

Canning Town Friary

Philip Bartholomew writes:

Brothers SSF have lived at St Matthias' Vicarage since autumn 2006. We are part of the 'cluster' of brothers who live and serve in Plaistow and North Canning town, East London. St Matthias' Vicarage is within the parish of the Divine Compassion. The challenge for the brothers there is to help the people to "Be Church" in a mission environment which is located in a multi-cultural and multi-faith area. Brothers Hugh and Philip Bartholomew, along with Derek Austin, a volunteer testing his vocation to the priesthood, make up the community at the Vicarage, which provides a focus for the people of the parish through daily prayer and worship and as a place of meeting and hospitality. We welcome people to eat with us at Sunday lunch and Thursday evenings, and always try to provide cheerful assistance for those who call for help, support and advice. Within each month, the parish sees a large turnover of residents, with families frequently moving to better accommodation or to find work, so the ministry here is more like a chaplaincy than that of a parish priest. Philip Bartholomew has the care of St Mathias' and St Mary's congregations; Derek is acting as the parish administrator until Easter when he hopes to move to another parish to broaden his experience.



There are many social needs in the community, with racial disturbance and discrimination becoming more evident within the Black and Asian communities. There have been a number of murders of young people living in or around the borough, and there is widespread anxiety and depression among teenagers and young adults. In response to some of these needs, the Turnaround Project and the Renewal Programme, have been established. Hugh and Philip Bartholomew have become involved with these organisations, assisting with providing the evening meal at Aram House, a 25-bed night shelter, and lunch for 40 - 60 at the 'Drop In', and also being a welcoming presence at the Drop In - listening, chatting, playing chess and helping people to fill in forms and understand documentation.

The church centre provides space for the educational needs of the wider community, and acts as host to other fellowships - the Borough of Newham has more places of worship, inclusive of all faiths, with more people attending worship in the course of a week, than anywhere else in London. This includes numerous Pentecostal and 'black led' churches, some with congregations of hundreds, other as little as five or six. Each fellowship appeals to the language, cultural and spiritual needs of its membership. The parish of the

Divine Compassion hosts eight such fellowships. The buildings are also hired out for social events and various other alternative uses which help to provide an income for the parish. In the area of interfaith relationships, the Faithful Friends scheme is providing a meeting point where we can get to know and understand both our differences and where we meet as people of faith. Pat Mossop TSSF is a great champion and inspiration in encouraging Faithful Friends. *f*