

Part of the Story: being there for life events



Last year I took my first family wedding when my ‘niece-by-marriage’ married in St. Bartholomew’s church, Nympsfield. Amy and Andy specially chose this Cotswold church, travelling from London each month to establish a connection. This little village became part of their story on that day, and everyone present went away having touched something of God’s love in that place. On a different day, in a different village, I led a funeral for a man who had lived

there for 86 years. There was no more appropriate place for his funeral than the church which had held the family story for generations.

Every week, the Church of England holds an average of 5500 services to mark life events - meeting people at times of big emotions, big thoughts and big questions, whether that is the start of lifetime commitment, the baptism of a child or the loss of someone we have known and loved. The local church has been alongside people at these times for generations and each event brings us into direct contact with people who have asked us for help. Each wedding gives us a chance to talk to a couple, each funeral perhaps three or four people we meet at a visit, and each baptism will involve meeting around six people. Beyond those people, there are hundreds attending these special services. As families become more geographically distant, and friendships are forged across the miles, so coming together to mark life’s key moments becomes even more important. In one village church I was visiting, I added up the numbers in the register for the previous month: average Sunday attendance 18; three weddings, and two baptisms in the past month equalled nearly 400 people – and that didn’t even count the funerals the vicar and reader had taken at the crematorium! Life events matter.



The Archbishops’ Council of the Church of England decided to undertake research into weddings, baptisms and funerals, and discovered that ministry at these times is valued and appreciated. Relationship are built through welcome, smiles and prayer makes a real difference, and that those who had contact with the church welcomed further contact – and keeping in touch for the long-term can be the bridge that leads to a life-time of discovering all that the good news of Jesus can mean. Even when couples and families live far way, even when you never see them again, the contact we make increases the chances of contact somewhere else.



Churches hold stories – stories of individuals and stories of communities, and above all the story of God’s faithful love. Sometimes people come across our churches by chance, step inside, find space to reflect on their memories, leave a prayer, and are given just a glimpse of God’s presence. Sometimes they ask us to help them celebrate or to walk with them in grief, because the church is the heart of the community. But whatever reason, there is no doubt that meeting people at life’s key moments gives us an amazing moment to share their lives, become part of the story and sow the seeds of love that lead to the Kingdom of God.

You can read more about the research and resources at www.churchsupporthub.org or explore www.churchofenglandfunerals.org, www.churchofenglandchristenings.org and www.yourchurchwedding.org for more information.

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