

Bed

[Aim: to look at how tourism and hospitality can help to make a real difference to people's lives]

Story

Morag was a farmer's widow who ran a bed and breakfast facility for visitors coming to explore the countryside. With a house next to a 12th century church in a very rural setting, Morag hoped to offer her visitors a haven of peace, a base for refreshment and for exploring the area. Yet her Christian faith also allowed her to provide important care and witness to those coming so briefly into her home and under her care. For example, on one occasion, Jenny and Derek, a couple from America, were coming to spend a holiday. Before they arrived, Morag received a telephone call at 2am from their daughter to say that Jenny's father had died and asking for them to telephone as soon as they arrived.

Jenny talked briefly of her grief but the family decided that she and Derek should stay for the week that they had planned, so the couple spent their time with Morag in the context of an unlooked for sorrow. Jenny called in several times to the church during her stay and one day came to Morag and said that she had woven a wreath out of the hips she had gathered from the hedgerows and had placed it in the church. She asked Morag if anyone would mind. On the last day of their stay it was Harvest Festival and Morag

agreed with the people decorating the church that the appropriate place for Jenny's wreath was on the cross. Later, having heard Jenny's story and knowing that the hips would dry and last a long time, everyone in the church community decided to leave it in place when the rest of the decorations were taken down.

Jenny and Derek joined the community for the service and were very moved that Jenny's wreath had been placed on the cross. In praising God, there was opportunity to remember and give thanks for all the good things about the countryside and the need to nurture the fruits of the earth. This went alongside the need for everyone to give thanks for the lives of all those we love. The congregation remembered the suffering in the rural community and this related directly to the suffering of anyone who loses something or someone they love. Jenny afterwards affirmed not only how much she had enjoyed the service and had been comforted by it, but how she would love to support a church community like Morag's. In doing so, she affirmed both Morag's own ministry as one who understood her grief, but also the role of the small rural church in being a centre for mission, healing and refreshment. This was true, not only for the local community, but for travellers from all over the world. In making the link between those staying for bed and breakfast and her local church, Morag provided a vital witness and ministry.

Discussion

Walkers, casual visitors and tourists are a significant part of the life of rural Britain and bring much needed resources into remote parts of the country.

Such visitors also frequently visit churches in the countryside. Those Christians engaged in providing food and accommodation have a particular opportunity to offer a witness to their faith, and hospitality may make a great difference to people staying for a brief time. Morag's story shows particularly how she was placed to make a link for Jenny to the local church which provided Jenny with the context for expressing her grief. Yet Morag had to gain Jenny's trust and create a relationship in which the wreath of hips could become a potent symbol of resurrection hope.

Churches too have special opportunities to witness to tourists and visitors, but in remote locations there are often difficult questions about whether it is safe or proper to leave churches open and unattended. Questions of access are sometimes hard to solve. Some villages find it hard to believe that their local church has anything much to offer visitors if the building is not of great historic interest or possessed of a wealth of unusual features. Sometimes the missionary potential of a modest flower festival, or display of children's paintings is overlooked. Holidaymakers may be in a better position than others to engage in reflection. A quiet wander into a church may just provide the beginning of a questioning and taking stock to which a sympathetic Christian presence may make all the difference. In Jenny's case, Morag's help and encouragement was exactly what was needed.

Some suggestions for Bible Study

Genesis 18: 1-14.

Luke 10:38-end

Leviticus 19:33; Hebrews 13:2

Choose one or two questions for discussion

What opportunities for hospitality are there in our own situation? Do we make the best use of these opportunities?

What does our local church offer to visitors? How can our church building be helped to speak of God's love for all?

What events take place which could be acts of witness? How could they be made more effective and attractive?

What use can we, or do we make use of our own homes to offer people hospitality?

Suggestions for drama or role play

Imagine you are Morag welcoming Jenny and Derek into your home. How would you break it to them that they must phone home?

Try making wreaths from natural materials. What does it mean to place your wreath on the cross?

Imagine you are decorating the church for harvest festival. What might you tell a visitor about what you are doing and why?

Reflection

Through our hospitality towards others, God gives us particular opportunities to witness to our faith through both being and doing. How do we extend a ministry of hospitality to *all* those we encounter?

A Hymn and a Prayer

**For example, *We plough the fields and scatter*
*or Come, you thankful people, come***

God,

You are the source of all our harvests.

You are the provider of all good gifts.

May we always show others the gift of your love.

Amen