

St. Edmund and St. Mary, Ingatestone. Rector's report for APCM 19th March 2006.

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The Gospel of John, chapter 10, verse 10. Jesus speaking to the Pharisees.

Churches, at their best, are dynamic groups of believers who are centred on Jesus. They are seeking to grow in faith and service to their fellow men and women and open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are always striving to move forward, acknowledging their debt to the past, but looking to new horizons. Their lives are rooted in prayer and the values they espouse are often at variance with those around them. In a situation such as we are in at Ingatestone, this has to be coupled with our responsibility towards the wider structures of the Church, the maintenance and development of the historic building God has placed in our care, our willingness to work with Christian brothers and sisters across the denominations and with others of goodwill. Our church building is strategically placed in the historic centre of the village. As a church we are strategically placed to play a full role in the community. I believe that as a church this is a vision that we are working towards.

Following a period of unprecedented growth in 2004, the last year has been one of consolidation. Our average attendances have remained constant. We have had very large attendances at major services, most notably at Remembrance and Christmas. The re-introduction of Evensong as a Benefice service, alternating with Fryerning, did not prove a success, being very poorly attended. The service is now held each month at St. Mary the Virgin, Fryerning. The Wednesday morning B.C.P. communion service has a small but faithful congregation, as does the Sunday 8 a.m. B.C.P. Communion service that alternates with Fryerning. Our pattern of Sunday morning services shows that normally the Family Service with communion is the best attended service, followed by the Communion service and then the Morning Prayer services.

We have lost some significant people from our church family, yet God has added new people to be amongst us. Most significantly has been the retirement after ten years of Sylvia Benson as both organist and choir mistress. Sylvia's commitment to her tasks has been commendable. Sylvia has regularly played the organ and chosen hymns for the choir and congregation following the pattern of mixing traditional hymns with new material. Her enthusiasm has benefited a group of young people who have worked through the 'Song for Life' programme. Everyone wishes Sylvia happiness in her retirement and anticipated move. We are indeed fortunate as a church to have had Ian Cruse play with Sylvia at major festivals. Ian has now taken on the role of organist, with the assistance of Robert Scholes. We are blessed that this has been such a smooth transition.

The EMUs (Edmund and Mary Under 5s) was the vision of Vicky Johnson. This has been an exciting development in the ministry of the church. The attendance has demonstrated the need for the group. Vicky, Simon and Antonia have moved to the north east of England. The group is now co-ordinated by the Revd. Sue Cruse, with others from within those attending, and supported by church members. More help is always needed. A number of the EMUs have been amongst the 17 baptised during 2005. Gill Hopkins, who is now in the second year of her ministerial training, has begun a project to see how the EMUs can be more integrated into the worshipping life of the church. We praise God that he has lead us in this direction.

Our Sunday school continues to work faithfully with children from our church family. The dedication and enthusiasm of the teachers can be seen in the smiling faces of the children returning from their lessons, holding their latest creations. We have splendid links with our local Brownies, who are strong supporters of our monthly Family service with communion and other services. We have very positive relationships with the other uniformed organisations, as could be seen from the attendance at the Remembrance Day service. It is good that we live in a village where there are so many artistic and sporting activities organised for children, but it is sad that many of them happen on Sundays.

We have continued to develop our positive relationships with the schools in the village. We have been welcomed into the Infant's School for the first time in many years, taking assembly and informally talking with the Head Teacher and staff. Church members serve on the Governing body of the Church School. I lead assembly weekly. The school visited the church for Harvest Festival, Easter and the Leavers Service. All those who left the school were presented with a Youth Bible on behalf of the two benefice churches. The school welcomed us in running a Y course for adults in the library on a Monday afternoon and then a youth confirmation course. One of those who attended the Y course was among the two adults who were confirmed at Mountnessing in October. Four young people who attended the course in school were also confirmed. The Anglo European School's Christmas concert had more children wanting to take part than in previous years. I have been in negotiation through Churches Together so that an initiative can be launched that is targeted at the village teenagers.

The Churches Together have run Lent courses, Good Friday services, a joint Pentecost service, a New Year's Eve service and a daily service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Weekly services are also undertaken at Ardtully. In 2005 a Lent booklet of daily readings was produced and for 2006 a similar style booklet is planned for the Easter to Pentecost period, with daily reflections written by local ministers. In 2006 I am Chairman of the Churches Together, which has a committee of representatives from the four village churches and St. Mary the Virgin, Fryerning.

For the Ingatestone Lectures in 2005 we welcomed again Anne Davidson to talk on matters relating to helping us to a greater understanding of those of other faiths. Anne will also be with us in 2006. Jan Cadman and the Crossways team talked at a main service about their weekday counselling activities in the Choir Vestry. We welcomed a number of guest preachers throughout the year, in particular Canon Peter Brantham from St. Edmundsbury Cathedral for our celebration of St. Edmund's Day, the first for many years.

On the third Saturday in February each year a Marriage Preparation Day is run jointly with Revd. Frances Drake on behalf of the two benefices. In 2006 12 couples attended. There were seven weddings and one blessing service in 2005 and nine weddings and one blessing service are planned for 2006.

Taking funeral services and supporting the bereaved is a significant part of the ministry of this church. There still appears to be a belief in the local community that only those who attended church regularly can have their funeral service in the church.

Thankfully we are beginning to overcome this perception. It was at the initiative of the CO-OP Funeral Directors that a local support group for the bereaved has been started, that meets monthly in the Parish Rooms.

A special mention is needed for Pat Coleman and the other ladies who so expertly decorate the church with flowers and add to the atmosphere for worship.

The church has been the venue for a number of concerts throughout the year, including the Anglia Singers, the Frog Island Jazz Band, the Ingatestone Choral Society and the Immanuel Choir. Most of these have been fundraising events. Those on the fundraising committee have also organised the event at Ingatestone Hall, the Christmas bazaar and various other activities. These events not only raise money for the church, they also provide social events for the church and wider community.

In June 2005 Revd. Sue Cruse was ordained Priest on 26th of June, celebrating Holy Communion on that evening for the first time. Sue plays a full and active part in the ministry in the benefice whilst continuing in her training and her professional work. She often works in the benefice well beyond her usual two days plus three Sundays a month. At Sue's initiative a weekly notice sheet containing the Bible readings is produced. Sue has also been instrumental in founding the Bible reading group that meets monthly to consider the daily Bible reading notes produced by the Bible Reading Fellowship. Many people have benefited from her pastoral ministry.

John Pritchard has faithfully undertaken his role as Reader at the church for over twenty years. In recent years this has been in leading and preaching on the fourth Sunday in the month, being a member of the PCC, writing in the Towers magazine and being a representative on the Churches Together Committee. John is retiring from these positions and being admitted into the Catholic Church. We are all grateful for John's ministry in both this church and at the churches in the benefice led by Frances Drake. We wish him well as he takes this step.

Michael Allen and Allen Matthews as Churchwardens, John Bayliss as Deputy Warden, Martin Taylor as Treasurer, Pam Forrester as PCC Secretary, Gerry Prescott as Sacristan, those who assist with communion, read the lessons and lead intercessions, those in the welcome and refreshment teams all play a vital part in the work of the church. For two months we were without a Towers magazine, but now Margaret Taylor, Pat Clarke and Teresa Cattell will be producing it for us. Thanks also go to Betty Weaver for the distribution network. The church website, managed expertly by John Hammond, has now had over 4000 hits since being launched.

John and Pat Bayliss and Martin Taylor have been our representatives at Deanery Synod. I am a member of the Deanery Pastoral Committee. The Synod has met on three occasions throughout the year of 2005. Meetings inevitably cover such matters as finance, but also look at broader matters of the ministry throughout the Deanery and to questions concerning the wider church.

As can be seen, the ministry of the church is firmly based in serving the people of the parish. Particular thanks should be given to all the members of the Parochial Church Council. This has met nearly every month. Inevitably discussions are often based on practical matters relating to the upkeep of the hall and the church. The

Churchwarden's reports will cover these matters in more depth. The P.C.C. has taken the bold step to work towards the vision of replacing both the choir stalls and the congregational benches in the church. These were second hand, placed in the church following the demolition of a Dr. Barnardo's Chapel in Barkingside in the 1970s. The Diocesan Advisory Committee felt these benches and stalls are of poor quality and being Edwardian have no historical value in relation to the church building. In many places they are covered in graffiti. They are also not comfortable. Nor are they flexible. Originally the building of the church was to meet a wide range of village needs. It is the belief of the P.C.C. that we should be working towards their replacement. The building would have had no fixed seating for at least the first six hundred years that people used it for worship. Michael Bysouth has been commissioned to produce a mock-up of a potential replacement for the choir stalls. A questionnaire was produced for the wider congregation to ascertain their views. The Diocese would not allow any scheme to proceed without the approval of the majority of those who attend worship in the church.

Personally, with the full backing of the P.C.C., I have been involved in seeking permission from the Diocesan authorities for the placing of a new War Memorial on the green in front of the church. This has backing from the other ministers in the village and the Parish Council. Despite objections from English Heritage, permission was eventually granted by the Chancellor of the Diocese. I am delighted that plans are well advanced for the building of the War Memorial.

You are all St. Edmund and St. Mary Church in Ingatestone. Those of you involved in the church in any of the ways stated above and worship here. You are all people who are drawn to this place where an ancient building has been altered and developed throughout the centuries. May we all be thankful for all that God has done through the centuries, is doing now, and will do in the future to build His church here in Ingatestone. He has given us life. May we serve him to give life to others.

Revd. Patrick Sherring, Rector of the Benefice of Ingatestone with Fryerning.