

Getting stuck in



'Welcome on board!'

The churchwarden was running a little bit late setting up for the service. Busy in the vestry sorting out hymn boards, checking on readings and who was on the rota to read, getting out bread and wine and all that goes with the smooth running of a service, her daughter, home for the weekend, asked 'Is there anything I can do to help?' 'Yes,' came the reply, 'Can you give out books to people as they arrive?'

So that is what the daughter did. In her work she was employed as cabin crew for an airline and she went in to work mode:

'Good morning, nice to see you. Here are the books you need. Please take a seat...'

She didn't get quite as far as asking people to stow luggage in the overhead locker or under the seat in front. There wasn't a safety demonstration with details of how to put on a life jacket. But over coffee after the service there was conversation about what a lovely warm welcome people had enjoyed that morning.

Those things which are second nature to cabin crew – eye contact and a smile – do actually make a difference to people. What might we as church learn from people whose professional job is to welcome?

'Yippee, I like going to church!'

Those words were from a six year old from the village of Eastham. She went on to explain the reason why she likes church: 'I get given jobs to do.'

With a village population of just over 200 (and the usual rural issues of affordable housing) there aren't many families with young children in Eastham. There are a few. Of those few a minority choose to worship frequently at the monthly All Age service. There is one family who is almost always there with children of six, four and two. Occasionally visiting grandchildren come. Christmas, of course, is different all together!

The consequence of low number of children is that 'all age' worship has to be genuinely all age. With an age range from two to ninety two, there needs to be something that everyone can relate to. Having 'jobs to do' means that the children learn that they have a role in the church. Being applauded means that they learn about being valued for what they do. They are not talked down to or treated as part of the future church. They are appreciated as part of the church of today.

But the service has to have something for older people too. As children learn about being valued, adults explore more complex issues. While children enjoy doing a blindfold obstacle course, adults reflect on trust and trusting God.

Getting the combination right isn't always easy but when children say 'Yippee!' there's something good going on.

Revd Robert Barlow
Priest in Charge Teme Valley South, Diocese of Worcester
temevalleyvicar@gmail.com
@RobertMBarlow

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