

Who are you going to invite?

Across the diocese parishes and schools are gearing up for over 400 different outreach events this month, as we welcome Archbishop Sentamu and his team for the Crossroads Mission. However all this effort will bear little fruit if the only people who attend are those who already go to church.

Now is the time to think of a friend or neighbour or colleague whom we could invite, and pray for an opportunity to say: 'I'm going, it's going to be good. Will you come with me?'

Inviting people takes effort – like getting fit there is a pain barrier to go through before you reap the benefits. Not everyone we invite will be interested, but some will respond, and the more we invite, the more response we will get. But we must be prepared for some disappointment along the way.

This summer I have been reading a refreshing book by Rico Tice, the author of the excellent enquirers' course 'Christianity Explored'. It's called 'Honest Evangelism'. He highlights recent research * that shows that 67% of those who are not Christians have at least one friend who is a Christian. The research also shows that most non-Christians describe the Christians they know in very positive terms, as friendly, caring, good-humoured and generous; only a tiny minority think of Christians they know personally as narrow-minded or hypocritical.

The survey reveals that when Christians talk to non-Christians about their faith, a fifth of those they speak to want to know more about the Christian faith. This shows that there is a sizeable minority among those who are not Christians who are curious or spiritually searching, and who are grateful when a Christian plucks up the courage to talk about their faith. However the research also indicated that four-fifths of non-Christians were not interested in hearing more about Christ, or indeed were hostile.

This research is a tremendous encouragement to be open about our Christian faith, and to take opportunities that come up to talk about God, because among our friends or work colleagues there is almost certainly someone who is not yet a Christian but is aware of a need and would to know more. However, as Rico Tice commented, we have to be prepared to go through the pain barrier – the experience of rejection or hostility from four of our friends before we find the one who is spiritually searching.

Jesus never said being a witness would be easy – he told his disciples that he was sending them out 'as lambs among wolves', and the Greek word for witness means literally 'martyr'. But when the 72 came back to Jesus they were filled with joy, at having seen lives changed and people healed. And they brought joy to Jesus too. (Luke 10.17, 21).

So, as we get ready for Crossroads Mission, be encouraged! If you are willing to go through the pain barrier, and risk rejection from four friends to find the fifth one who is spiritually hungry, you could be the one who helps a friend make the best decision in the whole of their life. 'I'm going. It's going to be good. Would you like to come?'

* The research referred to can be found at www.talkingjesus.org. Rico Tice has written 'Honest Evangelism' (Good Book Company, 2015)