



The Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

Members' Newsletter

JUNE 2021

Welcome to the June Newsletter

I wonder if you remember the Very Reverend Edward Patey? He became Dean of Liverpool Cathedral in 1964 at a time when the Cathedral whose foundation stone had been laid some 60 years earlier was continuing to be built. In 1978 Her Majesty the Queen attended the dedication of the Cathedral.

Why am I telling you all this? It is because while attending to my bookshelves, I came across a small book by Dean Patey, published in 1979, entitled "Open The Doors." It cost £1.25!! It has 6 chapters as follows: 1) Who Are These People? 2) Dare We Open The Doors? 3) Open The Doors – Whose Job Is It? 4) Open The Doors - To Caring 5) Open the Doors - To Say Something 6) Open The Doors - To The World. Those who know me and the work of the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association will quickly realise why the book's title and the chapter titles caught my attention – and I purchased the book a long time before becoming involved with CVTA!

In a nutshell the thrust of the book is about opening the doors of church buildings to let the world in and get the congregation out! I am not going to quote at length, but given the circumstances in which today's Church finds itself I find Dean Patey's opening lines exceedingly appropriate:

“... every church community, however small, and every member of it who dares to claim the name of Christian must ask three basic questions: Is the spreading of the good news of God revealed in Jesus Christ given a first priority among us? Are we making a serious attempt to understand the secular world about us into which we are sent to carry the message? Are we trying to work out a strategy of mission appropriate to the times in which we live?”

Clearly the first question is about putting 'a willingness to get out' at the top of the priority list; the thrust of the second is about carefully interpreting the state of society, local and national, what colours it, what are its concerns; and the challenge of the third is about shaping the Gospel message in such a way that it responds to the hopes, the fears, the dilemmas, of individuals, families, groups, whole communities of which society is composed.

You don't need me to describe on the one hand the current state of our society, indeed world society, as we are in the wake of, or perhaps better, in the continuing presence of, the Covid-19 pandemic, and on the other the ways in which it is being responded to by scientists, politicians, individuals, families and communities.

So in the light of Dean Patey's 3 questions, may I ask if you yourself or in company with others have pondered appropriate link-ups between the components of the Gospel message, the nature of today's secular society, and 'strategies' for what I always refer to as 'mission through ministry' - it isn't what the Church does occasionally, it isn't about occasional evangelistic missions, but what it does constantly in and through its day-by-day interactions first with its immediate community, and then in its ministry to visitors and tourists.

The majority of church buildings have been shut - for weeks, months; communication with the world outside has been by website and social media, and we are told that many who customarily would not have entered church buildings have valued the contents of services and other communications broadcast through social media. Now that church buildings can be opened again are communications by such means going to cease, or added to the work of clergy, worship leaders and other participants? Why deprive those who have benefitted from this resource which has come to the fore because of the lockdown?

Yes, over these past months, since the middle of March 2020 in fact, our society has changed. As a society we have always been aware of risk - road accidents, family breakdowns, uncertainties with regard to employment, to name but three. But now awareness of risk has become far more prevalent - for how much longer will we be urged to wear a face mask, to social distance, to participate in test-and-trace - yes, we need to be protected, but others need to be protected from us who unwittingly may be carrying the virus. It all sounds very scary! And at the time of writing numbers of victims of Covid-19 are still increasing, people dying prematurely, and couples and families being bereaved.

And what is the content of the Gospel the Church has to offer to today's society? - response to risk, response to uncertainty, response to becoming a victim, response to being an unwitting carrier, response to caring, response to bereavement? As church buildings open, hopefully during most of daylight's hours, what resources will congregations, visitors, tourists, find inside which will give them comfort, hope, a sense they are not alone but that God is one with them in their plight - the single candle burning from morning 'til night, the offer of lighting other candles, the names displayed of those who have died, their partners and other family members, resources for prayer in anger, grief, despair, hope, scriptural verses and passages and appropriate poetry to offer expressions of grief, to comfort, encourage, inspire, thanksgiving for those who have and still do hazard their own lives in nursing and supporting the victims of this pandemic

Mrs Jenny Carpenter, a former Trustee of CVTA has reminded me of an article by the Revd. Lucy Winkett, the Rector of St. James Piccadilly published in the *Church Times* on 21 May.

Lucy writes:

"I take some time, one afternoon, to sit in the empty church building with our architect and think with others more deeply about a possible clean-up and restoration in time for the 300th anniversary, in 2023, of the death of Christopher Wren.

The sunlight streaming in through the clear glass windows expresses the late 17th-century desire that the light of Reason should shine on the practice of religion, but also somehow embodies the sense that, bathed in that light, prayers have been said for centuries before us, and will be said by many others, long after we are gone.

And I'm reminded again, as cafes and pubs, galleries, and - eventually- theatres open up again, that church buildings matter. This is not as historic monuments, or museums to a faith that few are interested in any more, but as often beautiful public sacred spaces where honest conversation, whispered prayers, and public ritual place each of us as a small part of a much bigger story.

As we recover together as a society and as a global community, we will need these spaces more than ever."

For those who are not aware, St. James' Piccadilly, in the heart of London's bustling commercial and entertainment communities, is open every day, much frequented by those who are homeless and by those who in other ways live within crisis situations. Lucy and her colleagues engage in very specific contents and expressions of ministry shaping the Gospel in ways appropriate to the contexts of those who come to them and in which the church building is located.

Jenny also informs me that from time to time she reads the Roman Catholic publication *The Tablet*, and that on 15 May it contained an article by Elena Curti, the author of "*Fifty Catholic Churches to see before you die*," as recommended by readers, subtitled "*The ones that got away*." The great benefit of course is that

most Roman Catholic church buildings are open during daylight hours every day! Why not try to find out if any Roman Catholic church buildings near you are featured in Elena's book?

And my attention has been drawn to an article in the 11 June *Church Times* written by Fr. Philip Martin entitled "This traumatised nation needs open churches" It echoes CVTA's pleas to dioceses and parishes to a "t". I shall send Fr Martin a copy of this Newsletter and invite him to join CVTA!

An Afterthought.

Thinking from time to time during the pandemic about the significance of church buildings, I have come up with a number of images. My latest which may well horrify some is 'a pit- stop'! Church buildings are not there for people as destinations, to enter and stay in; but rather for them to be resourced before they go back out. Whether members of congregations or occasional visitors, we enter only to be equipped to leave!

And finally ...

The end of this month marks the time for the sending out of requests for members to renew subscriptions, and maybe to hope that we shall welcome new subscribers. The Membership Secretary will be making contact with current and former members.

If any readers wish to copy any of the content of this Newsletter you are very welcome to do so. Please simply acknowledge its source: Canon John D Brown, Chair, CVTA.

Hopefully another Newsletter will be written and published during August or early September. I would be delighted to receive items for inclusion. If you have something you think others could benefit from reading, please e-mail by the end of the second week of August to: canonjbrown@mac.com.