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The revision of the Canons was followed by the revision of the liturgy. In the late 1980s came a brief respite with the 'Decade of Evangelism', but as the name suggests, this was soon over, and arguably had little real impact.

The message of the Church is the eternal gospel!

Contrary to what was urged in *Towards the Conversion of England*, evangelism remained the provenance of the few rather than the many, and of the specialists, not the whole Church. As another twentieth century writer on mission, Roland Allen, once said, "Missionary work must be either the relation of the Church to the world, or a fad of a few." And unfortunately, in the postwar years, seeking people's actual conversion increasingly became 'a fad of the few' in the Church of England.

Nevertheless, for a while the Church grew — perhaps inspired by the spirit behind the report. Easter communicant figures rose sharply, for example, in the 1950s, as did confirmations. But then came the decline. Today in the diocese of Chelmsford, out of a population of almost 3 million, only about 32,000 will attend church on any given Sunday. That's not even 2% of the population! And whereas in 1961, the Church of England had 15,488 full-time clergy, in 2010 it had 8,135, despite the growth of the population. Yet once again, the 1945 report has a familiar ring:

"The basic fact is that the parochial clergy are now all too few. They cannot, therefore, get free from the necessary routine duties of a parish in order to give themselves to the absorbing personal and pastoral ministry of evangelising their people."

But what of the laity? Here also, the report makes some cogent comments about the situation then:

"We cannot exaggerate the importance of breaking down this traditional English reserve which produces a Church of 'silent saints'. [...] The Christian obligation of spoken witness does not require from all the duty of addressing public audiences: still less of button-holing comparative strangers. It does demand being

able to give a reason for the faith that is in us, when asked by a friend; and of praying that such openings shall be given and used by us."



Archbishop William Temple

And it added,

Always be prepared to give an **answer** to everyone who asks you to give the **reason** for the **hope** that you have. But do this with **gentleness** and **respect**. (1 Peter 3:16)

"We believe that ordinary Christians may be helped to talk naturally and openly about Christ if they do not regard themselves as isolated prophets, but as representatives of the evangelising Church, and as the tongue of the Body of Christ."

It is just over sixty-six years since the publication of *Towards the Conversion of England*, and on the downside we may say that the nation is no nearer being converted, and the Church is no better equipped for the task than it was then. On the plus side, God has not gone away, Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today and forever" and, as William Temple said in 1944, "The message of the Church is the Eternal Gospel."

Perhaps the Church of England, having tried so many other things, is finally waking up to the call it issued in 1945. We cannot know that our efforts will succeed in seeing people converted, but we can be sure that if we are doing what God wants, then what we are doing is right.

(John Richardson chairs the Deanery Growth Task Group, set up in 2009)

References
Towards the Conversion of England, (London: The Press and

Publications Board of the Church Assembly, 1945)

Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962)



Preparing for the Saffron Walden Deanery Mission 18-20 May 2012

Don't fear the 'e' word!

— says Rural Dean, David Tomlinson

Words acquire baggage. Associations, memories and images accumulate. In some cases, there can be a long distance between a word's origins and its contemporary resonances. Sadly "evangelism" has some uncomfortable connotations for many. Propose it, and a litany of bad practice can be the retort, from crass and insensitive presentations to browbeating conversations. I'm sure that you can cite your own examples.

Yet, the danger is that, against this backdrop, we are struck by stage fright. To change the metaphor: rather than risk falling into the many traps, we stay rooted to the spot. Without all its apparent hazards, we avoid doing any overt evangelism.

This is almost a crisis for the church. Recovering the essential meaning of evangelism and rising to the challenge of finding appropriate and authenticate ways of evangelizing is urgent and vital.

Living in a missionary context where increasing numbers have little or nothing to do with the church and many are largely ignorant of the Christian faith, the need for effective evangelism is increasingly pressing. Our urgent calling is to rediscover the courage and joy of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Deanery Mission Weekend provides an opportunity to explore anew how evangelism is best done where you are. Each church is being

asked to consider its own locality and what kind of event would attract local people. The next step is to decide how and who is to make some kind of presentation of what difference it makes to believe in Jesus Christ. The goal is to find an event that is repeatable that can become integral to what each church offers.

Reflection and review will be a key aspect of what happens after the Mission. Appraising the event can result in improvements or in deciding to try something else.

Moreover, even before the weekend, there might also be some consideration of how each church might follow up the individuals contacted or engaged through the Weekend.

As we share in this exciting venture together across the Deanery, we can be encouraged by and learn from each other.

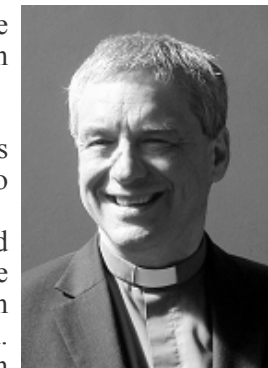
Leading up to the Deanery Mission, the Deanery Planning Team

will be working with Bishop Stephen.

Those on this Team are to stimulate thought and help to shape the plans in each church. The onus is on each church either singly or with other churches to do something evangelistic.

At this stage, the task is to make sure that the members of your church know about the weekend and have noted the dates. As we begin to think and take the first steps in planning what to do, we need to make prayer a priority. In evangelism, we are co-workers with God. Seeking God's guidance and praying for people to come to faith should be fundamental throughout the preparation and on the Weekend itself.

In conclusion, let us drop any baggage we carry about "evangelism" and embrace the opportunity the weekend, 18-20 May, presents. Let us aim to make evangelism integral to our life and plans as churches across the deanery of Saffron Walden. Furthermore, let us learn to be evangelistic communities who both tell and are good news.



Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." (Luke 8:38-39)

1945-2012: from the 'Conversion of England' to the Deanery Mission

by John Richardson

"Come to Life" is the title for the Saffron Walden Deanery Mission, to be held on the 18th-20th May 2012.

Encouraged by the Bishop of Chelmsford, Stephen Cottrell, similar Deanery Missions will be occurring across the diocese over the next months. Bishop Stephen has left it to individual deaneries to decide what to do, but has insisted that the mission events and activities should be "local, repeatable and evangelistic".

Asked exactly what he meant by 'evangelistic', however, he replied with a quote from a report produced by a Church Commission in 1945 titled, *Towards the Conversion of England*:

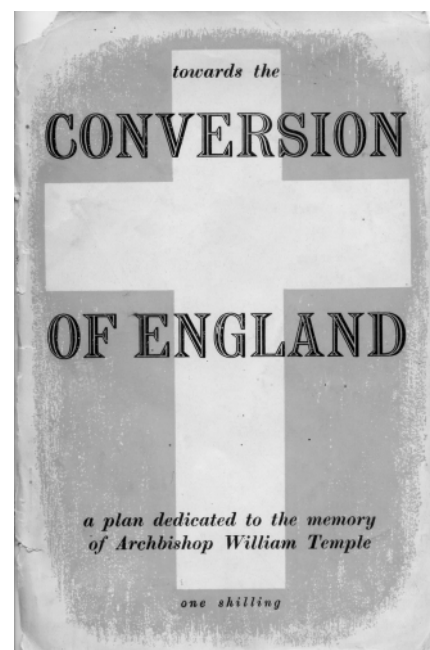
"To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that [people] shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."

This definition of evangelism was actually first produced by an *Archbishops' Committee of Inquiry on the Evangelistic Work of the Church* over a hundred years ago, in 1918. By the time of the Second World War, however, it was felt that very little had been done, and in 1943, the Church Assembly set up a Commission whose brief was,

"... to survey the whole problem of modern evangelism with special reference to the spiritual needs and prevailing intellectual outlook of the non-worshipping members of the community, and to report on the organization and methods by

which such needs can most effectively be met."

The result of that Commission was the 1945 report, which owed much of its flavour to the inspiration of the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. The Foreword to the report told how Temple set two principles before



Front cover of the 1945 edition of 'Towards the Conversion of England'

the first meeting of the Commission:

1. "The message of the Church is the Eternal Gospel. This remains fundamentally the same, from first to last. The Gospel could not alter, although the setting in which it was given, and the method of its presentation, could and did."

2. "The first need in evangelism is for a strengthening and a quickening of spiritual life within the Church: 'We cannot separate the evangelisation of those without from the rekindling of devotion within.'"

The 156 page report covered both the challenges facing the Church and the means by which those challenges might be met, including evangelism in towns and villages and amongst youth and children, the part of the clergy and the laity, the use of advertising and the media and so on. In its first year it was reprinted every month!

Some of it has a remarkably modern feeling. The Commission concluded, for example, that,

"In England the Church has to present the Christian Gospel to multitudes in every section of society who believe in nothing; who have lost a whole dimension (the spiritual dimension) of life; and for whom life has no ultimate meaning."

Those of us who imagine that England in the middle of the twentieth century was a place of full churches and widespread faith obviously aren't seeing things the way the Church did then! On the contrary, according to the report, the Church faced the twin threats of advancing humanism and secularism, immorality and indifference from without, and ill-equipped clergy in insufficient numbers plus uncertainty and lukewarmness from the laity within.

The report therefore concluded with a clarion call:

"We recommend that the Archbishops, together with the House of Bishops, call the whole Church, clergy and laity alike, to review their responsibility as the Body of Christ and rethink the obligation of their Ordination and Confirmation vows in terms of the Master's command to preach the Gospel."

So what happened? Perhaps the most important thing, unfortunately, was that Archbishop Temple died before the report was even published. And his successor, Dr Geoffrey Fisher, was a man of a very different temper. Instead of engaging in evangelism, the Church spent the decades after the war revising the Canons (the 'laws of the Church'). Admittedly these were out of date, but as one commentator has written, this was surely "a glaring example of mistaken priorities".

But even when this was over, the Church still did not turn to evangelism.

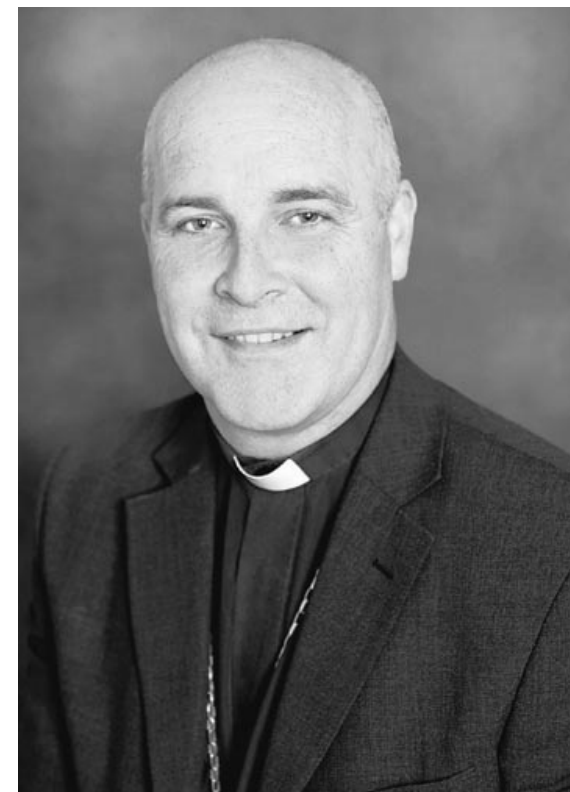
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Greetings from Bishop Stephen

Every one of us was evangelised once. Perhaps you were brought up in a Christian home and that was how you learnt and received the Christian faith? Or maybe you had a sudden and dramatic conversion experience. Or perhaps, like me, you weren't brought up going to church at all, and faith was something you discovered over the years, many different people helping you along the way. Well, all that is evangelism: the many different ways that different people become disciples of Jesus Christ.

We need to become a church that is better at sharing this faith. We need to provide more people with more opportunities to know Christ. That is what this mission process is all about: learning to do evangelism better, providing opportunities for people to take the next step. I look forward to working with you and accompanying you on this journey.

+Stephen



equipping for evangelism

Books

John Chapman, *Know and Tell the Gospel*
 Stephen Cottrell, *From the Abundance of the Heart*
 Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism*
 John Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*
 Bob Mayo et al, *Ambiguous Evangelism*
 Yvonne Richmond et al, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture*
 Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church*

Web Resources

Leading your Church into Growth: www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk
 Evangelism UK: <http://evangelismuk.typepad.com/evangelismuknet/>
 Two Ways to Live Presentation: <http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl/>

DVDs

The Christ Files: How historians know what they know about Jesus, DVD and Book from thegoodbook.co.uk
 Lennox/Dawkins - the God Delusion Debate (available from Amazon, US import)

Courses for enquirers

The Alpha Course (uk.alpha.org)
 Christianity Explored (www.christianityexplored.org)
 Emmaus (from Church House Publishing)