

## **CAROL SINGING IN THE MALL**

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Research shows that the majority of non-churchgoers would be tempted to go to a carol service if invited to do so by a friend. If this is so, then as Christians we need to be in the temptation business – we need to put on carol services and then invite friends and neighbours to come and ‘indulge’ themselves. Yes, ‘indulge’ is the right word. For non-churchgoers come to enjoy the singing of traditional carols, the magic of candlelight, and the coffee and mince pies (or even better the mulled wine) which follow the carol service.

But what about the non-churchgoers who will not be so easily tempted? The answer surely is that if they will not come to us, then we need to go to them. So over the last few years, as many other churches have done, we have gone carol-singing in our local shopping mall on the last Sunday before Christmas. But rather than taking with us just a small band of enthusiasts, we take the whole church. We do this by holding a short morning service and then together going across the road to the packed mall. Initially I tried to limit the service to just ten or fifteen minutes, but some felt they were short-changed, and so now we allow the service to go on for half-an-hour, with a decent act of worship as also a brief exposition of God’s Word. Then off we go carol singing.

However, we don’t simply sing carols. Instead we put on a twelve minute presentation with readings and carols. But everything is short and to the point. So we rarely sing more than two verses of one carol – what people want is a medley of carols. Furthermore, we have discovered that few people stand around for any length of time – so we repeat our presentation. On the first occasion we did this, we repeated ourselves twice (i.e. three presentations in all), but by the time we began our third presentation some of our older folk as also the young families were sloping off. So we limit ourselves now to 25 minutes.

Initially we didn’t collect money – we felt that it does the church’s image no good if it is always seen to be asking for money. But it became clear that people wanted to give money – indeed they would come forward with money, whether or not we had a container for money. So we now collect money for one of the town’s good causes.

While we sing, the younger children hand out invitations to our carol services. Not only does this give them something to do, it is also a remarkably effective way of ensuring that people take an invitation – for few people want to offend a child by refusing to take a leaflet from them!

If I’m honest, I only know of one person who has made it to committed church membership as a result of this form of outreach. Indeed, for all I know, our Christmas presentation has not even scratched the surface of popular Christmas sentimentality Christmas. But its worth a try. I commend it to you.

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