

Is the Church irrelevant today?

Let us know what **YOU** think!

Occasionally someone makes a provocative statement that really challenges people to think again about something they have previously taken for granted. Peter Riddell, a well known journalist and Christian writer said this:

“The greatest barrier to the Gospel in contemporary Western culture is the Church. The forms of the church, its life and pronouncements: these act to prevent people from hearing the liberating story of Jesus.”

By continuing with what to regular churchgoers is a familiar form of church are we actually keeping people away? Are they put off by the church of their childhood or that frequently presented by the media? Is it true that as the President of the Methodist Conference said *“It is as if we are trying to preserve telephone kiosks in the age of mobile phones.”*

Is the church, as it is, now perceived as being irrelevant by many? I am sure it is! That is not to say that what we have is of no value. Clearly there are many for whom the “status quo” is what they want, and it is that which feeds and sustains them spiritually. The idea that the church is declining everywhere is untrue. It still has a lot of vibrancy. “Traditional church” is still good news.



However, we must recognise that there are many people seeking spiritual things who do not believe they will find it in the Christian church. There are probably now 3 generations (anyone under 60yrs) for whom church has not been part of their upbringing. During that time life has changed dramatically whereas in many cases the church has changed very little. Just spend a moment or two reflecting on what life was like 60 yrs ago, or 50, 40, or even only 10 yrs ago! Then reflect on how much the church has changed in that time. Think about music, liturgy, robes, styles of presentation, facilities, etc. Is the current church something that the new generation will see as likely to meet their needs?

Through contact with people in connection with funerals, baptism and weddings I am aware that for many there is a belief in God, but often little understanding as to how they can best express and develop that belief. Today few people know any hymns, or the Lord's Prayer, or know anything about baptism or confirmation, or the church year. Few attend anything at which they are expected to sing or speak together. As a result traditional forms of church will be quite alien to them. They will struggle to see how they can fit into that culture. What can we do to serve people who are searching in this way? If we are to be a church for the whole community it is a question we must ask and try and answer.

Many churches are looking at ways to communicate the story of Jesus Christ in the 21st century to the new generations. While affirming what we already have, what sort of things might we consider at St Gregory's?

Discuss this with people you know who don't come to church – friends and family – ask what might appeal to them. Make it a topic of conversation. Don't dismiss anything they say! We may need to be very creative and radical!

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