



THE BISHOP OF EBBSFLEET

Hill House, The Mount, Caversham
READING RG4 7RE

Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church
'Whit Monday' 2020

Appointment of a Healthy Churches Mentor for the parishes of the See of Ebbsfleet

On 5 March 2016 the Ebbsfleet Lay Congress at Coventry Cathedral was addressed by the then Archdeacon Missioner in the Diocese of Coventry, Morris Rodham, who talked about strategies for church growth and evangelization, and especially about the 8 Essential Qualities which underpinned a programme for Growing Healthy Churches that he had introduced, very successfully, across the Diocese of Coventry. That same day was also addressed by Bishop Rowan Williams, on the theme of 'Growing the Catholic Community'.

Subsequently Archdeacon Morris proposed to make the programme available to parishes across the See of Ebbsfleet too. With Bishop Jonathan's support the Diocese of Coventry included the See of Ebbsfleet in a funding bid to the Church of England's Strategic Development Fund, which obtained funding for a full-time post to undertake the work of supporting Ebbsfleet parishes in the aspiration to grow the church using the Healthy Churches Programme.

At last the scheme can begin, and Bishop Jonathan is delighted to announce that The Reverend Canon Gary Ecclestone SSC has been appointed to this new role available to the parishes under his oversight.

Fr Gary has been Vicar of Hanslope & Castlethorpe in the Diocese of Oxford since 2003 and is Area Dean of Newport. He is no stranger to the wider Ebbsfleet Area having been born and brought up in Lichfield diocese, came to faith as a student in Exeter diocese, completed a PGCE living in Truro diocese, trained for ordination in Oxford diocese, and served his title in Salisbury diocese: all dioceses in the area served by the Bishop of Ebbsfleet.

Fr Gary's role will include supporting and mentoring incumbents across the Ebbsfleet area, working with PCCs and key lay people to reflect on the wider life and health of their church communities, introducing the 8 Essential Qualities and supporting parishes in surveying their church life, identifying both things to celebrate as well as areas for future development, and helping implement the Society Bishops' agenda of '[Forming Missionary Disciples](#)'. He will be part of a network with others in the Catholic movement who are engaged locally in similar roles

Fr Gary says, “I am hugely excited, albeit slightly trepidatious, at being called to this new post which will take me to a hugely diverse set of parishes from the Fal Estuary in Cornwall, to the very north of Derbyshire. I hope I can bring with me a genuine enthusiasm and passion for growing the church and I am really looking forward to working with priest colleagues and committed lay people, as together we look to take stock of where we are, and discern what the Spirit might be saying to the local Church in each context.”

*Bishop Jonathan says, “I am delighted that the efforts and creativity of so many colleagues in the dioceses Coventry and Oxford and the Strategic Investment Board have made this role available to those under my oversight; and I encourage parishes and clergy to embrace it with joy. I’m even more pleased that Fr Gary, who is both a faithful and creative parish priest, is to be the colleague who will share this aspect of my own ministry for and with them. This appointment could not have come at a more opportune moment as the future opens up before us in an unexpected way. It is clear now, as we contemplate life beyond the pandemic, that whatever lies ahead in the design of God for his Church, she *has to be herself*, serving God, living out *all* the Gospel reveals. For that, Christians, and Christian communities, need to grow in confidence and holiness, as well as in number from every age group. I look forward to making the most of the time we have with Fr Gary in this role, and thank him for taking it on. May the Virgin Mary, ‘mother of the Church’, accompany with her prayers the Church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel to the people of our time.”*

