

*Life and faith in rural Britain...*

# COUNTRYWAY



## Christmas in the pub

My wife, Pam, and I have been in North Yorkshire for around two years. It's a challenge being priest-in-charge of nine churches; the joy has been the depth of welcome we have received not just from the churches but the community, and particularly the pubs!

Two in particular have been outstanding in their welcome, grace and generosity towards us; I won't name them, as there is a little bit of rivalry between them, and customers are loyal to the particular pub in their village!

The nearest pub is directly opposite the church building. The first time I visited, the landlord hushed all the customers, introduced me to them all, and described them as my congregation. Since then we have held several services in the pub, including two carol services and a Harvest festival. All were wonderfully received, and the Harvest festival was outstanding, with not an empty chair available. Folk brought gifts that went to the local food bank, and a brilliant meal and service was shared by all.

The second pub is a mile down the road in another village. A group from various churches gather here fortnightly to play whist and have a meal together. Longer term our intention is to get to know the clientele and share ourselves and our faith with them.

Last Christmas, the landlord asked me to invite up to thirty people from the wider community to the pub for a free three-course meal on Christmas Day. He particularly wanted to include those struggling with loneliness or financial issues. I managed to get 25 folk to attend, including a small number from the church who came along to help serve. It's not easy for the lonely to admit their loneliness, so this had to be done with sensitivity.

On arrival everyone was made beautifully welcome and offered a drink, any drink at all. The drinks continued all afternoon and a beautiful three course meal was served to all.

To my surprise, at the end of the meal the landlord and his lovely wife appeared with a huge stack of wrapped gifts. The village folk had very quietly done a Secret Santa and forty lovely presents were shared out between all that attended.

Grace, generosity and love were poured out in abundance, by a couple who don't attend church, but who are now asking for prayer and asking questions. All love comes from God, and there's a lot of it about; we need to recognise it and embrace it where we find it.

Revd Rob Barker