

## Deanery Conference & Festival 2019:

### Panel: 'Building up the Church

(Post Conference Notes - Fr Julian Lowe)

I am a great believer in audience participation!

Here we go ...

- Hands up if you drive  
*(Most hands raised)*
- Hands down if you have ever seen any bad drivers or bad driving.  
*(All hands lowered)*
- Hands up if you are a bad driver!  
*(One or two half raised hands)*

There are certain 'accusations' that most people will vehemently protest against. For example; "You're a bad driver!", "You don't have a sense of humour!", "You don't listen!"

The sad truth is that many of us are not good at listening. Having two ears does not mean you can listen any more than having a mouth means you can sing! Listening is a complex skill and seldom comes naturally. For example, Jesus spoke many times of his crucifixion, but His disciples always seem to not hear what was being said they appeared not to be very good listeners.

A little while ago now, a musician, then known as 'Cat Stevens', wrote a song called "Father & Son". One particular line in that song has always meant a lot to me

"From the moment I could talk I was ordered to listen"

I was raised by parents who firmly believed that children should be seen and not heard! Now, I was, and still can be rather shy and reserved. As a child I never wanted to be noticed, I didn't want to be 'seen'; and so I turned things around in my head and "Children should be **seen** and not **heard**" became "Children should **listen** and not be **heard**".

I think it was from that point that listening became an important part of who I am.

It is because listening is so important to me that I became a Samaritan volunteer. The average 'shelf life' of a Samaritan is three years. I remained a volunteer for a little over ten years and only resigned due to health issues. During my time as a volunteer I worked not only in my local branch but also in the local Prisons; supporting both prisoners and prison staff and also training prisoners to be 'Listener' providing peer support. It is difficult to explain how it can be rewarding to listen to

those in crisis, those who feel that life has nothing to offer them and those who are literally dying; but I have no hesitation in saying that this period with Samaritans was one of the most rewarding and enriching experiences of my life.

Of course one doesn't need to be a Samaritan any more than one needs to be ordained to offer to listen to others. However, ordination does bring opportunities that might otherwise not be available. One such opportunity is chaplaincy work. A little over 3 years ago I offered to support the chaplaincy team at HMP Nottingham. This is an establishment with which I am familiar from my Samaritan days. However, the security clearance process is significantly different today. The fear of 'radicalisation' by religious groups is a major issue within the prison establishment and is making chaplaincy work a difficult field to break into.

*Having said that, the 'Pagan Chaplain' at the prison does not appear to have had any issues!*

I am still waiting!

I have also offered to support the Chaplaincy team at our local hospital sites. The issue here is not so much security as actually getting a reply to ones emails! Recalling my Sam's experience I remember how the hospitals were reluctant to let anybody, from outside of the NHS, be involved in anything that they believed was their responsibility. The offer of 'time' was frequently interpreted as a questioning of their competence.

The other avenue I have explored is University Chaplaincy work. This has been for more encouraging. My initial approach to the chaplaincy team led to a meeting with the Chaplaincy coordinator. The response to this meeting has been very encouraging and I am currently awaiting approval from the University Management team. From the feedback I have been given I understand that my desire to 'listen to all' and not 'gather the Orthodox' has been valued and appreciated by the chaplaincy

All around us hearts are in pain, joy, and ambivalence; all have stories to tell, and all have emotions that need to be heard. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen.

Our Lord said, "...for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1John 4 v 20).

I would like to suggest that we could also say, "for he who doesn't listen to his brother whom he has seen, how can he listen to God whom he has not seen?"

By actively listening, we can extend God's grace to those who so sorely need it. By listening to an aching heart, we can be a major catalyst in helping it heal. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. And so, it is **His** work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him.

Is there a more palpable way to '**Let your light so shine...**' and to build up the Church?

I don't think I want/need to say more just now, except perhaps to recite a poem from my childhood.  
Although recorded as early as 1875 it is apparently older than that!

A wise old owl lived in an oak  
The more he saw the less he spoke  
The less he spoke the more he heard.  
Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?