

## Mission while you sit

When St. Bartholomew's Church re-opened on Advent Sunday 2003, having been closed for major roof repairs, it was decided that it was no longer possible to keep a paid full-time Verger and the idea of members of the congregation opening the church on selected days was promoted. Initially, it was for three days a week but, as some dropped out for personal reasons or moving away, it was reduced to Wednesdays and Saturdays and also Bank Holidays.

## Visitors

The reason why visitors come varies, from those seeking a few minutes of meditation, those renewing past connections such as weddings, christenings or being part of the choir when young, or coming from elsewhere in the UK or from abroad to look at a Grade I Listed Church building.

## Valuable way for church to reach out

The number of visitors has been recorded since the beginning of the year and we have had 538 people coming into the church in the 11 months, 383 of whom have come to look around, and 81 come for prayer and meditation (One day over 40 people came in). Surely this must be a valuable way for the Church to reach out. There may be a few days we open when no-one comes but the record shows those days are limited. The difficulty now is a few more people have dropped out, and gaps are beginning to appear in the rota. At the moment sitters are asked to attend twice in a three month period and we are reluctant to ask them to do more.

## Need more volunteers

We are therefore desperate for more volunteers. The duties are not onerous - just sit and chat to visitors, perhaps run the vacuum around, tidy up and water the flowers – time for meditation oneself.

## Interesting stories

Some people come with interesting stories. One man had been a choirboy over 60 years ago and reminisced about the time then. A family of six came to see the church where their grandparents were married before emigrating to Canada.

## Greeting visitors

We ask those "church sitting" to greet any person coming – pass the time of day with those coming in to pray; if they come to look around, give them a copy of the short guide and a copy of the Parish Magazine (don't worry about the 50p) Many people thank us for opening the church for them to come in, and you can feel them finding something extra. Will they come back?

Will they find it easier to enter their local Church? In most cases we will not know. Many people, who Jesus' helped, rushed off to tell their friends and perhaps found some Faith. If we make it comfortable for visitors to find some Faith we are doing God's work.

Please give serious consideration and we hope you will volunteer to do God's Work and stay relaxed.

Grace and Geoffrey Reed