

3 Small Steps - Hide & Seek: A Generous Welcome

I remember hosting a church youth worker for a week, who enjoyed entertaining my young boys in her free time, by playing games – especially hide-and-seek, which they loved. One day, she hid in our bath behind the washing strung over it. It was a brilliant spot. The seeking began so well, with shrieks of excitement on several occasions as they thought they were about to discover her. But, after thirty minutes of turning our tiny flat upside down, the boys became quite dispirited and what started out with great enthusiasm and laughter, ended up in despair, frustration and tears as they were convinced she had actually disappeared!

The scripture says, “Seek the Lord while He may be found,” which can be easier than locating some of our Cornish churches! We have some marvellously situated buildings in idyllic spots but, how to find them? A generous welcome can't take place if visitors never reach you and, even with the best will in the world, they too may end up dispirited and frustrated. Here are **3 small steps** to putting your church on the map.

Step 1. A Church Near You (ACNY). This has to be the most underused Church of England resource. Think of how much time, money, expertise and effort it would take to create your own webpages and yet, here they are – totally FREE! Every CofE church, large or small, is listed with address and postcode, clergy contact details and often a picture. If someone searches online for your church, this is usually what appears first and for some, it is their only web presence. Please, please keep it updated. You don't have to include everything you do but here are some basics. 1. Ensure the postcode leads directly to the church building and if it doesn't, give extra instructions. 2. Be clear about the nearest parking, toilet facilities and access 3. Include information about activities, special events and dates and times of current services. “Next Sunday...” is not helpful without the date. (We actually turned up to a village garden event, one year too late as 24th June was advertised with no day or year!)

Step 2. Signage. We've followed the directions and seem to be here but where exactly do we go now? I have knocked on many a nearby house to enquire before attempting un-signposted tracks. If the council won't make you a permanent sign, put your own out on a Sunday morning. One church I know, with a very long drive down to it has several signs on the way: 'KEEP GOING'; 'NEARLY THERE'; 'ROUND THE CORNER'. This is more than just a bit of fun as it sets the tone for the arrival and first impressions.

Step 3. Greeting. Many of our rural churches are not just hard to find but dark and cold even in high summer. The warmth of a friendly greeting can quickly thaw that chill. We are often so desperate for new people to be a part of us that our first thoughts can be, “What are they going to give us?” or “Will they join the PCC?” Be genuine with no Lady Macbeth style hidden agenda in your welcome! Simply – GIVE. A smile; love; service information; an offer of prayer; a sense of family and acceptance. Leave their response in God's hands. If all they do is to speak well of you, that is already a huge gain.

Have a wonderful summer as generous hosts to Cornwall's visitor population and with a little preparation, you will be rewarded with joy and encouragement.