

## **A priest's perspective**

Fr Mark Swires, parish priest of Brightlingsea and Wivenhoe and also the chaplain to Essex University and vocations director, set out his thoughts on being a priest and on working with the laity. He had not 'cracked it', he said. "I am not a perfect priest or running a perfect parish or chaplaincy. I owe a great deal to the kindness and generosity of lay people, through their service in the parish and through support on a personal level. A priest's life consisted of spinning plates: sometimes only he can see the parish as a whole and decide where the priorities lie within it; he needs to adjust people's expectations, which can take time to do." He said it is also vital for the clergy, all of whom are at different stages of their lives, to keep in touch and support each other.

Fr Mark emphasised the common priesthood of the faithful: "I am a believer in 'the Heineken principle'; it is the role of the laity to proclaim Christ in the world, to refresh the parts that priests cannot reach." Although the Church is hierarchical, he said, Christ turns everything on its head. All kinds of model are possible. No one was indispensable, he added, citing Pope Benedict. "The ideal is harmony between the different parts of the church."