

I am the Door

East Window

As Archdeacon and Area Bishop we find ourselves travelling many thousands of miles each year in order to visit the 186 church buildings in the Bradwell Episcopal Area. In some ways we are 'visitors' to a Church every Sunday morning, and that means we see things that regulars don't see because they have become so accustomed to them. For example, some of our churches truly are superb buildings, often ancient treasures – and many of them glory in having wonderful oak doors of great antiquity. But these treasures can also prove foreboding.

We often find, on arrival, that the great door is closed and no notice informs the Sunday inquirer that they should simply open the door and enter. We actually know of one tentative new-comer who arrived at just such a closed door one Sunday morning and did as they would do to any other door – they knocked upon it. It was a cold Sunday morning and they had decided to pluck up all their courage and give Church a try. But their knocking elicited no response. They knocked again, but after a little while they gave up and went home. They never went again.

Why is it that we who are used to the odd ways of Church-going forget that those who come for the first time are simply not used to it. A shop would expect to go out of business if it had oak doors which you had to push that hard to gain entry, and yet it does not seem to dawn upon us that we are barring the way to new Christians.

And that's just the doors. We wonder in how many other ways we are expecting enquirers after Jesus to do make all the first moves? Doors can have warm welcoming notices on them. A member of the congregation who has a gift of hospitality could be near the door always looking out for arrivals and helping them with our odd churchy ways. For even if we have modern glass doors, people are still reluctant to enter if they don't see an obvious welcome.

Jesus said, "I am the door to the sheepfold". He is a 'living' door, a welcoming and warm presence, alive to peoples' needs and their fears. Coming to Church for the first time must take a lot of courage – Jesus welcomes newcomers with gentleness and sensitivity. We wonder if we could all take a fresh look at the outside of our Churches on a Sunday morning, and ask ourselves, "if we were coming to church for the first time, would we ever have the courage to get over the threshold?"

+ *Laurie Bradwell*