**A matter of calling**

*How, and with whom, we communicate during the lockdown is something we should think hard about, says Jonathan Parker, Curate in West Cemaes LMA*

I don’t really like using the telephone. Partly it’s because I’m hard of hearing and worry I might mishear a vital piece of information. Partly it’s because I find the telephone rude and needy; it clamours for attention, interrupts whatever you are doing and takes priority over whoever you are with. Better than the phone is email. Better still, face-to-face conversation. But with the churches closed I can’t chat after services, I can’t call round to people’s houses. I can’t meet non-churchgoers in the street (though, if we keep moving, I can say hello during exercise).

Most of our congregation don’t use email or social media so the telephone is our main way of keeping in touch. The ministry team and churchwardens ring those on the electoral roll and there are other, informal groups who phone each other too. One thing the lockdown has highlighted is how vital informal networks can be. Some of our most faithful church members are not on the electoral roll so we don’t have contact details. With some thought we can often find the link person on the electoral roll that can pass our numbers on, thus enabling contact to be made.

For the lonely and isolated a call from someone in church might be the only one of the day. For people living with others it might be the only new voice of the day. For those who don’t feel safe at home it could be a lifeline. For any of us, a call from church reminds us we are still part of something bigger, still connected, and, more importantly, that someone is interested in us. Many people are happy with a quick hello, others have things they need to discuss, some are in need of pastoral support. All are glad to be remembered.

When making the call it may be useful to have some prayers to hand, some suggested Bible readings, pen and paper in case you need to remember something. You might even find a list of what you want to say helps. I get very anxious before ringing people but, even though I’m not entirely comfortable with the phone, I know it is playing a key part in keeping our church community together during these strange times. But the focus is ‘our church community.’

When people are ‘called’ in the Bible it is often a two way process. God gives a sign, someone responds. Moses goes to investigate the burning bush, Samuel calls out ‘Here I am!’ and Peter and Andrew leave their nets. How can we call out to those not on the electoral roll? Can we bring new people to Christ?

Many churches in the diocese are striving to reach out. They are streaming services on Facebook or linking to them from their websites. With huge amounts of material on the Church in Wales and diocesan websites it’s possible to point people to services, reflections and prayer resources even if we lack the skills to upload them ourselves. Churches which have never used Skype or Zoom are having a go. Clerics and parishioners are learning new skills. We post to a page and, by doing so, can connect not just with our existing members but potentially to their friends and contacts too. We call and give others the chance to respond.

More traditionally we have our notice boards outside churches displaying relevant contact information from before the lockdown. It is possible for people to telephone us, ask questions, request prayers or just to start a conversation. As the period of building closure continues we may need to update what we have on display so long as we don’t need to enter the building to do it. We may be able to find more ways of giving those outside Church the chance to hear God’s call to them.

Telephoning our congregations is vital but it’s possible we are only speaking to those already saved. What about the rest of our society? What about those looking for strength, support and love? What about those who think they can make it on their own? We must continue to pray for them but we must also try to connect with them by whatever safe ways we can. It is our duty, for Jesus said, ‘I have come to call not the righteous but the sinners.’