

The Rectory, 1 Rectory Close, Fryerning Lane, Ingatestone,
CM40DB
01277352562 patrick.sherring@fryerningparishchurch.org.uk

Dear friends,

The Church of England is a complex church. As you know, it only tends to make the news when a controversy appears that the media is able to report with a sound-bite. In the case of the recent controversy surrounding the Archbishop of Canterbury, it was quite clear that some of the journalists had not listened or read the words of Rowan Williams, but had jumped in with a view based on ignorance and prejudice. Admittedly sometimes the Archbishop's style is more suited to the academic lecture hall than the popular media-based culture of today. Even in our culture the views of Archbishop can make the news. The way the Church of England has a role within the structures of society means that his voice can still be heard. Sitting in the House of Lords means that the Archbishop, and the group of Bishops who have the privilege, can have influence at the highest level. Many people today feel this is now an anachronism, a hangover from a distant past. I suspect that even the Archbishop's sternest critics from within the church would not wish the establishments of government to be totally secular. Seven years ago I was asked on one occasion to open the proceedings of Essex County Council with prayers. This was an unexpected honour. If we believe that faith is not just a Sunday choice activity, but a bedrock of life, then it is natural and right to say prayers on all occasions, asking for God's help and an openness to his guidance. Be the meeting our Junior School Governing Body, or Essex County Council or the business of a day at the House of Commons. God is not excluded.

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Bishop John Gladwin, as one of the senior Bishops within the Church of England, sits in the House of Lords. Bishop John participates actively within the life of the House, taking part in many debates. He is also involved as a member of committees. His voice is heard at the centre of Government.

For the last ten years Bishop John has also been Chairman of Christian Aid. I know that he believes all Christians, including clergy, should be involved in issues about which they feel passionate beyond their own churches.

The House of Lords and Christian Aid would be enough for most people. But, of course, the main business of a Diocesan Bishop is his Diocese. It is for Bishop John, assisted by the Area Bishops, to provide leadership within the Diocese. At a time of great change within our society, the Bishops are at the forefront of guiding the church in how to meet these changes and the challenges they bring. We cannot stick our heads in the sand like ostriches and pretend nothing is happening in the world. Bishop John has a particular interest in social responsibility and public affairs.

Despite the enormous and diverse workload, Bishop John is not a distant and aloof figure. I met him once in Michael's, the hairdressers in the village. Living in Margaretting, I have met him on a number of occasions in the High Street. There is always a smile and a word of encouragement. I have also seen him at Diocesan Synod, where he has not been afraid to demonstrate the other qualities that have clearly carried him to his present office. Anyone who has met him is soon struck by his great love of Jesus Christ and his desire to see people express that love in their own lives.

I am delighted that Bishop John will be with us in both parishes in the next few months. When you consider the huge number of parishes in the Diocese of Chelmsford, the old county of Essex including the east London boroughs, it is great that he accepted the invitation to lead worship for us. **Bishop John will be celebrating and preaching at the 9.45 Common Worship Communion service at Ingatestone on 20th of April.** With slightly longer warning for your diaries, **Bishop John will be celebrating and preaching at the 11.15 Sung Holy Communion service at Fryerning on the 8th of June.** Do please take these opportunities to meet him.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*