

Executive Summary for St James the Less and St Helen Catholic Church, Colchester.

The "1 minute questionnaire" conducted in the Autumn 2016 got several hundred returns. The results suggested that the parish felt welcoming and friendly. It was felt that there were many services but that more needed to be done in the way of social and educational events for both adults and young people. A smaller proportion of people felt there should be a greater outreach to disadvantaged groups locally and nationally.

The Stewards of the Gospel found it difficult to ensure that all points of view in the Parish were sampled. It is doubtful if we managed to reach everyone. This was a marked problem in people aged five to 25 years. Several methods were used to reach parishioners. The first, simple questionnaire was more successful in getting returns from all age groups. The second questionnaire which asked more complicated questions and suggested discussing these in groups did generate some useful thoughts but far fewer people were involved. The stewards arranged meetings after Masses in all the Mass Centres and at the parish church in Priory Street but few younger people attended.

In talking to people through these last months there were many comments about the lack of recognition of the joint mission of the different communities in the parish. This included the different physical communities around the 3 Mass Centres and the different ethnic groups. There was also evidence of lack of knowledge in the Parish of the different activities going on. Examples of this included requests for prayer groups when there are regular groups and ignorance of the existence of the Mass centres.

All the groups who discussed the more specific questions in the second questionnaire recognised the need for more lay involvement in the parish. The following were felt to be barriers to volunteering; lack of knowledge of what is needed, not knowing who to approach, a feeling that volunteers should be identified by the priests at least for some ministries, a lack of time for working age people, current delays and difficulties with the DBS process and a hesitance to volunteer if training was required often related to a lack of confidence by the potential volunteers that they would cope with the training. Some at least of these barriers must be addressed as many of the ministries and groups in the parish are very reliant on older people who would like to relinquish their leading roles.

On the positive side the Parish has coped with a difficult 6 months with the illness of the parish priest and the loss of the parish secretary and many people have helped fill the gaps.

One depressing reaction to this process was the memory of several parishioners of a similar process in 2002 which produced, they felt, little change. The groups at the Mass Centres felt particularly worried about this and the perceived threat of closure. There are distinct communities attached to each of the centres but they also feel that they could contribute more to the parish physically and spiritually.

There was no great appetite for merging the parish with another though St Theresa at Lexden was the most frequently mentioned potential partner. There was however evidence for greater co-operation with St Theresa especially around events for young people. There was one call for a super parish incorporating the whole of Colchester and Tendring but in general it was felt that a team ministry would decrease the feeling of the family of the parish supporting the parish priest .