



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop writes in today's [Sunday Telegraph](#). The article follows in full...

There was no room at the Inn.

This is one of the most well-known bits of the Christmas story, a dramatic highlight of the school nativity play. Mary and Joseph trudge through the streets of Bethlehem. Doors are closed. They cannot find what they need. Eventually provision is secured by a kindly Innkeeper who makes his stable available.

This Christmas many of our fellow citizens face a similar challenge. There is no appointment to see the GP. No available bed in the hospital. No place on the waiting list for at least two years. No childcare available. No savings in the bank. No food on the table. No way the heating bill can be paid. No room at the Inn.

And others, not citizens of the UK, but citizens of the world we share together, fleeing oppression, conflict, extreme poverty, risk everything to secure shelter in this country and are turned away, sent somewhere else. There is no room at the Inn. Well only in Rwanda.

And now, dear reader, you may think this is going to turn into an all too predictable rant from another leftie, this time a bishop, pleading for welfare reform and greater generosity for refugees and asylum seekers, but that is not quite where this article is going.

I do indeed think that how we deal with asylum seekers and refugees, and how we reform and strengthen the health service, and how we provide dignity and basic provision for the poorest in our communities should be taken far more seriously and that as a nation we need to find ways of taking a longer, more compassionate view. The short term politics of election cycles don't help us deal with long term issues. But what I want to celebrate in this article, is where those in need do go.

Or to put it another way, whose door is open?

And alongside other agencies, charities, and faith groups the answer, in just about every community, is the parish church.

Despite falling congregations and less inherited affiliation to the church, a recent survey by Savanta Com Res shows that 46% of the population – nearly half – had contact with their local church. The most common reasons were weddings and funerals, and of course carol services at Christmas. But 30% of those who had contact with the church – that is about 7 million people, a staggering 13.7% of all UK adults – had contact through toddler groups, lunch clubs, and food banks.

This is an incredible service to the nation. It is rooted in and flows from a belief in the God who in Jesus Christ comes among us as one who serves.

You probably wouldn't expect an Archbishop to say otherwise, and while there have been some concerns recently that the parish church is somehow under threat in the Church of England at the moment, let me say this clearly. Yes, putting clergy into parishes costs a lot of money, as does the necessary infrastructure to train, support and house them. Church buildings are also costly. But the Church of England is very committed, not only to support and revitalise the local church, not only do all that we can to sustain clergy numbers, but also plant and establish new worshipping communities, particularly in areas of new housing and in many of the most deprived urban, rural and coastal areas.

This mission imperative to be the church for everyone everywhere is at the heart of what it means to be the Church of England, and therefore of our current vision and strategy.

And why? Because we want everyone to hear the good news of God's love for them in Christ. To hear the song of the angels announcing peace on earth. And to provide the caring and transforming presence of a Christian community in every human community, large and small.

The local church is one of the few places left in our society where you can turn up and someone will be there to assist you and to signpost further help. You won't need to fill in a form. You don't need to make an appointment. We have much to offer. We are a community centred on Jesus and trying to make a difference in the world. Our USP is kindness and mercy. Of course, we sometimes get things wrong. We make mistakes. But we continue to strive to be the hands and heart of Jesus himself. And to steer the world in such a way that no one is left outside in the cold.

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