

Keeping Christmas Fresh

General Intro

IT'S OFFICIAL

Attendance at Christmas services held by the Church of England reached its highest level in a decade last year, figures published yesterday showed.

News of growing congregations at festive services provided a small ray of hope for the church as weekly attendance figures fell to record lows.

TIMES 15 11 18

INTRODUCTION

Unlikely that I will be give you anything new - but my hope is that some little keys will open a few big doors.

FRESH

James 3:11

Does a spring send forth **fresh** water and bitter from the same opening?

James 3:12

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and **fresh**.

What is the opposite of fresh? Stale, no changes, frozen.....??

Let me contextualise my presentation:

- Mindsets - we think in different ways:
 - ideas will spark your imagination of some;
 - caring for and helping people will be more important for some;
 - some will be asking for more detail - tell me more
 - others will want to know how to do it - what steps do I take
 - so we cannot fully please everyone - but there should be plenty of time to talk and share and ask questions

- Multiple opportunities
 - Involvement
 - reaching out in small ways and big ways
 - most straightforward time of year to begin reaching out
 - what about those who find Christmas hard

- Do these things lift you, encourage you and lift you to fresh efforts and approaches?
 - Challenge - on edge - fresh approach
 - New people attending church or being reached is a powerful encourager.
 - awareness of the existence of a lively caring church
 - think big and small - Tim and the Wembley Arena

MY PAST EXPERIENCE

Bangor	wacky evening service 10 pm
Wrexham	open airs, meals for parents of youth group with young people serving over 100 eating!!!
Noddfa	variety of services and meals tried - Christmas Eve at 5pm (for which I had must criticism when I suggested it - but it is still going - even this year.
Llanelli	COSTA COFFEE carol singing choir - many on edge of fellowship join in
EMW	Matt Lewis introduced Christmas Wrapped - used around the country - Morriston do it - what is their view
Clevedon	Luke in Noah's Ark!

THIS TALK

Written to a lot of friends who are vastly experienced. I asked them if they had anything to share. Roger Carswell, Jason Duffin (Vice Chair of UFM & UBM), pastor and businessman, Vinny Commons, Eryl Davies, Mark Griffiths (St Padarns, Cardiff), Dan Rackman, Lindsay Brown, Ann Brown, Andrew Norbury, Helen Franklin (SU).

SECTIONS

1. ROGER CARSWELL - GENERAL ADVICE
2. EVENTS
3. TALKS & SERMONS
4. RESOURCES

SECTION 1. Roger Carswell - general advice

Twelve Tips for Christmas evangelism – Reach Out magazine

The month of December leading up to Christmas Day provides a unique opportunity to proclaim the gospel to non-Christians who are listening. We can expect to see larger crowds attending church services, and being willing to consider Christ, than at other times of the year. Therefore let us prepare to make the most of the opportunity, and be ready to explain the gospel. Here are some possibilities for Christmas evangelism:

1. **Traditional services**, with well-known carols and more familiar Bible readings about the birth of Jesus are still very attractive. Therefore let us plan to have a number of Carol Services aimed at different groups of people. **They can be held mid-week, mid-day as well as on a Sunday! In each of them, ensure that the gospel, including the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are central to the appeal to come to Christ. We are not to complain to the congregation that we only see them once a year!**

2. Some of your congregation may be able to run **an evangelistic Christmas gathering in their home, or their workplace**, which would include a gospel message, **presenting** each of those attending with **an evangelistic book. Do encourage Christians in schools to run an evangelistic Christmas event through their Scripture Union or Christian group.**

3. **'Are you ready for Christmas?'** is available as an evangelistic Christmas tract. Plan to deliver the invitations to your Christmas services around your locality, and **include with the invitation the gospel tract.**

4. Ensuring your **church has sufficient quantities of various tracts and booklets** available, encourage your congregation individually to use them as an enclosure in each of the Christmas cards they will be sending to their friends and relatives in the UK and

beyond. Encourage your congregation to **use Christmas cards with a Christian picture and message.**

5. As well, **'Are you ready for Christmas?' is the title of an evangelistic Christmas book** published by 10Publishing. It is making this available from your local Christian bookshop or online and can be purchased very cheaply if bought in bulk. Books can then be given **(perhaps even wrapped in Christmas paper) to everyone who attends any of your Christmas services.** There are other short Christmas books too, such as **Glen Scrivener's 'Four kinds of Christmas'** and **Lee Strobel's 'The Case for Christmas'.**

6. **Your church could be encouraged to give a copy of the book with their more usual Christmas gift to friends, relatives and people who would normally be given a tip at Christmas, such as the postman, newspaper delivery boy/girl, doctor, pharmacist, etc.** The church as a whole will be encouraged to pray for those receiving the book.

7. **Remember too that there are books for children which are not expensive and evangelistically explain the Christmas story.** I highly recommend the new book 'The Characters of Christmas' by Ruth Hearson. It is available as a colouring book, and a board book as well as a storybook and short (free to use) video.

8. **Dan Rackham has produced a video** on the theme of 'Are you ready for Christmas?' which is available to freely download and show in Carol Services. Go to www.youtube.com/gochatter

9. With planning, your church, or an individual, could arrange to **present to a local library or a local school a collection of 5 children's books as a permanent gift.** www.10ofthose.com is making available a package of books at a specially discounted price, so that they can be donated to schools and libraries:

The Jesus Story Book Bible

Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing

Everything a child should know about God

10. Whilst being aware that it is becoming **harder to preach the gospel in the open air, Christmas provides a wonderful opportunity for us to do this in the context of carol singing and short talks and Bible readings.** Perhaps you could get a **brass band** to play? Around the edge of the gathered crowd church members can **give away the Christmas tracts**, invitations and even copies of The Bethlehem Carol Sheet (available from Embrace the Middle East). Such services not only make known the gospel, but also raise awareness of your church.

11. **Write a letter to your local newspaper on a topical theme**, positively explaining the hope and joy that the coming of Jesus brings. They are more likely to print a Christian letter at this time of year than any other.

12. **Consider producing an A5 poster which will be displayed in the windows of all your church members** as well as co-operating shops in the run up to Christmas. Perhaps using a text like 'The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world' it may also mention that the poster has been produced by your church

SECTION 2. EVENTS

Traditional goes well. Old carols, candlelight, warm welcomes, some nice **generous** bites.

CRAFT

Carefully planned making Christmas crafts - Maesteg, Highfields - growing attendance in Maesteg plus soup and a talk (not in Maesteg as it is used to raise awareness of Christmas services and events - Lisa Norbury (Maeteg) and Sophie Rees (Highfields)

TRADITIONAL MEALS

A range of opportunities - from Christmas dinner to invitation events

NATIVITY PHOTO BOOTH

Helen Franklin - in markets or various events

Christmas gatherings - children can dress up - parents take photos and they go viral.

See Helen's Handout on reaching out at Christmas.

HOLIDAY CLUB - on a Saturday near Christmas

FREE CHRISTMAS WRAPPING

CHRISTMAS TREE COMPETITION - Community competition

CHRISTMAS UNWRAPPED

Ask a church who have done it!

CAROL SERVICE

Abersychan - Noddfa Baptist Church, Gwent - Pastor John John Funnel - He has gone from a really small handful of old christians to a thriving and blessed community of believers - one of the tools God used was his carol services held in a cleared out tunnel!!!! Over 300 attending!!! Look it up on their website.

CHILDRENS' STORY as part of a carol service

LOCAL CHOIR OR BRASS BAND

Eryl Davies

House meetings with food and a gospel message/carols go down well here. Folk are glad to come. We use the idea of 'good neighbours', inviting folk/neighbours whom we know though others are invited. People appreciate the relational aspects of this and catching up on personal/family news.

About four/five years ago, we started a Christmas Eve carol service at 5-30p.m, recognising it was a good time because folk had finished shopping, it was before an evening meal or outing and there was a slot in their programme! We offer an opportunity for families to join us to sing carols and have a brief message then mince pies afterwards. The service lasts 45 minutes, YP and oldies take part in a choir or reading Scripture. It is very popular and we have between 300-400 present, a third of whom at least would be unbelievers. It is a superb time here in the Heath area for such a service.

Scripture Union (Helen Franklin) See her handout

The Great Christmas Bake Off

Local Nativity

Carol Singing

Star at the stable/Nativity Photo Booth

Christmas Photography Competition

Christmas Mince pies and "Merry Christmas"

Interactive experiences including:

- Stable trail...Christmas Journey ...Christmas Unwrapped

Together with a list of resources and offers of support bu SU Cymru

SECTION 3. TALKS/SERMONS

Some rules of thumb

Huge gap between Christians and none Christians

Connecting folk with the gospel is the challenge

Welcome - Big London Church approach

Serve the Lord with Fear=mirth - Ray Ortland - **serve with more mirth in a non weird way.**

Are we aiming to get folk back? Or are we aiming to see folk converted? or both?

Keep it as short as possible - harder than long talks

Punchy

What do you want people to take away? One major message?

Good questions can be a central pivot.

In what ways....?

To what extent.....?

Is forgiving people easy?

Authentic

Simple examples:

1. Illustrating the Incarnation and rejection of the Person of Christ

Joshua Bell played in the subway - wearing a baseball hat— and no-one stopped - noone knew him - possibly one was reported out of hundreds ...video on You tube and reported in the Washington Post

2. The woman/lady who saved Christmas - 2 Kings 11 - Dale Ralph Davies P 169

Roger Carswell

With regards to Christmas talks, I prepare one new evangelistic Christmas talk every year, which I then take around with me in the different places. I have about 30 of them now! But, the emphasis is always a double one: incarnation and then salvation!

It always worries me that we get people in to hear the gospel at Christmas but then don't really see them again. However, praise the Lord for that one unique opportunity that we get every year.

I have found Christmas is a wonderful opportunity for tract and literature distribution. Big numbers of tracts always go when there is some big event in society. At the moment, thousands of Remembrance Day tracts and booklets are being distributed and at Christmas tracts etc. go out in big numbers and there is always a bigger response to tracts at Christmas than at any other time of the year.

Mark Griffiths - St Padarn's

I always go STORY. Often the attached.

I took a session at a homeless shelter once. I was invited to explain what Christianity was, but the Sikh's and Buddhists and Muslims were also invited. We were all given 10 minutes to talk about our 'thing'. They explained their religions and the rules and books and dress. I went last and told the attached story. I got the round of applause 😊.

So I always go STORY.

This particular story is from *Hangin' on Every Word*, by me! Mark

The Golden Box

Karen lived alone with her father. Her mother had moved to another country many years before. Karen did miss her mum, but living with Dad was OK.

Karen had spent the whole afternoon at the kitchen table with the scissors. Dad could hear lots of cutting sounds as he sat in the living room watching television.

But when dad eventually went to the kitchen to investigate, he was furious.

“What a waste of money! Why have you used that good wrapping paper? You really are a silly girl.”

Her dad told her off quite severely. They didn't have much money, and the last thing Karen's father wanted was for her to waste their most expensive wrapping paper on her game. She had cut the gold wrapping paper up and now it was no good for anything. He grew even more upset when, after sending her to her room for cutting the paper up, he saw her pasting it onto an old box.

“What are you doing that for?” he protested. “We could have used that paper for your granny's present.”

A little later, the same gold-wrapped present appeared under the Christmas tree, and when dad looked at the tag his anger soon subsided. He felt almost embarrassed when he saw his name on the tag.

That night was Christmas Eve and Karen went to bed early – as everyone does on Christmas Eve – hoping that the morning might come more quickly. Eventually, after a very sleepless night, Karen rushed into her dad's bedroom at 6 a.m. She shook him until he eventually woke up. He was still very sleepy. He rubbed his eyes until the sleepiness had all gone. Then he stumbled into the bathroom to throw cold water over his face, and made his way downstairs. He was feeling a bit grumpy about being up so early, but he smiled as Karen opened her presents. The Barbie doll and the lovely outfits, the new slippers, pyjamas with Harry Potter on them, new school shoes... eventually all her presents were opened and all that remained under the tree was the golden box. Karen went to collect it and handed it to Dad. He decided that he didn't mind being woken up at 6 a.m. for it must be a very lovely present to be put inside such a wonderfully decorated box. He took his time opening the lid and then he gazed inside.

But he became quite angry as he looked into the box. He looked at his little girl and spoke to her very sharply. “Young lady, don't you know that when you give a present to someone there's supposed to be something inside?”

The little girl looked up with tears in his eyes and said: "Oh, Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into it until it was full. And then I put the lid on so none could escape. I've made you a box full of love." Dad said nothing, but tears ran down his cheeks as he hugged his little girl tight.

Two books with excellent stories in:

Hanging on every word ...Mark Griffiths - stories for more than Christmas - excellent introduction on telling stories and the power of them - 48 stories

A young persons guide to knowing God- Patricia St John

Sections include

I believe in God

the white handkerchief...the lost boat...

I believe in God's Son

Why Sheikh Ali Ran....The unrecognised guest...

Childrens' stories told in churches have lead to the salvation of adults!

Vinny Commons - evangelist

Good vivid pointed illustrations .prepare talks in Costa or Macdonald's ... ask will this sermon reach and be understood by these people ? Read read and let the wonder of the story get into you . This will generate an enthusiasm that's impossible to miss . Know the reality of the lord in experience first . If you are struggling to experience him ... be big enough to say your struggling then preach with a renewed depth !! Pray an anointing on your sermons .

Eryl Davies- elder, retired pastor and principal of ETCW

a) there is no substitute for digging in the Word ; this involves refusing to recycle the usual annual Christmas messages and only changing the texts and an illustration or introduction .

b) study in detail the Old Testament background to the narratives and statements as well as checking and going back to where the O.T quotes are used. and why . Use narrative where possible.

c) give the big picture , placing the Incarnation in the context of the flow of redemptive history . That is exciting !

d) don't be afraid to include solid teaching about the Person of Christ, the wonder of the Incarnation, the plan of God, etc. Too many messages are devotional, light and boring ! We have heard it all before and know what is coming next !

Not being in pastoral charge now, I cannot be contemporary but I'm probably doing a series in one residential home . Some time ago I was invited to address the former WDA staff and guests in the centre of Cardiff for a Christmas carol service . The important folk were there too . I had to be contemporary and fresh , limited to 20 minutes so I took th message of angels to the shepherds as words they may be familiar with but playing on the word 'news' ---'good news' with secular, homely illustrations then the big picture background before getting into the gift of Christ . They listened intently and the feedback over the buffet afterwards was encouraging. But we need to know, understand in some depth the background and nature of the message then work at communicating it in a relevant, clear and arresting manner . Hard work !

Lindsay Brown uses a talk based on a Vaughan Roberts booklet - 3 words

Ann Brown

Shepherds story Talk based on pictures from Fine Art e.g. Henry Tanner Angels appearing to the shepherd plus 9 others - text and images (see below)

SECTION 4. RESOURCES

Reindeer - Church service in London

TRACT AND PUBLICATIONS BOARD - WITH TRACTS OLD & NEW

- use in combination with say the Nativity Photo Booth



Other times, I will use a tract to close the door of conversation. So that after having had the opportunity to witness, I leave the person with a suitable leaflet, "which goes over some of the things we have just chatted about." I try to stress that this is "the ordinary Christian message, not some strange new religion."

'Losing' Tracts!

As well, though, I like to 'lose' tracts. I put them in all my correspondence when paying bills, returning forms or simply sending a letter. I 'lose' them on the seat of a bus, train or plane on which I may have travelled. Sometimes I leave them in telephone kiosks, library books, pre-paid envelopes or places where I know they will be found. Then I pray that the Lord will use them.

If I travel overseas, I always obtain some tracts or Gospels in the native language, to pass on to waiters, hoteliers, and contacts.

For me, tracts are one of the most helpful tools to keep me diligent in scattering gospel seed each and every day. They are not expensive, and are easy to pass on. And I am encouraged by truths in the Bible like, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many

days." (Ecc 11:1), and "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him." (Psalm 126:5&6)

Still Effective Today

Some years ago, I had the privilege of leading to Christ, at Bath University, a Vietnamese PhD student. He had recently arrived in the country but felt lonely. In Bath town centre one Saturday afternoon a very elderly lady (as it happens, she was the daughter of the famous Bible teacher, WE Vine) gave him a tract and an invitation to her Gospel Hall. He regularly attended for several weeks, and it was my privilege to be with him at his conversion. And it began with a prayerfully given tract.

In Musselburgh, I interviewed a man in his forties who had been converted through reading tracts that had been sent in pre-paid envelopes to the Royal Mail in Edinburgh where he worked. He had had no other contact with the gospel. Another man I knew had come to Christ as railway carriage cleaner. Working through the night, he saw and read a tract, and there and then prayed to trust the Lord.

"There's a work for Jesus, ready at your hand; 'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned."

Maybe that work for you is to seek to regularly give away gospel leaflets, some of which may lead to significant conversations, which count for eternity. I have found that one of the greatest sources of joy of each day, is to give away a tract!

If you would like a sample pack of tracts to get you started, please write and ask: **Roger Carswell, 15 Stirling Crescent, Horsforth, Leeds, LS18 5SJ** or email: Roger@rogercarswell.com www.tell-me-more.org

Publishing
www.10offthose.com
Produced by Printbridge. Tel: 0845 226 7306

Who Can Track A Tract?

By Roger Carswell



Tracts Then

Over a century ago, the founder of the Hawes Creamery (famous for Wensleydale Cheese) was a teenager when he noticed a piece of paper on the street in Hawes. Inquisitively, he picked it up, read it and was converted to Christ. The discarded tract had done its work.

James Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary to China, was so bored with his life in Barnsley that he took a tract with him to the outhouse of his home, with the intention of simply reading the opening story. But reading on he came to the words, 'The finished work of Christ.' He trusted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour ... and the rest is history.

It was a pamphlet, written by Martin Luther, that fell into the hands of John Bunyan, author of 'Pilgrim's Progress', which helped him to Christ.

There are many other stories like this, but are tracts as valuable today? I would answer a thousand times, "Yes!" The vast majority of people in the United Kingdom have never heard a clear explanation of the gospel message. They pass through life and into

eternity with a religion that has been shaped by their home, school assemblies and the BBC. Their attitude to Jesus, if they believe in Him at all, is to benevolently respect Him as a good teacher from history who has no relevance to them individually. But they must hear the news that only He can save, and they urgently need to repent and believe.

Tracts Now

Of course the ideal would be for each person to hear the gospel either in church, a mission or from a Christian, but there are millions of people to reach. That is where tracts are so valuable. A good tract - or Christian leaflet, as I prefer to call it - attractively designed and faithfully explaining the gospel, can be a powerful proclaimer of the gospel. It never gets tongue-tied, it is not cowardly or compromising in its presentation, it can quote and explain scripture, and leads its reader to a prayer of true repentance and faith. It does not answer back, or become irritated when ignored. It doesn't wait until Sunday to present the good news. It can be read in the bustle of a busy life or in quietness, at any time of the day or night. Tracts, like dynamic

evangelists, have a personality and power of their own. They are like missionaries going into all situations to testify of Jesus.

God's Word Never Changes

Long ago, God commanded His people to care for the materially poor and debtors, but it seems to me that the words equally apply to us with regard to the spiritually poor debtors: "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren ... you shall surely give to him ... for this thing the Lord your God will bless you ... therefore I command you, saying, "You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy in your land." (Deut. 15:7,10&11).

I have disciplines in my life, which I seek to follow - a key one is to never go anywhere without a pocket Bible and a few tracts. I then

use them, and 'lose' them!

Opening Doors

I use them as the key to open the door of conversation. If there is no queue behind me, I will offer the attendant at the garage or the supermarket check-out, or the bank or newsagent, "a small Christian leaflet that simply explains how Jesus came into the world for people like you and me." Quickly judging their reaction, I see if the conversation will lead to speaking more of Jesus. I pray each day that I will be able to turn inconsequential chatter into significant conversations about Jesus. I aim to be winsome, genuine, chirpy and warm; I don't want people to be put off the gospel because I come across as odd. And if they don't want to talk, I leave the subject and simply try to remain friends.

Video clips

Dan Rackham <dan@gochattervideos.com>

Here's the current catalogue of Christmas videos on Go Chatter.

<https://gochattervideos.com/category/christmas/>

Category - Christmas



[Myrrh for a baby](#)



[Meet The Nativity](#)



[Wrapping Paper](#)



[Mary's Song](#)



[The Greatest Journey](#)

Away in a what?

The Dummies Guide to the
Christmas Story



[Away in a What?](#)



The Characters of Christmas



The Well Good News of Christmas



Are You Ready For Christmas



Ydych chi'n barod ar gyfer y Nadolig? (Welsh)



4 Kinds of Christmas



John Lewis Christmas Advert – Remake

Another video - Bible Society
<https://youtu.be/2rn6lezmUlg>