

Being a Christian from Monday to Saturday

MANY of us are heavily involved with what goes on in our churches on a Sunday. We know what it means to be a Christian there.

But what happens between Monday and Saturday when we're at work, school, college or volunteering in the community? What's it like being a Christian in the secular world? Is God actually calling us to what we're already doing anyway?

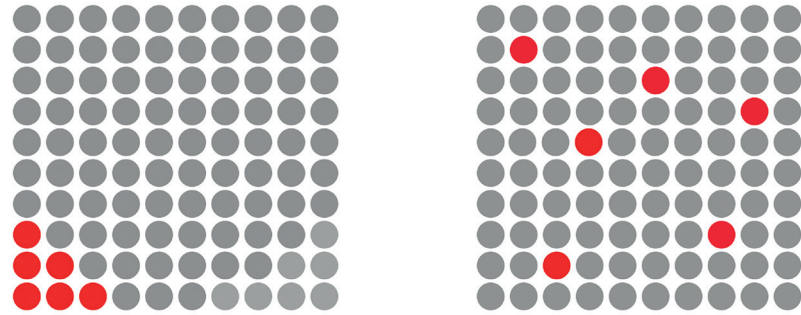
That's the subject of a Church of England report, 'Setting God's People Free', which is currently being implemented. Our diocese is a pilot diocese, trying out ideas to help us be more confident as Christians in the world.

It's all about the ministry of lay people, who represent 98 per cent of the Church. They spend only five per cent of their time doing 'church', and the rest of the time showing others what it means to live as Christians.

One teacher quoted in the report said: "I teach Sunday school for 45 minutes a week, and they haul me up to the front of the church to pray for me. I teach in a school 45 hours a week and the church has never prayed for me."

It's interesting that 67 per cent of non-Christians know a Christian, but only one per cent know a vicar. Leaving everything to the clergy is therefore not an option.

Our diocese has appointed a group to think more deeply about what this means for us. It is chaired by Debbie Sutton, and includes our stewardship adviser Victoria James, mission



Moving from 'gathered church' (left) to 'sent church' (right)

development officer Andrew Hargreaves, Clare Watson from Leesland Neighbourhood Church, and bishop's chaplain Richard Wyld.

Debbie said: "The report makes a helpful distinction between what we do as 'gathered' church and 'sent' church. In other words, what we do when we gather together, usually on Sundays, should strengthen and equip us to make an impact for Christ on the world around us – the world we are part of when we are not in church.

"It asks how you can show those who know you what it means to be a follower of Christ? How can you live so that they can sense the difference that Christ is making in your life?"

"One aspect of the report I like is that it is not asking us for any more time, money or even activity. It is suggesting a change of culture so that everyone appreciates the value of what we do when we are not in church.

"It suggests that we focus some of the prayer, teaching, fellowship and Bible study that we already do in church, so it gives us the confidence to take opportunities

outside church to talk to friends and colleagues about our faith.

"Some people find this a lot harder than others, but we can all pray that if God gives us an opportunity to make a comment as part of a conversation we are having, then we will be brave enough to take it."

The national Church, which is supporting the implementation of the report, has produced some resources, including simple ideas to remind us that God can use what we do outside church:

- **Sunday Praying for Monday to Saturday living:** Include in your intercessions prayers for the non-church activity going on in and around your parish, and pray for congregation members in their daytime contexts.
- **This Time Tomorrow:** Encourage everyone to ask one another "What will you be doing this time tomorrow?" Talk about the pressures and challenges they will face and offer to pray for them during the week.
- **What's Noted on the Notice Boards:** Our noticeboards often include one that shows a linked worker in a distant

Ukulele group builds skills

MINISTRY comes in many forms, some of them surprising.

At St Mary's Church in Fratton, friends have come together to entertain in a musical group – The Sunflowers.

It all started when Marie Lambert was given a ukulele as a much-appreciated present and was teaching herself to play. When she decided to take the plunge and play at the Harvest Supper last year, she had no idea she was about to become leader of a group.

Now she's in charge of a small group who play ukuleles and sing at social events. By getting together and practising regularly, they build each other's confidence and learn new skills.

"I'd been given a guitar aged 14, but never learnt to play," she said. "I'd always assumed the ukulele could only be played in the style of George Formby, but I saw Bette Midler play it in quite a melodic way on TV, and thought I could do that. I ordered one and fell in love with it.

"I'd been teaching myself to play, but hadn't been brave enough to do it in public. Once I had decided to play, our verger asked mutual friends to be backing singers. It went down so well that other people wanted to learn too."

The small group started rehearsing at Marie's house monthly. As they get closer

country. How about starting to put up a picture and a prayer request from the teacher at your local school, the nurse in the hospital or the local shopkeeper?

Setting Gods People Free talks about 'lay leadership' rather than 'lay ministry'. You don't have to be in a position of recognised



The Sunflowers playing at the St Mary's pantomime; below: Marie Lambert



to performances, they also rehearse after church on a Sunday morning. Four play the ukulele, while three sing and play percussion instruments.

They performed for 45 minutes at a women's midweek group in January, mixing well-known songs with information about the history of the ukulele. Then they

had a slot during the church's annual pantomime. They even have a uniform which includes yellow jumpers, stetsons and sunflowers on their lapels.

"We're not polished, but we think if we're having fun, others will be too," said Marie. "This is a new adventure for all of us. I'm still learning myself, and I'm trying to pass on what I know.

"We have great fun rehearsing, and I'm glad that others enjoy it too. We are very much a team, sharing fun, friendship and supporting each other through life's ups and downs."

Her vicar, Canon Bob White, said: "This group of individuals has grown in confidence and are also supporting one another in their life, both in things they do in the church and in their day-to-day lives. It has led to a growth in fellowship and sense of belonging together to the Body of Christ."

not about removing people from the world to seek refuge within the Church, but about releasing and empowering all God's people in order that the whole of creation might be transformed and restored in Christ."

For details, to read the report and to find resources, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/lay.