

### **310 Is your church all right?**

When Sue was in a group that created biblical-themed quilts, we used to exhibit them in churches around the country, but at the Sunday services I wondered if those churches would still exist in 10/20 years. At 60-odd, our presence reduced the average age rather.

So is your church all right, I wonder? Will it continue to exist?

Maybe your church is like the ‘lively’ church we joined when we moved to Norwich in 1980? Our faith was encouraged: surrounded by loads of people singing wholeheartedly, I specifically remember feeling: ‘This has made me realise we’re on the winning side!’

It was a big church that attracted people from miles around, and families especially appreciated that children were catered for. We appreciated the really good teaching – sermons of 20+ mins. We did have quite a high turnover, but we were training people up and sending them out to serve the Lord in different places. (We were there for 37 years.)

Now the Anglican church is parish-based – the official policy is that an Anglican vicar has ‘the cure of souls’ for the parish. However, hardly any of the congregation actually lived in the parish, which caused a tension. The people we could ‘reach’ were friends, family and work colleagues, but they might live even further away from the church. We had very little contact with the people in the parish – it was a group of like-minded people, not a community church.

When we moved house and changed church, we both felt immediately at home in this small medieval church. We said, ‘It’s such a welcoming church’, and talking to others in the congregation, everyone said the same. We all live locally (or some have family who do), so it’s very much a community-based church. And some people in the area who don’t come to (many) services still feel it’s ‘their church’, and help with our community events.

Having lost my faith totally, and tried to rebuild it at our old church, I still had questions – many questions. Talking about God with some in our new church made me realise that there’s a wide range of views, a broad spectrum of churchmanship, and I have found this liberating and faith-enhancing – hence all these articles.

So, is your church ‘*all right*’? What is important to your church leadership (to you as a church leader)? For example, I’ve known independent local churches that have split over whether women should be in leadership – indeed, when my old church needed a new vicar, we said (and I was on the PCC at the time) that we wouldn’t invite women to apply.

Yes, I’m a radical; yes, I challenge people to go back to the Bible and consider whether you should just accept what your church (local or national) teaches. So am I right now? No, I’m pretty sure that I’m wrong in various ways, but I (we) try to prioritise relationships, rather than getting your theology *all ‘right’*.

Paul Bev. 11.2.24