us to bear in mind that this is a tool to help us look at ourselves as we are today and then to pray about where we will go in the future.

We face considerable changes. Some are inevitable but many we can mould to our own cause. Some are negative but many are great opportunities.

No one knows what our future church will look like but it will be different and we get to have a say in just how different it will be.

To help me with this task I need the help and prayers of you all and I need the very practical hands on help of three or four extra people who will work with me and our existing Parish Pastoral Council to co-ordinate the completion of the questionnaire and parish meetings to reflect on different aspects of it.

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There are three dates for meetings already set they are listed in your Newsletter today so please put them in your diaries when you get home and come to give your voice to this process. Those meetings are NOT all going to deal with the same things, they are not going to be one meeting repeated three times but rather three very separate meetings to consider different aspects of our parish life.

This work and these meetings will take place in September and October and early November and everyone will have an opportunity to join in. I need to plan that work with volunteers quite soon before people start going on holiday.

There will be on line forums and I have an email address to receive your thoughts and disseminate information. We will use open meetings and the parish Newsletter and the website. Aidan is setting us up on Social Media and we'll use that too. It is my hope that no one will be able to say that they did not have a chance to have their say.

I cannot be your voice unless I hear it.

Bishop Alan has described this process as a journey and one that must be undertaken with God placed firmly at the centre of everything. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to join in with a diocese wide review of our Church and to plan its future.

So I leave you with a repeated request for volunteers to help me and Pope Francis' words:

Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!