

The Power of Invitation

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When I was young I used to imagine that people who didn't attend church sat at home seething with hatred for God. The years have passed and I now realize that very few people are hostile to God or even to the church. Most people are simply getting on with their lives oblivious to the fact that God exists and completely unaware that there is a church round the corner that would love to welcome them.

A few months ago I came across TEAR FUND's excellent recent publication entitled CHURCHGOING IN THE UK. It's brilliant! Amidst a heap of statistics it draws attention to those non churchgoers who would attend church if someone personally invited them. If you put together all infrequent and non-churchgoers they come to 37.2 million people. In this group they discovered that 8% indicated that they would attend church if someone were to give them a personal invitation. In this group alone there are, on that basis, nearly three million people who are just waiting for the invitation.

I suggest that we need to stop looking at our society and bemoaning the fact that such a small proportion of the population attends church ... and start inviting people. No, following Christ is not simply about attending church. Of course it isn't. But it is a wonderful way of learning about God and meeting people who are seeking to live their lives for him.

Looking at our churches in this way could radically change the way in which we do things. Our services need to be checked and double-checked to ensure that they are accessible to people of all kinds. In-language must be banned and clear explanations need to be offered for all that happens. The link between what happens in church and on a Monday morning needs to be clearly expressed. Church publicity needs to be attractive and welcoming, and people need to be encouraged to offer warm and frequent invitations to their friends and neighbours.

Churches are often accused of being cosy clubs ... and often the accusation is absolutely correct. Our loving, welcoming Heavenly Father expects something completely different from us. He expects our churches to be outward facing and welcoming to every kind of person. If we were to think and to act in that way I suggest that many of our churches would be profoundly different places.