

The Gate Keeper and the Good Shepherd

John 10:3-7

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him,
and the sheep hear his voice.
He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
When he has brought out all his own,
he goes ahead of them,
and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.
They will not follow a stranger,
but they will run from him
because they do not know the voice of strangers.'
Jesus used this figure of speech with them,
but they did not understand what he was saying to them.
So again Jesus said to them,
'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

It is a striking image.

In the ancient times, the good shepherd would protect the flock against predators by physically lying across the entrance to the sheepfold, becoming a human gate, a barrier to prevent unwanted entrances as well as preventing the sheep from wandering off into danger.

In our 21st century world, a gatekeeper is someone who controls access to somebody or something.



Oddly, the lowest of the old medieval holy orders of the Church was called an **ostiary** – or gate keeper- a person who was held responsible for looking after the door of the church – or *ostium* in Latin.

The illustration shows the church's hierarchical structure from the olden days!

Thinking about this prompted me to ask the question – are we good gate keepers in our own day?

And what gates do we have control of?

Open Church policy

The most obvious way in which we are gate keepers is simply opening the church as much as possible to allow anyone to come in. This sounds simple or even naïve but there is a very powerful statement made by a church which stands open and one which stands closed. We ought to be making efforts to staff the church with people in order to make it safe to be open as often as possible. For this reason, I am proposing that we soon start an Open Saturday policy in which anyone who wants to can come and spend some time in Church on Saturday mornings, confident in the knowledge that other people will also be there. They can use the opportunity to meet, clean, polish, prepare, work, photocopy, have tea and coffee, and this can all be offered with a Morning Prayer to start off with, a service lasting about 15 minutes which could be led by anyone, not just a priest. I hope that we can get this idea established in the near future.

Some of the other gate keeping functions to consider including:

Our baptism and Confirmation policy

This is an open policy where we juggle issues. On the one hand, we don't want to treat the sacrament lightly, and appear to offer it without any concerns for who is asking. On the other hand, we realise that the sacrament of Baptism is not ours to offer, but God's. We are free to restrict it or to offer it freely because we remember that the work done in the baptism is done by God, not us, and we are the vessels of God's free love, not there to make it difficult for people.

Our Church School Admissions policy

This is always a tricky issue. Our policy is agreed by the Governing Body (GB) which has a majority of Church organisation representatives on it. The policy operates when the school is over-subscribed, and only then. If we are not over-subscribed, then all the children who apply get a place. When there is a place, the place is filled. We do not hold places vacant. The GB policy is designed to offer priority to families who are clearly members of the Church community but also to serve the local Greenford community- to offer places to local children who have affiliation to other faiths or none. This policy is often objected to and misunderstood by people from further afield who feel that their Christian credentials should out do the needs of more local children.

Our Communications policy

Well, we have a fully open website thanks to our webmaster Richard Bell. Our other parish communications are available freely but remain insider documents. Perhaps we need to reconsider that and look for ways of communicating by the written word with more people in our parish?

Our Lent 2008 invitation

Four people responded to our Lenten invitation, but that was a cold canvass and if we were more in touch with them, our wider parishioners might be more interested in responding to initiatives, perhaps.

What for?

Being gate keepers is a big responsibility and the more you think about it, the bigger the job becomes. We must always remember that we are not owners of the church but we remain desirous being the mouth, hands and feet of Jesus Christ, his Body doing his work.

And what is the reason for all this?

As Jesus put it: **I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.** John 10: 10

