

Of Google and *God*

One of my daughters has just moved to Harrogate with her job. She phoned last Sunday afternoon :

Her : 'I went to a church this morning. It was awful. How can I find somewhere better?'

Me : 'Look on the internet'

Her : 'Can't do, I can't get it yet from my home'

Me : 'Never mind, I'll look for you.'

So I did. I asked the mighty Google to search for 'Churches Together Harrogate'. First in the list of websites was <http://www.harrogate.co.uk/churchestogether/> . A quick click **and there was the home page of Churches Together in Harrogate.** But how to find a suitable church for daughter? Well, the link that says 'I'm looking for ...' seems a good bet. Hey, it works! Up comes a page with a clickable GOD at the top. Leave that for later. Click on 'Children and Youth'. Well, wadyaknow. Here are Guides, Brownies, Scouts, Youth for Christ ... and churches with youth and young people's programmes. Click to an interesting looking church. One phone call and daughter says she'll try the place that evening.

There was a phone call on Monday :

Her : 'Hi Dad, it was great!'

Me : 'That's nice, dear'

I couldn't believe how easy it had been. So I went back to the website to look for God. To be honest, God Himself didn't pop up on the screen. But there was some helpful information and links to places where I could find out more. Brilliant!

Of Websites and ... Websites

Then, thinks me, what about trying it out on another town where I know a bit about the churches. Oh dear. First, there doesn't seem to be a website for Churches Together in that town. There's one for the district, though, so let's try that. Hmm... to find details of churches, first choose a denomination. It's not like that in Harrogate. I try Church of England. Now choose a diocese. Then a deanery. And up pops a biography of an archdeacon... Finally, I find a suitable church. But what an uphill struggle! I didn't bother with God, I might have been directed to a theology degree.

Which just goes to show that there are websites and there are ... well, websites. Nobody sets out to produce an unhelpful one, but there are plenty around. I was lucky with Harrogate. Anyone looking for a suitable church in the other place would have problems. As for finding God ... enough said.

The Important Bit

But this isn't really a gripe about websites. It's actually about you and me. Because you – if you are a Christian – are God's website. You are God's interface with the world. It's you that people turn to if they are looking for God. It's you that can

make the difference between them finding God and giving up because it seems all too difficult.

So what sort of website are you like? Do you :

- Make it easy for people to know that you can help?
- Answer their questions rather than tell them what you think they need to know?
- Talk about God rather than churchy things?
- Keep it simple, clear and at the right level?
- Help them find a church that's right for them rather than insist they come to yours?
- Know where to point them for further help?

You do? Congratulations, you are God's Harrogate website!

The Even More Important Bit

And if you'd like to find out about God but don't know how to start?

It's a pity there's no Google to help you. But hang on, doesn't God say in the Bible 'Seek and you will find'? Perhaps there's a divine Google here! So go on, have a chat with one of God's human websites. 'I'm looking for ...' is a good starting point. And if the answer doesn't seem very helpful, don't give up. Perhaps they aren't one of God's Harrogate websites. Just do as you would with Google – work down the list until you find the right one for you. As with the world-wide-web, there's a lot of really useful stuff out there – it's just a matter of finding it.

Steve Kinnersly

How well are we getting the message across?

These suggestions were first made available at the Annual Assembly 2004; also available on the Churches Together website

Physical attributes - external

The appearance of the buildings (church, office): state of repair and external decoration

The notice board: how up to date?

How much relevant / irrelevant information? Crèche? Youth Groups?

Any awkward "competitive" statements ("Powerful prayer meeting")

Opening hours and office hours?

Contact details? Telephone, address, website

How to find out more info (website or internal notice board?)

Directions to car park(s)

Links to other local churches ("nearest cash machine") and Churches Together in Harrogate?

Key access (remember village churches)

Include the youth fellowship in the 'tidying the church yard' rota!

How well does all this live out the church's stated Mission statement?

Physical attributes - internal

Internal appearance: state of repair and décor

Seating comfort and quality ("Harrogate church pew comfort index")

Welcome card; what's included? (Consider the Aeroplane info card)

Repeated info: office hours, church open hours, leader day off

Service times - including nursing homes, school assemblies?

Lighting: good, adequate or poor (think DDA - and VIP)

Prayer request area (tree? cards?) A clear - yet unseen ministry

List of other churches in your CT Area Group, contact numbers etc.

List of chaplaincies in Harrogate? (Schools, hospital, forces etc)

How has your Churches Together Area Group considered a "corporate" design for the Area?

State of the notice boards; who manages this essential attractor?

Where do you post notices for everyone? What about those for regular members? Who is the audience?

Tariff of services: how much to get married here?

Leaflet racks for supported works?

Toilets: how clearly signed? With flowers? Baby change area?