

THE ESSENTIAL MINISTRY OF HOSPITALITY

15 August, 2017

In his famous Institutes, the Reformer, Jean Calvin, stated that the Church is found wherever “the preaching of the gospel is reverently heard, and the sacraments are not neglected...”¹ By this he meant that “church” is gathered whenever the Bible is read and expounded upon via the preaching of a sermon and whenever the sacraments, especially Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are celebrated. This is certainly true, in that, we recognised this as a standard church service. The Bible is read at every worship service, whether it is wedding on the beach, morning prayer or the daily offices within a convent, Liturgy of the Word led by one of our Readers, or a sacramental service, such as Holy Eucharist, led by one of our priests.

This does, however, centre and focus our concept of “Church” on the act of worship – prayer and praise. But we all know that the Church gathers at other times as well. Our clergy and elected officers gather to administer their parish and chaplaincy when the Parochial Church Council meets. Our PCC regulates events such as the timings of our Christmas concert and market, they authorized the official electoral role, they monitor safeguarding training, they certainly would be involved in researching and approving the buying and selling of parish land and fixtures, and the wardens with the PCC oversee the maintenance of church fabric.

Perhaps a better definition of “Church” is the mission statement that was seen recently in a local parish. It read, “Our mission is to be a welcoming Christian community committed to enabling each other to grow through worship, spiritual fellowship, and service; following the example of Christ.” This recognizes that church is assembled whenever there is worship, whenever there is a church social exchange, and whenever we are active in charity endeavours. Worship obviously included Biblical scripture and the sacraments, but this statement includes Christian social gatherings, including Christian education, and when we are doing charitable acts and practical ministry such as hospital and home visits to shut-ins.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a great fear within the Church of England that we were becoming a country club and social gathering for polite society. People, they feared, were attending church to see and be seen and to make professional and social connections. Our Church hierarchy, synods, and seminaries cajoled us to avoid becoming a “comfortable pew”² and to become active in evangelization and visible tangible measurable acts of charity. Parish churches were to be “beehives of activity!”³ And not merely sanctuaries of rest.

¹Jean Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion”, (*Institutio Christianae Religionis*), Basel, Switzerland, 1536, Chapter 1, paragraph 10.

² Pierre Berton and Ernest Harrison, “The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at Christianity and the Religious Establishment in the New Age”, Toronto, 1965.

³ Bob Young, “Seven Characteristics of Effective, Biblical Churches”, accessed at [www \[.\] bobyongresources.com/articles/characteristics-effective-church.pdf](http://www.bobyongresources.com/articles/characteristics-effective-church.pdf)

But for chaplaincies, congregations that deal with people far from home – universities, the military, hospitals, prisons, and far off dispersed places like the Diocese in Europe, we have found that “comfortable pews, “Social interaction” and “Christian community” are exactly the types of sacred ministry that are called for. When people are far from their support systems of family and friends, loneliness can quickly arise. Today there are few options to gather that do not include alcohol or loud music. Young people especially are shrinking their world into their bedrooms where they can stay connected online.

For those of us in chaplaincies, we have found that a Ministry of Hospitality is vitally important. And in it, we can also find “Church”. Single people – students, the elderly, those on their own, in a foreign land – who want to meet and talk. Sometimes they need to find help. Sometimes they just need respite and sanctuary from a loud, busy stress filled world.

Important to us at All Saints’ is the fellowship time that follows our weekly worship. Robin is our primary minister here. Roxana and Anne are also faithful helpers. After worship, the coffee water is always hot, a biscuit is available, and there is someone to talk to, to share with – a fellow Christian with whom we have just shared a common experience of prayer and praise, of sermon and, perhaps, sacrament. Hospitality is essential within chaplaincies like ours. During hospitality time, fears and worries fade away or are lightened through commiseration and sharing, laughter and kindness are found, and questions can be asked about what was experienced that morning during worship. Hospitality leads to friendship and Christian fellowship builds up the body of Christ – the people who gather in Christ’s name. And that is another definition of “church”, Church is the assembled Body of Christ whenever two or more are gathered in his name.



Robin, far left, is assisted by Roxana in providing coffee & sweets and in facilitating a ministry of hospitality after worship at All Saints.