

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

Dear friends,

If you attended Ingatestone Church during a four week period in March or the Fryerning Family service you were given a questionnaire with the heading 'Survey of views about the church'. This had two main purposes. It was part of the project being undertaken by Gill Hopkins during her ordination training. But it was not just a paper academic exercise. The purpose was to look at how those who are now part of the EMUs group can be welcomed and involved more fully in the wider life of the church, in particular the worshipping life of the church. This group has been a very exciting development, with families and youngsters now in regular contact with us. How can we develop that contact? We have a PCC Away Day at Emmanuel Billericay to look at this question, which promises to be an interesting day.

I was delighted that the answers to the questionnaires showed that people view our churches as friendly and welcoming. This is very important. The surprise was that a number of people said they felt that some of the questions were too hard to answer. In particular, 'What image of God/religion does the Church portray?' That is a crucial question. If the image is of a judgemental God, always looking to catch us out and condemn, then it is the fear of God and ultimate destinations that is the image. In the last session of our ecumenical Lent course, where we have listened to twenty five minutes from a CD prior to group discussion, Rowan Williams said, "The thing about the Gospel that seems to me most obviously good news in our society could be expressed in one way of saying how much does it matter to you to know that you are the object of an absolute unconditional joy and respect, you might almost say reverence, on the part of the Creator of the universe; that on you is focussed an everlasting love, because that conveys a sense of the natural dignity of each person.". Rowan Williams is not always the easiest person to understand, but hopefully that point

is clear. That is surely the image of the church and religion that we are hoping to portray.

You will have noticed the construction beginning of the War Memorial. It will be wonderful to have prominent memorial having all the names of those from our villages who gave their lives in the two World Wars. I have been delighted to work in partnership with the Rotary Club on this project. The service at 4.30 on June 18<sup>th</sup> promises to be a very memorable occasion.

We should always be celebrating the fact that the Churches Together in our villages is so strong. Hopefully you are following the daily readings in our Easter to Pentecost booklet, produced by leaders of the local churches across the denominations. How many faith communities would be able to produce such a booklet? My personal thanks go to all those concerned in the production of this publication that hopefully leads us to deeper Biblical knowledge and greater understanding of our Christian brothers and sisters.

There is also a wonderful initiative taking place, organised through Churches Together, to provide an appropriate event once a month for the village teenagers. This is a tremendous development, as is the news that the Anglo European School are looking to develop a facility that could be used by pupils of all faith communities. These are yet more examples of significant developments taking place amongst us.

I recently had a conversation with someone who was not very happy with the church nationally. He said, "I have not changed, but the church has changed". I found it sad that he held this as a positive view of himself and a negative view of the church. The reality is that we have to always be open to the work of the Holy Spirit amongst us to broaden our horizons and challenge our assumptions. Our faith is dynamic and challenging, inviting and life-giving. Jesus said. "I came to give you life in abundance". Being a Christian is exciting and challenging, exactly the opposite of the way the world often portrays it.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick.*