

Eileen McLean Sabbatical Leave 16 May to 17 August 2006

How do Churches engage with their visitors?

Setting the scene

The idea of this Sabbatical sprang directly out of my own ministerial situation.

I am the Vicar of Bamburgh in Northumberland. The church was founded by St Aidan in 635; the earliest parts of the present building are Norman. The church has many visitors, mainly in the summer, but there is a small stream of visitors even in the bleakest winter months. The church is open from 8am until dusk every day.

Many come 'in passing' having been to the Castle and the Grace Darling Museum and it's the other obvious old building in the village. Some have spent time on the beach and are seeking somewhere free and open and dry (or this particular summer, somewhere cool). Many come specifically because of the Grace Darling connection, to see the Memorials in the churchyard and church – or to search for their own ancestors. Some come because they are very definitely on pilgrimage, visiting the sites of the Northern saints; for most of these, Bamburgh is a brief interlude, on the way to Holy Island.

As well as being the incumbent of two parishes I also have the responsibility of developing the church's Ministry to Visitors in the 2 northernmost deaneries of Newcastle Diocese, an area which extends from just above Alnwick to the Scottish Borders, from the coast into the Cheviots beyond Wooler. From my knowledge of other churches in this area, I am aware that almost every church, even the tiniest and most remote, is visited to some degree.

This pattern is repeated all over the country. Millions of visitors come into our churches. And, as is said over and over again in many circles 'Our buildings are a tool of mission'. We don't have to *go out* to evangelise, people are *coming to us* in droves. We have an amazing opportunity to plant a seed of faith (if tiny) in each and every visitor who enters a church.

Thus far I have said nothing new. Of recent times many churches have had this on their agenda, and a number have responded by improving the warmth of their welcome and the quality of the material offered to visitors. There has been a growth in 'Church Trails' of many kinds, encouraging visitors to move from church to church to appreciate the varied splendour of our Christian Heritage.

A lot of excellent work is being done, but from material seen and conversations in various forums, I have developed a concern that sometimes the effort is being put into improving the medium rather than articulating the message. Often not much thought seems to be given as to the type of visitor we are catering for – what kind of people they are and the fact that today's British tourists live in a very secular context, and may have minimal or no knowledge of the Christian faith or places of worship.

All of this has formed the basis of my thinking about how to use a period of Sabbatical leave. I decided to journey round a large number of churches in (mainly) England, which receive many visitors, to find out how churches are responding to the needs of their visitors.

What kind of visitors?

Visitors to any church will have many different motives for entering through the door, some of which I mentioned above in referring to Bamburgh. They will also be a mixture of ages (veering towards the older end of the spectrum) and personalities, some highly literate, some less so. As well as this, they will undoubtedly be a mixture of (1) regular church-goers, (2) those who have lapsed but have some 'feeling' for church life and awareness of Christian teaching, but may be of a sceptical disposition (3) people who have never experienced any form of worship (other than perhaps a funeral or wedding), and are pretty ignorant about the Christian faith altogether.

In this Sabbatical time I set out to discover how churches help 'committed' and 'knowledgeable' visitors (categories 1 and 2) to understand their Christian heritage better, and enable them to pray and renew or deepen their spiritual experience.

But most especially I wanted to find out how churches relate to visitors in category 3. It is a fact that many people today are totally unfamiliar with what happens in an act of worship, and formal prayer is strange to them. When they come into a church, everything is 'foreign'. Many people have never opened a bible. They know almost nothing about Jesus Christ, or the story of the saints, and as for the Trinity ! They have a tabloid view of the church, as an out of date institution, fuddy-duddy, introverted, irrelevant and dying. They believe that it is for a small minority of people who 'like that sort of thing' (who, by definition, are very different from themselves.) It is also a fact that a particular sort of modern spirituality has been adopted by a lot of people over recent years. Candles and incense and meditative music and wayside shrines with flowers – this is the folk-spirituality of today.

All of this is particularly true of the young – though by no means exclusively so.

What impression does a church building make on such modern non-churchgoing people? The words 'we aim to change tourists into pilgrims' trip lightly off many lips. Realism says that for many tourists this is a touch ambitious; a 5-10 minute visit isn't going to achieve that transformation. But there must be ways of, at the very least, disturbing not confirming existing prejudices; at best of sparking some imagination and interest in what the church is about.

At the very least, every church could try to convey three messages to its' visitors :

- (1) We are glad you are here, this place is for you
- (2) This is not just a beautiful old building, it is a sacred space; however you may understand that word we want you to know its 'specialness'
- (3) This church is alive, loved and used regularly by people who follow the way of Christ

These messages don't need to be explicit, expressed in words; they can be implicit, felt and experienced. Neither is this an exercise which need cost a lot of money, it mainly needs an effort of imagination and serious commitment.

One visit to a church which gets across such messages is highly unlikely (though it's possible) to have a life-changing effect on the person. But if someone made repeat visits to various churches in different parts of England, (and lots of people do), and each time had a wholly good and positive experience, the 'build-up' could be very effective indeed.

It would seem to be an obvious element in the mission of the whole church, to encourage every single congregation to address the issue seriously 'who are our visitors?' and 'what do we offer them to take then forward on a spiritual journey?' This is a simple way for the church to improve its credibility, attractiveness, and even – slowly – possibly – membership.

Method

Within the space of two months I aimed to visit as many churches as possible, in various parts of the country. To minimise costs I stayed a lot of the time with relatives and friends, so the choice of churches was to a large extent dictated by locality. However it included many of the most tourist-visited churches in the country, as well as those recommended by friends with inside 'local knowledge', and some which I just stumbled on in 'touristy' areas. Some were visited because of associations with famous people, some because they are included in TV programmes, some because they are in the middle of a town or village with many holiday makers.

Altogether I visited 100 churches in Yorkshire, the Lake District, Derbyshire, Nottingham, the Welsh borders, the Cotswolds, Cornwall, Dorset, Isle of Wight, Kent, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. *See complete list in Appendix 1.*

I used a pro forma in each church to assess various aspects. These were very difficult to quantify. Impressions were often far more important than facts. However, the forms helped in making comparisons, and recording very good and very bad practice. *See Appendix 2*

I considered each church under the following headings :

Age of the church?

Almost all of the churches were mediaeval with a handful of Victorian. A fair number claimed to be of Saxon origin. Almost all were Anglican, with the exception of Buckfast Abbey and a couple of Methodist chapels in the Lake District. This is not for lack of an ecumenical spirit! RC and non-conformist churches tend to be of the last century and not visited by holiday makers – though they are sometimes open for prayer all day when Anglican buildings are not.

Number of Visitors to the church

This is impossible to assess. Not every church has a Visitor's Book, and where one exists there is huge variation in opinion as to what proportion of visitors actually sign the book. And even this will vary greatly from church to church. Some books are prominently placed, some hard to find. Some Stewards encourage every visitor to sign. Some books have very large spaces for comments – perhaps deterring those of a non-literary disposition!

In the event, in each church where a book was available I counted the number of entries in the book, during the previous month. This means one can at least get a statistical comparison of the numbers of visitors to churches, if not the absolute numbers visiting each one. (An 'entry' means one line in the book, which could mean a couple or even a family. Probably multiplying by 2 would give a more accurate figure for those who have actually signed).

The number of entries counted varied between 6 and 800+ in a month. There seems to be no direct correlation between numbers and the size or significance of the church, apart from the obvious 'biggies'. Being right in the middle of the town/village certainly helps. So do open doors and obvious 'prettiness', but none of these explain some great anomalies.

Welcome

If you don't feel welcome and accepted everything else will be coloured by this.

Section 1 gives findings and observations

Prayerful

Is there something numinous here, or is it just a museum or fascinatingly beautiful ancient building? Is it obviously a sacred space which can be accessed even if you are not conventionally Christian?

Section 2 gives findings and observations

What is the purpose of this building?

Implicitly or explicitly, does it tell you anything about Christian belief and what worship is about? Very particularly, does it do this in words and ways which can be understood by those who are not into Christian 'jargon' or practice? Does it awaken interest?

See Section 3

Alive?

Is there evidence that this is a building which is used and loved by a worshipping, believing community? Or is it seemingly dead, with fading literature and out of date posters?

See Section 4

Are there connections with the surrounding community?

Is there evidence of outreach to and care for the wider world?

Both of these demonstrate aspects of being *Alive*.

Another way of saying is this church 'incarnational' – is it inward looking, or does it reflect God's love for all his world?

See Section 4a

What information is given about the history of the church and the building?

Many visitors are particularly interested in this. Is the material well presented, free or expensive, easily seen or must be searched for, interesting or dry?

See Section 5

I also noted whether there was anything to *take away* – to reflect on
And what kinds of items, if any, were *on sale*.

See Section 6

SECTION 1

Welcome offered to Visitors

I am not here considering the welcome given to visitors by the congregation at Sunday services. This survey is entirely about the impression given to tourists as they drop into a church outside worship times - what does the building say to them?

The least welcoming thing of all is to find a church closed.

The practice of 'open' or 'closed' appears to vary from one part of the country to another. In some areas it is considered entirely natural to have churches open from early morning until dusk, unmanned. (In a few cases they are never locked at all). This is seen as the only right thing to do if the church is to show that the open love of God is always there for everyone. In others it is received wisdom, that for security reasons it is impossible to open the building unless there is a steward on duty. This is seen as taking ones responsibilities seriously to care for the precious heritage passed down through the ages.

Two different 'oughts' are at work here, and it's hard to make judgments, but some commonsense can be applied. If a church is in the middle of a busy town and gets hundreds of visitors a day, it could be a great risk to open up without adequate stewarding. In this circumstance, for security reasons, it seems sensible to have people on duty. (Though some churches can vouch that sheer 'presence' is no guarantee of perfect security). On the other hand in a quieter village church the security risks are much less, and can be lessened by moving or 'alarming' really valuable artefacts. It would be interesting to know whether EIG has any statistics about the correlation between theft and vandalism and the presence of stewards? In smaller churches, often the only people available for this task are elderly retired men and women, who rather than protecting church property may themselves be in danger if any incident were to occur.

As far as tourists are concerned one of the most frustrating situations of all is to have variable opening hours eg *2 to 4 on Mondays, 10-12 on Thursdays, otherwise closed*, when you have arrived on a Friday for the weekend. This happened on a number of occasions. This reinforces the idea of the church as old-fashioned museum. *Many more churches could be encouraged to trust their potential visitors more, and open without anyone on duty. If it can happen in some places why not others which are just over the hill?*

Personal or printed welcome – or is it all in the ambience?

Stewards

Of course stewards are not there just for security purposes. Many churches see it as vital that there should be a human presence to make the welcome real and warm. About 1/3 of the churches had these kind of welcomers.

A person at the door certainly helps if they smile, say 'hello', perhaps offer you a leaflet guide, and then leave you to get on with what you want to do, ready to answer queries if approached. Sheer friendliness creates a welcome in itself. Some assistants in church shops and bookstalls and Coffee Rooms were particularly good at this.

But 'duty stewards' can be a mixed blessing. In 6 churches I visited, the stewards talked to each other or the shop-attendant loudly about personal matters, distracting the natural peace of the building – or they insisted on telling you which way you must go round the church to follow the official trail (in one case pulling me up me when I dared to go straight to the altar instead) – or they followed you round pointing out the most interesting historical details (about military regiments in one case) – or they made it clear they were not interested themselves in the religious aspects of the

building, only the architecture and history. In one empty church a steward, most unnervingly didn't say anything but followed us round with her eyes the whole time; this felt very intrusive.

If there are to be stewards as 'welcomers'/ guides they should be chosen well and given appropriate training and guidelines. And they should at least be sympathetic to the Christian faith (not doctrinal experts or counsellors or prayer leaders, just sympathetic) Theirs are the human faces who will initially influence the atmosphere. And help present the church as a community of faith as well as a building.

Welcome Literature

The majority of churches do not have a person on duty when the church is open. This does not mean that visitors are not made to feel very welcome. There is much excellent good practice in the provision of 'Welcome' posters, notices and leaflets. 90% of the churches visited had one or other of these – ranging from a simple 'THIS CHURCH IS OPEN' on the pavement outside or 'A BIG WELCOME TO ALL OUR VISITORS' beside a simple vase of flowers at the door – to more creative phrasing on well designed boards.

"This church proclaims God's love for the whole of creation, Partly through its stillness and silence, partly through its liturgy and the energy and creativity of the many people who bring the building to life each day. We hope you will feel at home here. May you leave refreshed and hopeful and may God bless you."

Both styles, the simple and elaborate, can work well. The important thing is that the church is seen to be expecting visitors and has put some thought into making them feel wanted and welcome. Two printed guides used the words 'Enjoy yourself here'. Most of the larger churches said 'Welcome' in a number of different languages. The words actually used will vary according to the theology and type of community. What is vital is that the words have integrity and that the initial message of welcome is followed through in the whole of the visiting experience.

Atmosphere

It isn't necessary to use words to be welcoming. Two of the churches which had no notices at all gave an immediate impression of valuing their visitors because everything was so well presented and there was a real sense that the locals expected visitors and were glad they were there. In the end ambience matters more than any words of welcome, which can too easily be belied.

Some examples of bad practice

Lots of churches, the majority of those I visited, combine welcome notices with asking for money or warning of security measures, some in very crude terms

- WELCOME Visitors £1 (on same notice)
- A huge welcome board covering one aisle of a small church, 90% of the space stressing their financial need, beside a notice which declared they have a generous private endowment
- First words seen inside one church THERE IS A SECURITY SYSTEM IN PLACE – second notice seen PLEASE PUT MONEY IN BOX The word 'WELCOME' appeared on a crowded notice board and was difficult to spot
- On the *same* notice on a church door WELCOME – SECURITY CAMERAS OPERATE – PICTURE OF CARTOON POLICEMAN
- Between a church gate and the door the following notices – DO NOT PARK - DO NOT RIDE BIKES - DO NOT FOUL GROUNDS - LEAVE DOOR OPEN - DO NOT BRING IN MUDDY BOOTS. No 'please' and no mention of welcome.
- Very prominent church where a man sat at the chancel steps selling tickets to get to the famous grave in the Sanctuary. No entrance to chancel without paying £1.50. Instant impression was of a museum, not the welcoming house of God.

Of course, churches need money to help with upkeep. Of course it is prudent to be security minded. But 'welcome' comes first. The above convey a sense 'we welcome you because of your money' or 'we don't trust you'. Comparatively few churches have thought seriously about sensitive wording in asking for money. The most appropriate requests for donations, seemed to be those placed on the way out of the church, especially when they were linked with thanksgiving.

Lots of churches feel dim and untended and unused; the atmosphere itself is unwelcoming. Child with school party overheard saying 'Why are churches always cold and nasty and musty?' Admittedly some churches have great natural advantages, but at least each church can try to make the best of its own situation.

A few places had faded, curled-up welcome notices, more had badly photocopied ones or they were placed on messy tables amongst lots of other papers. This doesn't appear to take welcome seriously.

A few churches have so many 'Welcome' notices, it feels completely over the top. Often of different generations of projects, and no one has noticed the proliferation.

Some churches only say 'Welcome to our Sunday Services', what about weekday visitors?

Unbelievably, a fair number of Welcome notices are situated on stands behind the church door, only visible as you leave.

Some examples of Good Practice

- A wide open door into a church leading off a market place, village square, or busy street, speaks volumes about 'welcome' and may intrigue passers by to investigate
 - 2 churches provided the wherewithal to make a cup of tea or coffee with no charge
 - one of these also offered plants and jams for free – 'to remind you of your visit'
 - one church had introduced bottles of water and refreshing sweets to sell in the very hot weather
 - about 10 country churches had light sensors which came on as the door opened – a few more had timed light switches – both say 'we want to make your time here a pleasant one'
 - 6 churches had music playing. This can feel welcoming and create a spiritual ambience. For me very quiet Gregorian chant or Taize or classical music works better than hymns or songs with recognisable words
- The obverse of this is that many visitors are seeking real quietness – local decisions must vary*
- One church had a world map - visitors were invited to place a pin to show where they came from
 - Another had a board analysing where visitors came from during the last year, quoted some of their words from the visitors book, and assured them of ongoing prayer
- Both of these show a real interest in those who come into the church for whatever reason.*
- About 10 churches say 'farewell' very nicely with notices only seen as you leave, saying 'Thank you for visiting' and assuring travellers of prayer
 - One church says, on the back of the churchyard noticeboard, "PEACE BE WITH YOU" – the last thing you see as you leave the grounds

Trying to put myself in the place of a casual, secular visitor

A feeling of being welcomed and valued is not in itself going to plant any seeds of faith. The absence of welcome, or a tainted welcome as above, or a too effusive welcome will almost certainly have the opposite effect.

Subtle things may affect whether one feels this is a welcoming place and community, of which it would be good to know more. Of course, in an environment which is not one's own, one doesn't expect to understand everything one sees. However, it is offputting when literature and notices

designed specifically for visitors contain jargon words and concepts – it feels excluding (and reinforces prejudices of 'oddness') A number of Anglo-Catholic and strong Evangelical churches were particularly prone to this.

Dingy and dusty buildings, with old and faded literature / notices are uninviting and depressing. Light and music can be helpful. But that isn't a universal solution because dimness and silence can be very special too. It's neglect and lack of thought which are off-putting. If the regular users of this place don't care, it can't be very important to them, so why should anyone else want to find out more?

SECTION 2

Does the church feel like a sacred place?

This may sound tautological. Of course, every church is a sacred space, that's what it is for. Every regular worshipper in a parish church knows that it is a sacred space, because here he/she worships and prays and sings and holds their joys and sorrows before God. Every time they enter the church, which may be to clean or mend or arrange flowers, this feeling of sacred memory floods through them.

This will not be so for many visitors. They come into the church to explore a building which is obviously ancient and historic and beautiful - but this was true of the castle or stately home they were in an hour ago. The question is does a visit to a church building convey something special and sacred, and enable the visitor to get in touch with a spiritual part of themselves? Is there something numinous here, or is it just another fascinating museum?

The quality of 'holiness' is impossible to describe. By its nature it is ungraspable. You just know it when you encounter it. On my travels I came across a number of churches which felt instantly to be sacred places, the moment you entered the door. It is well-nigh impossible to know whether the experience would be similar for non-churchgoers in those same places. I can only say, I would strongly suspect this to be so, and comments in a few Visitor's books would verify this; amongst the 'peaceful' and 'beautifuls' the occasional phrase says 'very special' - 'so different' - 'awesome' - 'speaks to my heart'. I once saw just the word 'wow' in a Visitor's book.

It has to be said that small, quiet, simple churches in places off the beaten-track, begin with a great advantage. These places 'on the edge' would include churches like St.Bega's on the shore of Bassenthwaite, Hubberholme at the top of Wharfedale, St.Cedd's in Lastingham on the edge of the moors, Chad's church at Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex, Gunwalloe church in the Cornish sand-dunes. Churches such as these, and others of their ilk don't need to DO anything, they just ARE sacred. It would require something extraordinary to be happening to undo this.

Sadly, a few small rural churches almost manage this impossible feat. A few churches, who obviously don't expect anyone to go there other than regular worshippers, are messy and untidy and everything is faded and grey, and somehow the numinous is hidden. In very small buildings it really wouldn't take much imagination to restore a spirit of life - and this would surely inspire the regular congregation too. (Perhaps this is why nothing is happening - the sheer greyness is itself dragging them down).

At the other end of the scale I visited some of the 20 Greater Churches, a few large and ancient Abbey churches, many of the enormous wool churches of the Coxwolds and Norfolk and other vast parish churches. One would think that huge churches in busy towns with hundreds of thousands of visitors a year, would find it very difficult to remain 'holy'. Again some churches have built in natural advantages. Some have walls almost entirely of glass and are great temples of light. Light speaks of glory and inspiration and draws one in and upwards. 5 or 6 such churches are so immersed in this quality of light that they manage to retain a special factor which surely makes any visitor say 'wow! What is this about?'

It is undoubtedly harder to retain a sacred sense in these very big churches with tourists pouring through all day long. Churches respond to this challenge very differently. It seemed to me that the ones which 'work' tend to be uncluttered and have noise levels at a minimum.

Many large churches are repositories for endless bits of old furniture, tables covered with bits of paper or music - or notes for last weeks sermon in one case!, piles of chairs, ladders, more display

stands than can reasonably be used, One is so distracted by the endless bits and pieces around at human ground level that the ambient glory and grandeur is somehow diminished. Perhaps one characteristic of the 'Holy' churches is that in the main, they have been disciplined enough to discard what is unnecessary, so that one can focus on the important.

I was very struck too, in the difference of noise levels, in apparently similar churches. In some, visitors spoke and moved quietly. In these churches it was possible to preserve a tranquil and special ambience. In others it felt more like being in a marketplace with pushing and even shouting across aisles. I suspect that the example and expectations of the 'staff' may affect others behaviour. Guides talking continuously and loudly, staff rushing from one place to another, Videos played in the main church (2) - all of these encourage noise levels to rise, at the expense of the sacred space.

As I said earlier, a 'sacred' ambience is very hard to define. Of course, it is integral to the character of most churches, and most churches are deliberately conscious of the need to preserve it. This is much harder in some than in others, whatever their size.. An ancient, crumbling, damp church, which has suffered neglect years before the present generation, has a very hard task indeed. I would say that perhaps 4 churches out of 100 almost seem to have given up on the enterprise and, whether they know it or not, have lapsed into being museums.

Is the church prayerful?

Apart from this indefinable ambience, the other measure of a church's 'holiness' is the attention paid to prayer. Believers want to pray in churches which they visit. So do those who have any remnants of folk-religion. Surprisingly so do many who admit to no faith - at least they have the need to find places of meditation and reflection.

In each church I looked at the following :

Is there a prayer at the entrance?

Do any of the available guide/welcome leaflets include prayers?

Is there a quiet chapel / corner set aside for prayer, and are prayer 'aids' provided

Is there a prayer request board or book?

Is there the opportunity to light candles and an explanation / prayer re the use of candles?

Prayer at the church entrance

By far the majority of churches had this. A fair number were half-hidden in among notices on the porch notice-board

Most were traditional and well known and on card on a door or noticeboard.

A few were very imaginative and beautifully presented on a special display stand.

Prayer in leaflets

Probably in about half of 'welcome' leaflets. A few in 'guides to the church'.

Again, mostly traditional and quietly apt

Quiet Chapel

Most larger churches had at least one quiet place designated.

These varied considerably

- some were just a chapel labelled 'for quiet prayer', with no particular focus or prayer cards, and not even very quiet
- some were chapels where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved - it was helpful where the meaning of this was explained
- some had been really thought out and included
 - Focus of cross/icon/candle/African carvings/inspiring stained glass/altar frontal
 - Prayer cards, sometimes one, sometimes many covering various situations
 - Books of prayers / reflections
 - Bibles (in 20 languages in one case)

Notebook and pen to jot down any memorable / helpful words

Large print prayers (in only one place)

- 3 churches had very imaginative new prayer areas – simple and beautiful circular table and chairs
 - candles lit on the table, prayers and books on the chairs – this was the place of Morning Prayer
 - visitors were asked to join them in spirit at whatever time of day
- Churches without prayer chapels usually had an obvious place – Lady Altar, Chancel... for quiet prayer. These were less likely to have aids to prayer
- Tatty prayer cards on every pew, mixed in with gift-aid envelopes and last week's notices were not helpful
- 20 churches had no helps to prayer anywhere in the church
- One church, with many E. Europeans living around, had set up an Orthodox Icon prayer corner

Prayer requests

Most churches had some form of prayer request system, boards or books being most common. Many had no explanation, not even explaining that these prayers would be included in the prayers of the worshipping community. (In contrast, one church had set up a prayer group just to pray visitor's prayer requests)

Many prayer books / boards were in odd places and difficult to find. A surprising number had no pen or paper to be seen

Some prie-dieus with prayer request books were in uncomfortable or embarrassingly open positions

A number of imaginative 'prayer trees', one a magnificently gnarled and wise one

Two prayer pools – a stone font, full of water. Nearby pebbles to be immersed in water as one prayed for a person, the water representing God's all surrounding love.

An invitation to dip into the water in a font – sense of belonging to a faith community

One had a number of prayer 'stations' with prayers, readings and meditation aids

One had request forms in the shape of a chalice, with info re 'da Vinci Code' nearby!

Candles

About half of the churches gave the opportunity to light candles – Anglicans are losing their fear of fire risk and their dislike of being 'too high'?

Stands consisted of the traditional in many shapes and containers of sand. More votive candles than pillar. Most imaginative – nightlights standing on pebbles in a large and beautiful stone bowl. Some indicated a charge – 50p most expensive.

Almost all had a prayer nearby about the imagery of candles – many, many variations – also lots had prayers to take away.

"When you have gone, the burning candle is a symbol of love and hope, uniting your prayers with the prayers of the church of God."

"Lord Jesus, the light of the world, we pray that your light may shine in our lives and in the lives of those whom we love: in times of anxiety give us faith; in times of suffering give us strength; and at all times give us a quiet trust in your wisdom and love."

Most seemed very well used.

Other ideas

One church suggested in its prayer chapel that visitors might like to use the church garden as a place of quiet.

A few places, had a loose leaf folder beside the War Memorial with biographical information, to aid reflection and prayer

Two churches offered material for reflective prayer walks round the church

Putting it together

It was a source of puzzlement to me that few churches have thought holistically about how people pray. Prayer chapel, candles, and request book, were often scattered in different corners of the church – the latter often difficult to find. It surely makes more sense to have Candles and Requests in or close to the Quiet place?

Trying to see through the eyes of a casual, secular visitor

Perhaps 20 churches would undoubtedly impress as being a sacred place, without any explanation or interpretation, just because of their ambience. These would be quite likely to produce a sense of awe and wonder and deep peace, and perhaps inspire 'why' and 'what' questions.

Most churches, especially at quiet times, evoke something of this 'sacredness'. But in many of these aural and visible distractions can get in the way

A significant number of churches would just be seen as interesting, historic buildings like any other, and the visitor would leave uninspired and unchanged.

In a search for a place of reflection, some quiet prayer chapels would be found to be helpful, serene, silent and uplifting – a lot would be unhelpful because rather bleak with no thought given to providing a focus for prayer and meditation. Windows full of bible stories, or statues of unknown saints, are unlikely to directly aid reflection – even for committed worshippers

Beautiful traditional prayers on notices and leaflets would speak of the reassurance of ages, even if the words weren't totally understood.

Modern prayers concerned for rough sleepers, Alzheimers sufferers, the environment, the Middle East and AIDS would speak of the church as deeply involved in the world

The 'prayers in the round' would likely appeal because they feel open and inclusive, not locked away and separate chapels, just for pious people

So would candles, because they are part of modern people's lives, for relaxation and as a reminder of those who have died. Candles scattered among pebbles would impress more than those banked on a black stand covered with old grease. Prayer pebbles in water would probably be noticed and investigated, far more than a prayer book, because they are visible and beautiful and the symbolism is rich.

The smell of incense, with the scent of candles, is often an evocative sacred mix, even for those who never attend a service of worship. Anglo-Catholics win out here. (Once they put the sacred into words they are often incomprehensible to the ordinary punter – one prayer request board had at the top of it 'Orate Fratres' with no other explanation)

SECTION 3

What is the purpose of this building?

If the last section was about how church buildings speak to the heart, this section is about how they might speak to the head. About how churches communicate facts about the Christian faith to their visitors.

Previous Christian generations displayed the words of the Creed in church to explain what they believed about God. They created stained glass windows to tell the stories of the bible and the saints. These are still to be seen, the windows in almost all churches, the Creed in a fair number, though often hidden in a dark corner.

In the world of Christendom they made sense to the people, because they rehearsed them week by week in acts of worship, in bible classes, in sermons and in Sunday school.

Today neither Creeds nor biblical pictures make sense to the majority of the population because they have no reservoir of knowledge to draw on. Apparently young students beginning undergraduate courses in Fine Arts now have to pursue a crash course in elementary biblical history to help them to understand the works of mediaeval painters.

Neither do most people have any actual experience of church furnishings being used in worship. They need to have explained the function of altar, pulpit, lectern and font. They need to be told about chancels and sanctuaries and naves and aumbries and what they are used for.

We need to find a language which communicates all these things in an intelligible way which makes faith seem interesting and attractive, avoiding using Christian jargon, but without dumbing down.

Belief

A few visitors may come into a church, consciously seeking answers to questions of faith. If they have got thus far, they are probably hoping to find pamphlets or introductory books, or possibly a person to talk to.

For most people this is probably not on their agenda. They are simply there as tourists. The church's task is surely, to put it on their agenda with some gentle 'marketing'

Book and card stalls

Found in most medium to large churches.

Concentrate on cards, posters and small gifts.

A small number have Tim Tiley's 'Spelling it out' booklet which outlines Christian belief simply and intelligently.

Other books in the Tim Tiley range on 'Death', 'Loneliness' offer a Christian perspective

There may be a few other books for sale, but these tend to be eclectic and for the committed.

Buckfast Abbey had an excellent selection of CTS booklets, ethical, devotional and doctrinal

Bookshops

In some large churches. A concentration on cards and CD's and gifts means the book section is often quite small. A few have a really good selection, but they may be difficult to access if you know little. 2 or 3 churches had a section 'for beginners' (or words to that effect)

Person to talk to

Only a minority of churches had the phone / address of members of clergy or lay staff displayed in any way in the church. Far more had at least one of these on the outside noticeboard. 10 or more gave no indication of how to make contact.

Pamphlets, booklets, posters, information boards, in the church itself

Out of 100 churches, I only found 13 which said anything explicit about what Christians believe :

- 2 churches in the same diocese had similar 'Welcome cards' which contained times of Services, a prayer, and a simple outline of Trinitarian belief
- 1 church had an A5 'Welcome leaflet' which explained at greater length, but simply and attractively, about Jesus and why his church exists
- 1 church had a folded A4 guide to the building which included prayers and the well-known quotation about Jesus " ... he had no army, no political power executed at 33 And yet today 2 billion people worship him"
- 1 church had two A5 folded cards 'What is a Church?' and 'Why go to Church?' which explained about Jesus and his followers – illustrated with cartoons, a light touch
- 1 Church had a Welcome folder, which contained prayers and the story of Jesus, ending with a challenge to change one's life. Evangelical, well thought out, and simple wording
- 2 churches had identical pamphlets 'What do Christians believe?' with simple explanations of the Trinity, the bible and the Church. Simple, attractive language.
- 1 church, in a very warm welcoming leaflet, explained the news of Jesus and invited you to find out more. It explained that this church was, Christian, evangelical and Anglican
- 1 church gave out a glossy leaflet 'Who am I' which rather confusingly asked all the major questions of life and answered them in a couple of lines.
- 1 church explained its new tryptic which portrays images of the Trinity. Creative and beautiful, but the painting says it, the words are not simple.
- 2 churches had piles of Nicky Gumbel's 'Why we need Jesus' inside the door

Explaining the liturgical use of the building

First rule – don't use the word 'liturgical' – completely incomprehensible even to many church people.

The vast majority of churches, in both official and brief Church Guides, use technical terms with no explanation at all. This is understandable because they are generally concerned with history and architecture. If someone is interested in the architecture of castles they are willing to learn the meaning of 'curtain walls' and 'postern gates' etc.. Those interested in church architecture will be willing to master clerestories and chancel arches etc.

A very small number of guides try to give brief explanations of altars and naves etc. This is thoughtful, and shows awareness of the readers needs, but bluntly there isn't enough space to be effective.

Potentially more effectively, about a quarter of the churches I visited have erected notices beside key artefacts to explain more fully the use of fonts, altars ... and the meaning of Baptism, Communion Some of these are done beautifully, perhaps with illustrations of biblical parallels and photos of contemporary practice.

It feels hyper-critical to say this, but I wonder how many of the designers have asked themselves 'Who is this notice for?' And then tried to put themselves into the position of that imagined reader.

A few notices are just labels – FONT – ALTAR – PULPIT – SANCTUARY

These tell the initiated what they know very well, but don't take the ignorant any further forward in understanding. Basically they just add to clutter.

The majority of notices give a brief explanation – the FONT where Baptism takes place – the ALTAR where we receive the body and blood of Jesus – the PULPIT where the Word of God is spoken (all actual examples)

Again the initiated understand, but for the uninitiated the response may not be as intended

So, what is Baptism then? (*Christening is the commonly used word*)

Ugh, cannibalism!

Sounds like magic descending from on high – surely you don't believe that?

A few are very good indeed and great care has gone into choosing appropriate words, but so few seem to have asked themselves that question 'who is this for and what can they be expected to know?'

Trying to see through the eyes of a casual, secular visitor

If a person goes into a specialist bookshop and ask for a beginners guide to digital photography or Spanish or gardening they know they will find a choice. The assistant will be able to recommend one. Churches don't seem to be able to produce beginners Guides about the faith.

Rational, sceptical modern people need to have their honest doubts and questions taken seriously. In some churches there feels an element of 'sign on the bottom line, then we'll introduce you to the mysteries'

It is puzzling going into a church and seeing signs of much communal activity and notices about worship, all of which is totally outside one's own experience – it would be interesting to know what motivates it all. Why don't they tell us, very straightforwardly what it's all about?

Descriptions of artefacts in churches often use technical 'church' words and assume knowledge about the context. The genuinely interested visitor doesn't want anyone to dumb down on their behalf, but would be grateful if thought was put into different ways of expression.

SECTION 4

Is there evidence that this church is at the heart of an active Christian Community?

It is perfectly possible to have spiritual experiences when alone on a mountain top or seashore or when contemplating a work of art. Churches have no monopoly on sacred spaces.

It is perfectly possible to enter a church, and for it to tick every box as regards well-produced welcomes and guides, and being thought out about aids to prayer – but this could all be the brainchild of one enthusiastic person, possibly the Vicar, but certainly not necessarily.

A substantial minority of Welcome sheets and Guides declare the 'this church is not a museum' – 'we are a living community' – 'we are the present day living stones in this place'.

In this section I attempted to see whether there was evidence within the building for these claims, because being a Christian entails belonging to a Body, it is not a private experience. I wondered how this would come over to a casual visitor.

It's very hard to get this right. In each church I was a stranger myself, so couldn't judge whether only a tiny minority were active, or whether loads of posters indicated real involvement in projects and events. I am very aware that a casual visitor isn't going to scrutinise every notice and leaflet and magazine as I did. This is all about impressions.

Most churches gave very strong evidence of an active congregational life.

I shall just list the things which give this impression, in no order of priority.

- A well cared for church, evidently loved and valued
- Photos of events in the parish
- Photos of clergy and PCC members – in one case with descriptions of each of their particular jobs
- Obviously used children's corners with books, paper, crayons, toys and work displayed (a few specifically invited visiting children to make themselves at home there).
- Notices and fliers re upcoming events
- Good quality materials for visitors – shows thinking is going on
- Well presented, up to date notice boards. A few have different boards for – church – parish - beyond
- Displays of Youth Work
- Good up to date MU displays (a large number of these)
- Congregation offers to pray for Visitors
- Variety of Social events – walks, scrabble evenings, picnics, (not for fundraising)
- Variety of advertised Services catering for different sections of community – Pram Services, Taize ½ hour Family Services, BCP Choral ...

One church had a spectrum from Choral Evensong – Quiet reflection – CW Eucharist – Rock service

- Evidence of real association with the local schools
 - Lots of volunteers in shops, Coffee Rooms, as stewards
 - Relevance to current events eg a few World cup services, material re da Vinci Code
 - Opportunities for the congregation to learn more about their faith
 - Creative thinking re use / refurbishment of the building
 - Recently introduced works of art – paintings, sculpture, lots of Millenium windows
 - Between 10 and 20 churches had Mission or Vision Statements displayed
 - Reports of PCC's, Annual Meetings
 - Welcome slips for new worshippers
 - Well-kept churchyards – a few 'wild garden' projects
 - Imaginative fundraising eg cards of wild flowers in churchyard, beautifully done
 - Parish Office on site, gives a 'lived-in' sense
 - Well presented loose leaf folders describing variously – Life of the parish with lots of photos – charitable projects supported with details – Photos and details of church monuments – Educational opportunities in parish, deanery and diocese
- These appeared in perhaps 10 churches in some way, implying a lot of work on someone's part

- Fresh flowers – don't have to be 'arranged' – just bunches in rural churches look very good
- Concerts(some Free), Art and Sculpture exhibition

Conversely, the following imply an apathetic or dying church

- A dirty church – in one town centre church the altar was covered with dust and droppings
- Out of date photos – in one church the latest curled up photos were 1999/2000, begging the question 'Has nothing happened since then in the parish?'
- Notice boards covered with a mix of future and out of date events – rusty drawing pins
- Curled up, faded, badly photocopied notices. Not difficult these days to DTP well
- Children's Corners with 1970's books, tatty toys, and unsharpened pencils
(A few of these – are they actually used? – if so what does it say about valuing children?)
- Tables covered with every mission magazine and diocesan publication for last 5 years, mixed up with rotas, parish mags, welcome leaflets (Quite a lot of these in varying degrees)
- No evidence at all of anything taking place except Sunday Services, or of any outside interests
- Out of date Fees Tables (Quite a few 2004/5's around)

Of course churches with small congregations can't do as much as those with large ones, but both very large and very small churches appear in each of the above categories

SECTION 4a

Is the church involved in the life of its surrounding community? Is their evidence of outreach to and care for the wider world?

I considered these questions as different ways of reflecting whether the church was evidently *alive*. They also raise the issue of whether the church presents as being 'incarnational'? Does the building demonstrate that the task of Christ's church is not just to worship, and care for precious buildings, but to reflect God's love for all his world?

As far as being *rooted in the local community*, from outside one can only judge by what is visible, and this may be very misleading. I met the Vicar of one town church which had no evident indication of community involvement, but he told me that many members of the quite small congregation were professionals working within the ordinary life of the town. Their Christian commitment was lived out without any 'church' labels being imposed.

So for what it's worth, here are a few findings :

- Lots of churches displayed information about forthcoming local events
- Lots of churches displayed information about local charities
- There were appeals for volunteers in charity shops
- Appeals for offers of accommodation for twinned towns or twinned Schools
- Large town churches almost all displayed information about local 'help' agencies
- Services were being held in Village Squares, Pubs, at War Memorials
- Churches take part in Fairs, Local History pageants, Festivals
- Collections of food and goods for local homeless centre
- " " " " refugee centre
- Local Town Council Minutes displayed
- Civic Events in churches
- Magazines full of village activities, some published by the church for the village, some published by the village with church pages
- Display board with pockets full of local leaflets
- Guides for local walks
- Carrying on local traditions – Pace Egg Play, Lambing Services, Plough Sunday
- Partnerships with local schools, not always C.of E.
- WI Banners
- Millenium banner, embroidered by other churches and village organisations
- Weekly Craft and Gift Fair on edge of market
- Working with a local business to commission a painting
- A few villages, with no other central point of information used the church notice boards for all publicity
- Signs of working with other local churches
- Ring binders portraying recent Flower festival

Some of these I wouldn't have know about if notices hadn't been left up for a very long time!

A few churches were so anonymous that, once inside you could have been anywhere, no mention of surrounding parish

Putting up a notice does not imply active involvement – overfull and messy boards imply 'we'll put this up and get it off our hands!'

On the other hand a number of churches see offering their noticeboards as a real service they can offer their community

Outreach to the wider world

From my notes, about 1/3 of churches showed little sign that they were involved with any kind of mission or charitable work. I would guess this is an overestimate – there's good biblical precedent for not proclaiming your goodness from the housetops.

However I was grateful to those who did so advertise, because it presented such a positive picture

Almost all these remaining 2/3 churches in some way had Mission Links and gave to national and international Charities

Some examples :

- Loose leaf folder with details of annual donations – Barnabas Fund, Children's Society, Church Army, Crisis, CMS, USPG, Save the Children, Local Poverty Action Group, SSF (Mainly £50-£100)
- On 3rd Sundays the Collection goes to a nominated charity
- Excellent information boards re local social needs – Rough Sleepers centre, Poverty Action Group, Ex-prisoners association, Baby Loss support, Credit union – plus various Church Missions
- At least 25 churches had excellent displays on their Mission Links – mainly Africa, also India, Peru and and Latvia.
- Almost all had up to date information and recent letters
- A number of good Fair Trade displays, and Fair Trade Parish certificates
- Christian Aid and Make Poverty History displays
- Ecumenical boards – signs of working locally and internationally
- 3 charities supported each year, decided by PCC - Local (Homeless) – National (National Children's Society) – International (Christian Aid)
- Prayers for HIV / AIDS sufferers
- Overseas board – with good descriptions of the various projects supported
- Carved statues from Link African Parish used in Prayer Chapel
- Various in different parishes - World Aids Day – SureStart – Water Aid – Chernobyl Children – Fete in aid of St. George's, Iraq – Village Clinics in India – Mildmay Trust (HIV) – Society of Martha and Mary – Teddies for Tragedies – Playschemes – Young People's Counselling
- Notice in porch "we give away 10% of our proceeds to a different Charity each week" This week CA
- Charity of the Month – Mission to Seafarers – a large display with information and envelopes to take.

With some of the above it was difficult to tell whether there was active involvement by the congregation, but in most real enthusiasm was evident

Trying to see through the eyes of a casual, secular visitor

It is very unlikely that any holidaymaker will study all the notices on a church noticeboard and judge the individual content – for which we may be grateful when it comes to PCC minutes!

They may get a general impression of untidiness, aged papers on boards, bleakness, tiredness – and assume that this church building is typical and that the church in general is dying on its feet

Or they may be struck by a general sense that this is a cherished building, where things happen. This may be created by well-labelled and well-ordered notice boards, by well-laid out displays, by the varied content of a flicked through magazine, by a sense that this is not just a holy huddle but ordinary people who get involved with events in their community. They may be struck by the fact that the people who worship here clearly believe that a consequence of their faith is that they should help people in any kind of need. They may leave the church with a sense that something good is happening there and it could be nice to be part of it.

SECTION 5

Material about the church's history and the architecture of the building

Visitors come into churches for many reasons, but probably the most common reason is to explore a building which looks old and interesting. They may have expectations that material will be available to interpret what they see, either in leaflet form or in displays. Many would certainly find it helpful.

I looked at the material offered in each church.

15 churches provided 'Brief Guides' - free photocopied folded A4 sheets

6 churches provided similar 'Brief Guides' at a cost of 10 to 30 pence

24 churches provided an official Guide Book (between £1 and £3.50) – mainly coloured

26 churches provided an A4 sheet (free or minimal cost) AND an official Guide Book to purchase

i.e. 71 churches had some kind of literature available, some free, some to be purchased.

Also (some in addition to the above, some instead of above) :

15 churches provided boards to carry round, some of them 'bats', some laminated A4

13 churches had history display boards

21 churches had explanatory notices around the building, explaining particular monuments etc.

12+ churches also had pamphlets / books about particular aspects (bells, clocks, windows monuments) or particular people associated with the church, saints or local characters.

4 (?) churches had videos for sale

I estimate that only 7 churches out of 100 had no literature at all for visitors.

It is very difficult to analyse such a variety of material.

Some thoughts :

- Great variation in home produced material, some well designed and well reproduced, quite a number not. DTP skills are available in most parishes (not necessarily from churchgoers)
- photocopying doesn't have to be sloppy – professional looking material is within the capabilities of most churches now – so why not?
- Variation in content. Most often a plan of the church plus commentary. In some the plan is so smudged it's difficult to see and the text is small, with no white spaces and very dull. Others with the same basic format, produce something which is crisp, easy to read and interesting.
- Boards of the 'bat' variety, almost without exception were yellowing, old, difficult to read, and at least one, because of re-ordering 20 years ago, inaccurate.
- Leaflets and 'bats' are no use if they can't be seen – amazing how many weren't immediately near the door.
- 'Full Guides' varied from black and white, small font, dry as dust – to beautifully illustrated glossy coloured volumes, with information interestingly presented. There was no connection between the price and quality of these publications!
- With a very few exceptions full Guides were entirely concerned with history and architecture; no mention of faith or that the church is about the history of a people as much as about a building.
- Displays portraying the church's history had mainly been given a lot of thought and were well presented and helpful. Some took the opportunity to describe the life of the church today

- Paradoxically two of the least satisfactory displays were professionally done by Heritage / Council initiatives. A slight sense of being in a Tourist information centre – no faith aspect.
- Informative notices placed beside particular monuments or artefacts tend to fall into 2 categories, ones which have been in situ for decades and very recent ones, The former are often indecipherable and give an impression of a dusty museum. The latter are very well produced, some very imaginatively so, but sometimes the language used is very ‘in-house’.
- Very Evangelical and very Catholic churches tend to use their own particular language which may not always be understood by others. On the other hand, they often need to use words least because most catholic churches have a natural holiness, and most evangelical churches have a real sense of a living community.

Children's Guides to the Church

To my surprise only 12 churches provide guides / trails for children
2 of these were not labelled as such and I picked them up thinking they were the standard guide.

On the whole, considering how much good children's work was on display in the churches, I found these guides disappointing.

9 were based on ‘Can you find?’ – ‘can you count?’ – ‘colour this’ principles, with very little creative thinking about making this brief encounter with Christianity attractive and different.

7 were badly photocopied, sometimes it was difficult to make out the pictures.

One was produced in 1971 – and made no concessions to the difference in education methods in the last 35 years.

Children today are used to extremely high quality visual material, and dense black and white, simplistic text will not grab their attention.

3 were more imaginative in approach, explored the ‘special’ feel of a church, included bits of symbolism and stories about people.

One was designed by local school children and had some delightfully gruesome bits!

Trying to see through the eyes of a casual, secular visitor

Usually when visiting Heritage buildings of any description, Guidebooks are available of good quality. If a church offers interpretative material, it does not need to be glossy, but it does need to be well done and to fit its purpose, or it will be seen as fuddy-duddy and out of touch with the way things are done now.

If material is provided which is clearly thought out with needs of visitors in mind, helpful and well-presented, this gives an image of a church in tune with the best of the secular world and respectful of those who enter its door.

Not many young people visit churches as tourists (possibly with their schools) but some do come with parents. While parents look round, children are likely to be impressed if they receive a welcome of their own and are offered something interesting, fun and a bit ‘different’ which they can get on with by themselves. They will be particularly impressed if they end up knowing more than their parents about some aspects of the church.

SECTION 6

What is there to take away – free or on sale

Free literature included

Church Guide leaflets

Prayer sheet(s)

Information re forthcoming events

Information re Charities and Aid Agencies

Church Trail leaflets indicating other churches in the area which might be visited

- these tend to be glossy if funded, photocopied if entirely a ‘local’ production

Just one comment re Church Trails which seem to be increasing. Sometimes it seems there has been little cooperation with the churches involved – it is essential that the churches on the trails are a) open and b) are genuinely welcoming of visitors.

For sale

Church Guide books and Post cards (both very common)

(It's important to store these well and not to put out too many at a time – they don't look attractive when damp and curled)

Prayer cards and posters from 2 or 3 suppliers.

(Smaller or bigger displays depending on church size)

A few small churches also sell a few books (new or secondhand)

Most very large churches have a shop, which sells all of the above, as well as more books, icons, CD's, greeting cards, pens, bookmarks and so on

I can't work out why some of the larger shops also feel the need to sell teddy bears, items covered with Union Jacks and general tourist tat – this feels very inappropriate and reinforces thoughts that the church only wants tourists for their money.

SUMMATION

I am aware that this survey is subjective. Without a major statistical survey it is very difficult to judge the real nature of visitors' impressions. Inevitably it is also coloured by my own experience and attitudes.

Also it is a 'snapshot' of churches visited on one particular day. A visit on a different day might give a different impression (when they are not preparing for a concert or flower festival, when re-ordering is completed or when a new incumbent has been appointed after a lengthy interregnum)

However, this process has confirmed my initial instinctive feelings, that while churches are becoming more visitor-friendly – with improved quality of information and displays – there is scope for developing a greater sense of 'holy space' in our churches and for more emphasis on reflecting what Christianity means, in comprehensible terms, to a largely secular world.

The 100 churches visited seems a sufficiently wide sample to make some general observations.

There is much that reflects clearer thinking by churches about their policy towards visitors, and much to encourage those of us engaged with issues of visitors to churches

- Improvements in the quality of printed material over recent years
- Increased emphasis on welcoming and interpretative material
- Higher quality printed Guides
- Selective lighting
- The growth of Church Trails encouraging tourists to move from one church to another.
- Places for quiet prayer and reflection, with aids to prayer and places to light a candle

However, there often seems an undue emphasis on seeing visitors simply as sources of money, and rarely do churches seem to consider their buildings as tools of mission. Too few seek to present faith in comprehensible language. In a secular age it is a real challenge to present deep and complex matters in simple language and imagery – and a great test of our own understanding. For congregations to engage in this enterprise, could lead to a deepening of *their* faith.

Even where there is well-designed material and good quality displays, much of the impact can be diluted by a clutter of unused church furniture and too many notices, leaflets, fliers and posters in undisciplined or confusing display, unclear whether intended for regular congregation or visitors. Well produced material (even professionally with grant aid) can be so lacking in spiritual resonance as to present the church like a secular museum. Both of these can detract from the church as being seen as somewhere special and make 'holy space' hard to experience or recognise.

Many good things are being done and it is important to acknowledge this. My point is that everything displayed should be done as well as possible and the impact the church seeks to make on visitors should be considered as a whole.

Think of impressions on entering a church for the first time – am I welcome and wanted here, or do they just want my money? Is it a 'special place' which engages me in a spiritual way, if only fleetingly? Does it say something comprehensible about faith to someone largely ignorant of Christianity? Is it a place in which I could pause to reflect (or pray), and to which I would happily return? Is it just a holy museum reflecting a dead past, or does it speak of a living church community relevantly engaged with the local community and the wider world?

Through the eyes of others we can learn much about who we really are.

It is right that we should seek to impress visitors with our churches, but is also important that we should seek to engage them in the faith for which those churches were built.

APPENDIX 1

Churches Visited (with entries in Visitors book during past month)

Yorkshire

St. Margaret's, Hawes	60
St. Andrew's, Dent	
St. Oswald, Horton-in-Ribblesdale	6
The Ascension, Settle	30
Holy Trinity, Skipton	400
St. Michael and All Angels, Linton	202
St. Oswald, Arncliffe	60
St. Michael and All Angels, Hubberholme	
Bolton Priory	
St. Thomas, Heptonstall	14
St. Michael, Haworth (<i>Brontes</i>)	
St. Mary's, Goathland (<i>Heartbeat country</i>)	130
St. Oswald's, Oswaldkirk	
St. Cedd's, Lastingham	
All Saints, Helmsley	
St. Mary's, Thirsk (<i>Heriot country</i>)	400
St. Peter's, Osmotherley	28
St. Mary and St. Alkelda, Middleham	27
St. Gregory, Bedale	66
St. Mary's, Masham	106
St. Peter's, Harrogate	
Ripley	
Esholt (<i>Emmerdale village</i>)	600
Bewerley Chapel, Pateley Bridge	8

Lake District

Cartmel Priory	200
St. Oswald's, Grasmere (<i>Wordsworth church</i>)	800
St. Bega's, Bassenthwaite	150
St. Michael and All Angels, Hawkshead	233
Grasmere Methodist	
Hawkshead Methodist	

Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

St. Michael with St. Mary, Melbourne	65
Our Lady and all Saints, Chesterfield	280
St. Mary's, Nottingham	18
St. Peter's, Nottingham	82

Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire

St. John the Baptist, Stokesay (<i>in grounds of Castle</i>)	226
St. Oswald's, Oswestry	37
Shrewsbury Abbey	240
St. Michael and All Angels, Ledbury	273
St. Peter and St. Paul, Leominster	205

St.Laurence, Ludlow	240
Priory Church of Mary and Michael, Great Malvern	136
<u>Coxwolds</u>	
Tewkesbury Abbey	800
St.Mary's, Painswick	180
St.John the Baptist, Cirencester	378
St.Mary's, Painswick	180
St.Peter's, Winchcombe	
St.Michael's, Broadway (19th century in village)	21
St.Eadburgha's, Broadway (Norman outside village)	85
St.John the Baptist, Burford	370
St.Mary the Virgin, Bibury	130
St.Mary's, Fairford	224
Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon	700
<u>Cornwall</u>	
St.Finbarrus, Fowey	300
St.John the Baptist, Bodinnick	
St. Sampson, Golant	32
St.Mawes	77
St.Just-in-Roseland	650
King Charles the Martyr, Falmouth	
St.Petroc's, Bodmin	150
St.Hydroc, Lanhydrock (<i>NT grounds of Manor House</i>)	490
St.Merthiana, Minster Church, Boscastle (<i>TVseries and floods</i>)	120
St Winwaloe, Gunwalloe	
St.Keverne's, St.Keverne's	
St,German's	40
<u>Dorset and Devon</u>	
Buckfast Abbey	700+
St.Michael,the Archangel, Lyme Regis	46
St.Peter's, Dorchester	98
St.Michael, Stinsford (<i>Thomas Hardy</i>)	42
St. Mary's, Cerne Abbas	120
St.John the Evangelist, Tolpuddle (<i>Tolpuddle Martyrs</i>)	22
Abbey Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Sherborne	
St.Cuthberga's Minster Church, Wimborne	330
Fleet (<i>Moonfleet novel</i>)	
<u>South and South-East</u>	
SS. Thomas, Newport Isle of Wight	
St.Michael the Archangel, Shalfleet, IOW	24
St.James the Apostle, Yarmouth IOW	61
St.Mildred's, Whippingham, IOW (<i>Queen Victoria's church</i>)	Up to 10 coaches a day
St.Nicholas, Chawton, Hants (<i>Jane Austen</i>)	60
St.John the Baptist, Windsor	410
St.Giles, Stoke Poges (<i>Grey's Elegy</i>)	48
St.Mary's, Goudhurst, Kent	46
St.Dunstan's, Cranbrook, Kent	30
St.Mildred's, Tenterden, Kent	140

<u>East Anglia</u>	
Greensted, Essex (<i>World's oldest wooden church</i>)	180
Holy Cross and St.Lawrence, Waltham Abbey, Essex	160
St.Martin of Tours, Chipping Ongar, Essex	25
St.John the Baptist, Finchingfield, Essex	78
St.Peter's, Bradwell on Sea, Essex	400+
SS. Peter and Paul, Lavenham, Suffolk	200
St.Nicholas, Blakeney, Norfolk	110
St.Margaret's, Cley, Norfolk	120
SS.Peter and Paul, Cromer, Norfolk	540
Wymondham Abbey, Norfolk	
St.George's, Tombland, Norwich	
St.Peter Mancroft, Norwich	158
St.John's, Timberhill, Norwich	30
St.Margaret's, Kings Lynn	150
St.Julian's Shrine, Norwich	
St.Peter Walpole, Norfolk	
St.Botolph, Boston Stump, Lincs	

100 churches in all

Appendix 2 Church Check List

	NAME LOCATION	Age	No of Visitors
A M B I A N C E	Prayerful		
	Welcoming		
	Alive		
P R I N T E D M A T E R I A L	History Building		
	Purpose		
	Community connections		
	Outreach		
	To take away		
	On sale		