

**Gillingham and Milton on Stour Benefice
Evening discussion Wednesday 20th February 2013**

These are the comments of the 12 people present as collected and collated on the evening.

In the light of this presentation 'Let us Talk'...

1. What is the 'Personality and Character' of your local church?

We have 2 warm and welcoming broad parish churches, with a variety of different types of worship, a sense of community, and mainly elderly attenders. We have strong and good relationships with all the town's schools, especially the two church primary schools - e.g. open the book, foundation governors, exploring Christian values, weekly after school church clubs.

We were concerned about our non-activity with youth and have recently launched a monthly youth group.

St Mary's Gillingham might be labelled liberal catholic and is a town church
St Simon and St Jude Milton might be labelled middle of the road and "old fashioned" but not in a pejorative sense - it's a village church.

It is seen as a benefit that clergy have experienced working life prior to ordination.

Preaching often explores challenging issues.

2. What are the priorities of your local church?

We tackled this initially by asking what would an alien presume our priorities were if they were looking at our activities.

The worship of God, with good inclusive worship.

We 'keep the show on the road', maintain the building as an iconic place of prayer in the community. We are there for people when needed, with an open church, music and worship. We work with children in and out of church. We invite people to know Jesus in their lives. We engage with different groups of people within the life of the church - e.g. bellringing, sewing group, choir etc.

We seek to offer pastoral care to the community - clergy and lay people.

3. Is there one thing you would like to take on or develop in the coming year (recognising that may mean you may need to stop doing something else)?

We didn't settle on one idea - these were some of those offered.

- Offer more support to the working community and businesses.
- Provide greater engagement with secondary school age children.
- Provide alpha type course post baptism wedding funeral and for other people

who might be interested.

- Identify needs in Gillingham and respond to them
- Prioritise contemporary issues of social justice in the area, but not just locally e.g. poverty here and global poverty.

(We didn't manage to complete the Christians in the Community survey, but this overlaps with the discussion here.)

4. Are there ways in which we can work together with neighbouring churches to achieve more? (We were running out of time and energy for questions 4 and 5.)

Expand on what we already do together with other churches in worship and activity. For example, joint services in the tradition of the host church.

5. How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life?

The size of congregations and giving.

PS from Peter Greenwood

One of the things which was missing completely which I would like to raise was any mention of prayer (although it is there unmentioned in the worship section). Parish churches could be seen historically as the spiritual centres of their communities. I believe in them as having the potential to be centres of contemplation and action (Richard Rohr's phrase) for today.

We have daily morning and evening prayer in the benefice, monthly opportunities for contemplative prayer, quarterly quiet mornings, prayer for wholeness and healing.... and it's something that I talk about regularly but not too frequently I hope. There are habits and opportunities for people to engage with, along with the clergy - but there is little take up and it didn't crop up on the radar of yesterday's discussion.