

ROTARY – A CLUB TO JOIN?

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For a good number of years I have considered joining Rotary. When I first came to Chelmsford, I tried one of the lunch-time clubs – but I was put off because the vast majority of their members were retired, and I wanted to be mixing with the present ‘movers and shakers’ of the town. With the encouragement of my local undertaker, I then tried an evening club, but in the end felt that the demands of my church meant I could not afford giving over a whole evening every week to such an activity. Then this year I heard about a breakfast club – it meets at 7.30 a.m. in a hotel just 700 yards from my church, and is finished by 8.30 a.m. Furthermore, at that hour of the day it does not tend to clash with other engagements! So I accepted an invitation to go along – and eventually joined. At £7 a throw, the breakfast is not the cheapest in town – but it gives me an opportunity to get to know all sorts of people in the town – farmers, university staff, policemen, civil servants, local councillors, all kinds of small businessmen. Needless to say, as a minister I already mix with people from all sorts of backgrounds – but here I have a regular opportunity to mix with a totally different set of individuals, most of whom do not go to church.

It was a fascinating experience being ‘inducted’ into Rotary by the regional president. For five minutes the importance of ‘service above self’ was drummed into me – as also the importance of setting high ethical standards in my work. I kid you not, although there was no specific mention of God, I found this Rotary induction enormously challenging.

So every Wednesday morning I am there, enjoying my full English breakfast. It doesn’t do my waistline any good, but so what? But the question arises: what am I achieving through being a member of Rotary? Clearly there is the helping to raise money for good causes. But that’s not special to Rotary – why, as a church we already raise a good deal of money too. There is also the opportunity to develop friendships with non-churchgoers, and that is not unimportant. But is there any other benefit?

The other Wednesday I discovered there is. The question came up as to what we should do for Christmas. I said that we should have a Christmas breakfast party and use this as a springboard to invite other potential new members – yes, as a minister, I know all about building up an institution! So we agreed to have a party – with champagne laid on by the president. And then to my amazement, the president, who is not a churchgoer, turned to me and said: “You’re ‘a man of the cloth’ – would you be willing to speak about the meaning of Christmas”. What a wonderful Christmas gift that will be – and all because I have eaten a full English breakfast every Wednesday!

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