

Mary writes

In 1982 Bob and I moved from one side of Northampton to the other and we began the search for a church to attend with our family. Bob had not been going to church very long so it was important that we found one that was right for us. We tried out several in the area, but studiously avoided one, I am ashamed to say, because it was ecumenical.

Emmanuel Church building was ugly to say the least; built out of grey blocks as part of the Weston Favell Shopping Centre in the heart of Northampton's Eastern District housing development. It was shared by members of the Baptist, Methodist, Anglican and United Reformed Churches, and I was very definitely Anglican I decided that it was not the place for me. However God had other plans!

When circumstances brought us to worship in Emmanuel Church on the morning of the Sunday after Christmas 1983, we knew we had found our spiritual home. How did we know that? Because of the welcome we were given. The love of Christ in that church was so evident that we felt welcomed, accepted and loved from the very beginning. Our children grew up in that church and we remained as members of that church for nineteen years until my ordination in 2002.

What attracted crowds to Jesus' ministry? Jesus did three things with crowds: He loved them (Matthew 9:36 et al) he met their needs (Matthew 15:30; Luke 6:17-18; John 6:2 et al) and he taught them in interesting and practical ways (Matthew 13:34; Mark 10:1; 12:37, et al) and churches that do those things today are the ones that are growing.

If you were to ask the PCCs in each of our churches whether they consider their village church to be a friendly and welcoming place they would without hesitation say, "Yes".

But is it a welcoming place to everyone who comes through the doors, no matter what sort of people they are, how they look, or how they speak? Or is it just welcoming to those who are regular worshippers in that particular church?

Some years ago now as I was preparing for worship in one of the friendliest of churches in my previous post, I noticed someone in tears at the back of the church. I went and asked what was the matter and if there was anything I could do to help. This lady had lost someone close to her during the previous week and, as there was no service in her own village church had come to a service in a neighbouring village for the first time.

On arrival she was greeted with a warm smile and handed the necessary books. She approached an empty seat to be told by the person next to it, "I'm sorry! I'm keeping that seat for my husband". She approached another empty seat and was told a similar thing. When she most needed love and care and someone to sit next to, she was rebuffed and ended up at the back of the church in tears. The woman said that she would never visit that church again. Mahatma Ghandi once said that almost certainly he would have become a Christian, had not a similar thing happened to him.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Love one another, for by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another." (John 13:35).

If we want our churches to thrive and grow then the welcome that we give to people, and the ongoing love, friendship, care and support that we offer, is hugely important and we must offer it unconditionally, even to people we find difficult to get on with. Jesus has set the standard – how do we measure up?

Church Contacts and Services

For details about church services, weddings and baptisms contact:

Canon Mary Garbutt: T: 01327 700050 E: mygarbutt@gmail.com

The Vicarage, 19 Church Street Staverton NN11 6JJ

Church warden contact details

Catesby: Ruth Thomson 01327 871201

Staverton: Heather Jeffries 01327 703302

Rupert Frost 01327 700198

Hellidon: Vacant

Services February and March 2020

Date	Where	Time	Service
02 Feb	Catesby	09:30	Holy Communion
09 Feb	Staverton	09:30	Holy Communion
16 Feb	Hellidon	09:30	Holy Communion
23 Feb	Staverton	09:30	Worship for All
26 Feb	Staverton	19:00	Holy Communion with ashing
01 Mar	Catesby	09:30	Holy Communion
08 Mar	Staverton	09:30	Holy Communion
15 Mar	Hellidon	09:30	Holy Communion
22 Mar	Staverton	09:30	Worship for All
29 Mar	Hellidon	09:30	Benefice Service
05 Apr	Catesby	09:30	Palm Sunday
09 Apr	Hellidon	18:00	Passover supper with Holy Communion
10 Apr	Catesby	12:00 to 15:00	Good Friday meditation
12 Apr	Staverton	09:30	Easter Sunday Holy Communion

Contact Mary Garbutt for information about all services
