

## Wider contacts

Not all of us enjoys driving, but either through work or for pleasure, most of us do quite a bit of it.

Anyone who has ever driven on the M4 or A55 will testify that they are notoriously busy roads, but we are blessed in Wales to have many other roads which are much quieter and provide for some stunning scenery.

With the abolition of tolls on the Old Severn Bridges, there are no toll roads still in existence in Wales. But if you travel further afield you may well still come across some. One such toll road covers a stretch of the M6 just to the north of Birmingham and some might argue that just for the sheer joy of driving on a motorway with little or no other no other traffic it's worth every penny of the fee!

Interestingly, there is a motorway service station there which claims to house the busiest Costa Coffee Shop in the world. Whilst it might seem highly unlikely that such a quiet motorway could boast such a busy coffee shop, it turns out that by volume of sales it is indeed the busiest in the world!

Now whilst that might seem a bit of a random story there, it serves to remind us of is the significance of passing contact. Whether people are going somewhere for the first time in their lives, or whether it's part of their everyday experience, every experience counts.

In the Church in Wales, we live within a culture where people have fewer and fewer contacts with church. Yet we have an amazing opportunity to meet many, many people every year through weddings; through funerals; and through christenings, when they come to us at some key moments in their lives. And of course, at these pivotal times they often bring with them their family and their friends. It's not at all unusual at such events to find congregations of 80 to 100 people, and sometimes more than that. When you sit down and begin to think of all the people the Church in Wales encounters simply through hosting these Life Events, the numbers run into hundreds and hundreds of thousands.

And the amazing thing is, particularly at weddings and christenings, that a large number of those people in attendance are actually under the age of 40, the very people which many churches struggle to attract week by week on a Sunday. And because of the particular season in their lives, many of these people will be attending such services not just once, but regularly, for weddings and christenings

especially, and not just in one church, but in several different churches and other venues as well.

So, it's really important that when they come to us as such times, they build up a bank of positive memories and good experiences, because we don't know where those will lead them. Whether that is just a positive impression, or the beginning of an amazing journey of faith, who knows. But what we do know from our research is that when people have a negative experience of church, it closes everything down.

The thing is, most of the time, we simply won't know if the people in our congregations are there for the first time in their lives, even possibly the only time in their lives, so we need to ensure they have the best possible experience that they can.