

## ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *I really enjoyed the Big Hymn Sing on Holy Cross Sunday evening. We must do it again! But it made me wonder why we have so little by way of evening services at Holy Cross. Most churches have Evensong and even mid-week services, but we have very few indeed. Is there a reason for this and can it change?*

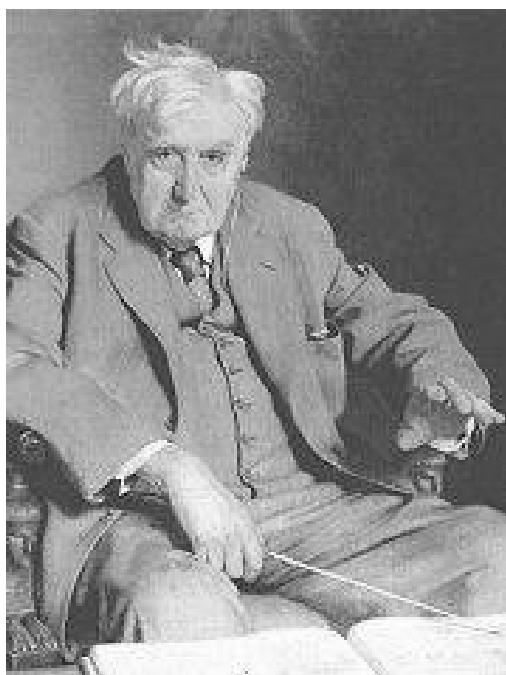
**Answer:** I am glad you enjoyed the Big Hymn Sing. I enjoyed it too. There was a good mixture of singing, praying, readings, discussion, research, comment and opinion, all bound together by a sense of fun! We will do it again, and hopefully more than the 30 people who attended last time will find it sufficiently enticing.

Greenford is and has been since the 1920s, essentially a suburb, a place where people commute to their work place or look after their children. For many years the pattern was for the bread-winner to leave home at 6.30am or earlier and take the tube or bus to their place of work, returning home as late as 7.00pm or 7.30pm. In this work pattern, a place for worship was difficult to find. In the 1960's, there would be a Mass in the church at 6am, making it possible for people to worship before their journey to work. Evening worship became difficult because who wants to get home and eat at 7.30pm and then dash down to Church for an evening service?

But then, as the 1970s and 1980s progressed, attendance at all churches started to decline. My predecessor, Malcolm Smart, decided to discontinue Sunday Evensong in the 1970s because the attendance had dropped to single figures. Mid-week services are a victim of the general decline in attendance at worship nationally. They are also victims of the current Church of England ethos which makes

attendance at Church not a matter of priority. Anglicans often feel that their presence at Church is not a pre-requisite of belonging, which is, of course, an error. Unless we are gathered together, it is difficult to see how our belonging can be creative for all of us.

As fewer people attended, the services gently dropped away. It would seem that in our neck of the woods, attendance on Sunday morning is satisfying the needs of most of the church community. There is no apparent demand for change or an increase in the frequency of services. This enquiry is the first time that matter has been raised for several years.



There is a need for contrasting climates in worship. The noisy bustling parish mass is great but we also need quietude, reflection, space, and yes, a chance to sing hymns, especially the great hymns, in an atmosphere of worship. This can greatly enhance one's awareness of God. But we need the best words and music, rather than the banal and pathetic stuff on offer from hymnals today. Ralph Vaughan Williams, (pictured) the editor of *The English*

*Hymnal* in 1902 wrote:

*"No doubt it requires a certain effort to tune oneself to the moral atmosphere implied by a fine melody; and it is far easier to dwell in the miasma of the languishing and sentimental hymn tunes which so often disfigure our services. Such poverty of heart may not be uncommon, but at least it should not be encouraged by those who direct the services of the Church."*

I agree.

Neil Richardson