

Letter from the Vicar - July 2009

Didn't We Do Well?

After last month's thoughts, which might have seemed negative but which were not meant to, I thought I would – or indeed should – offer some of the reasons why I find myself constantly encouraged by the Mission and Ministry lived out by our Parishes within the Five Alive Mission Community.

Did you know, for instance, that the national average for population attending Church in the UK is roughly 5%, of which about 3% attend Anglican Churches? In our villages that number is between 6 and 11% of the population attending our churches with some regularity, and when you add in our brothers and sisters of Baptist and Methodist Churches in the Mission community that number rises even more. Not that it is the numbers themselves that are important, but the fact that our church fellowships remain at the heart of our village communities. We are genuine community churches, existing for the benefit not just of those within our walls, but for the whole of our villages.

A wonderful example of this has been very evident for me in some of the funerals I have been privileged to lead recently. The welcome and concern shown for families and friends of those who have died has been moving and inspiring to see, not only that but when there are specific requests made – whether it is playing a clip of someone recorded for a cassette of 'village voices' or accommodating 200 bikers – the church communities will go the extra mile in trying to make these things happen.

Also within these church fellowships there is a real desire to be more than 'Sunday Christians' – our midweek services, study groups, special events, community lunches, coffee mornings and more all point to a desire to make our faith known day by day and to live out the truth of what we believe. The fact that so many of our church members are involved in crucial roles in our village communities, and that many of them are involved because of their Christian commitment, is a great testimony to the everyday faith we share.

And though I realise I am risking a little too much ego massaging I want to finish with one more thing. Our churches are *thinking* and *doing* churches. People ask questions about faith, they challenge and encourage their Clergy, they take part in debates and discussions. This is a sign of what the prayer book of 1662 calls a 'true and lively faith' and is very encouraging for those of us who minister here. But it doesn't stop with words, the Christians in our churches are keen to act out their faith, often in very quiet ways, without fanfare or even thanks in some cases. I am moved to see just how faith is put into action in so many ways in our fellowships.

That is why I feel encouraged by all of the churches in the Five Alive Mission Community, and why I feel privileged to be the Vicar here. Thank you for all you do.