

## **The importance of creating 'Warm Contacts'**

In recent years, the UK has become a nation of coffee lovers, and collectively we consume a staggering 1.7 billion cups of coffee a year. It's a booming business for the thousands of coffee stores out there, but for all the independent coffee shops we have in the UK, our high streets are actually dominated by the 'big three', Costa, Starbucks and Caffé Nero. And all three of them are out to promote brand loyalty. So, the working ethos is that whichever Costa, Starbucks or Caffé Nero you happen to visit, your experience should be consistently good and the coffee of a high quality.

And that's key, because they know that many of us will visit a coffee at least once a week, and they want to make sure that you spend your money in their coffee shops rather than anyone else's, whatever high street you happen to be on. If our coffee shop experience is good enough, the hope is that we will become lifetime customers.

Within the Church, when people get in touch with us and make enquires about a wedding or a christening, or perhaps the local funeral director rings, that for us presents an enormous opportunity. For those of us who minister in the Church in Wales, the opportunity is there not merely to be involved with this person or this family just for the one service, but to establish a lasting connection, a lifetime's journey, that leads them to an encounter with God's love and God's people.

Every day of every week, people will be ringing up of their own free will and asking the Church in Wales for help. In a culture with an enormous amount of choice on offer to help people mark life's big moments, be they weddings, the birth of a child, or the loss of someone they love, people don't have to call us - but they have chosen to do so. And at that moment we can choose to greet them and take them on that journey. These are people that we might call 'warm contacts'.

Just think of the opportunities to connect with people in a meaningful way that these Life Events offer to us.

At a wedding the greatest opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship rests with the bride and groom. But there are many more we will interact with in planning the wedding, and of course on the big day itself. There is the close family, best man, bridesmaids, ushers, photographer etc, and that's not to mention the wedding guests themselves.

Again, for Christenings there are some key people to connect with. There is, of course, a child at the heart of event, and usually, although not always, there are

two parents. By the time you include godparents, and perhaps other close family, there is an opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship with at least 6-10 people. And again, that is not including those who attend the Christening itself.

When it comes to funerals it not so easy to identify who the key people are. We all know that sometimes there's no one to talk to, but at other times we visit there may be twenty people packed into a living room! But each time we visit and connect with people at these pivotal times in their lives, we are beginning a relationship with them. These are our 'warm contacts'.

Just imagine if every time we spoke to them we saw it as the possibility of taking them on a life-changing journey, a journey that doesn't just end with them having a service once in the Church in wales, but actually leads them on to a life-changing encounter with the good news of God's love in Jesus.