

Opening of the Community Centre at the Beaulieu and Channels estate

28 September 2018

The diocese of Chelmsford exists because of the massive housing expansion in East London during the Victorian period. Quite simply, Essex became so populous that it needed to become a diocese in its own right. As the tenth Bishop of Chelmsford I face very similar challenges to the first. There are massive housing developments springing up all over this county. It is our historic vocation to serve these new communities.

The diocese of Chelmsford is also the birthplace of the Society of Saint Francis in the Church of England. The first Franciscan Friary since the Reformation was established in 1894 in Plaistow. On 11 December that year, Father Andrew, its founder, wrote in his diary that 'it makes one feel very sad to hear the children praying, "Give us this day our daily bread", when one knows there is nothing at home for them... The poverty here is something fearful. I found families without even the light of a candle sitting silently and starving in the dark.'

Although there is still material poverty in Essex, thankfully it is not that bad. We face a challenge of a different sort. The poverty people face today is not usually due to a shortage of bread, but a shortage of love, a shortage of hope and a shortage of opportunity. And so I find myself asking the question, what makes housing estate a community? Surely, it is when there is a heart to that community, a place where people can come together, and a place where, supporting each other, they can find the love, affirmation, hope and opportunity they need. The Church of England is committed to these things: to turning estates into communities and houses into homes. It is, therefore a huge honour to be working with many partners to ensure that this new estate of Beaulieu and the Channels becomes a community.

And we believe that a worshipping church community and a parish priest at the heart of the community, committed to working with others and determined to serve the needs of all people, can be a source of blessing and a sign of hope. Therefore it is my joy and privilege to be here today to open this new community centre and to ask God's blessing upon it and all that happens here and for all who gather here. And as you may know the church that will meet here has chosen as its patron, St Francis. Therefore, may the people who come here, for whatever reason, receive the daily bread they need, the bread of life and hope. May this community centre be a bright light of opportunity.

*+Stephen
Bishop of Chelmsford*