

Something Old - Something New

East Window, 2004

Bishops have always been travellers. We travel each Sunday and most other days too in order to be with our people in Churches across the Diocese and with them in their places of work and in their homes. That means a lot of driving, and as I drive I usually listen to the radio. I remember on just such an occasion enjoying the pop music on Radio One but being told by the DJ that a recent survey had said that not one bishop in the Church of England listens to Radio One! So much for surveys. I was listening because, like many people, I enjoy listening to something old **and** something new. And I think the same goes for Church.

Recently, a great deal has been written and spoken about "New Ways of Being Church". We must offer a whole range of experiences in homes, on the Internet, in coffee bars and public venues, which use modern language, music and ideas to speak to today's people in ways they can appreciate and understand. And that's because young people do not enjoy the normal style of Church service. Well, I'm not altogether sure that's entirely right.

I believe that what young folk don't like is any sort of worship which is done badly. And as a matter of fact, nor do old people – it's just that they seem prepared to put up with it. My feeling is that none of us should be prepared to see any worship done badly and go out of our way to put it right. We are far too ready to settle for Sunday worship of a very low standard and that, none of us should accept.

So, in addition to the important 'new ways of being church', let's hear it for 'old ways of being Church' done extra well! Bright notice boards, open doors, and a warm welcome. Well printed service sheets that make it easy to follow. Hymns that don't drag, and if there's no good musicians available, then there's plenty of brilliantly recorded hymns and songs available. Let's see full participation by a broad range of people from the congregation, with children playing a full and integrated part in everything. Good lighting and sound. Decent, clean loos and a warm invitation to stay a while and chat. Prayers that talk about real life issues in the community, and plenty of groups caring for the world and the needy. Good social events to bring everyone together from inside and outside the congregation. Interesting and challenging talks and sermons. And above all, a deep sense of the holiness of God, of prayer, worship and openness to all comers. Call me old fashioned, but that sort of Church would do me fine – and if we can get that right, then New Ways of Being Church would be really great too! After all, some of us actually do listen to Radio One *and* Radio Four.

There are many exciting ways of being Church – whether it is by gathering together to worship in a whole variety of ways – or being Church out in the world at the office, the school, the shop or the committee room. No one wants any of that done badly – it's all got to be 'something beautiful for God'.

So I drove along with Radio One blasting out a number of brilliant tunes. But then the DJ played a really useless track, so I turned back to Radio Four. Whatever way of being Church we choose, old or new, let's make sure it's the very best we can offer. We may then find that we can become a Church that's both old **and** new.

God bless,

✠ Laurie