

Some thoughts on Market Chaplaincy



Andrew Veitch has been a Market Chaplain for some years and here he reflects on the changes which have already happened and those which are expected to happen in the near future and considers their impact on the traders who have become his friends.

The headlines in Birmingham are all about the big things that are happening or going to happen – the opening next year of the new New Street Station and Grand Central – 40 new shops based around the new John Lewis store beside the station; the opening of a large new Primark in what used to be the Pavilions shopping mall; and HS2, which seems to be getting ever closer despite all the protests and concerns.

But for many these huge projects are very distant and will bring more challenges and threats to their livelihoods. Even The church at Carrs Lane is threatened by HS2 and the Council's plans to develop a new 'posh' square opposite the HS2 station which will see M & S and the church having to move. The Bull Ring markets are one of those areas where a large question mark hangs over the future – and it's been hanging there for years. Normally a recession is good for markets as people tighten their belts and look for cheaper retailers to buy from.



But this recession has hit hard due to the likes of Primark, Pound Shops, and other low cost retailers who are often selling cheaper than market traders can buy for. Added to that the constant rumours that the wholesale market will be closing and moving out to Witton will make a huge difference to the outdoor and indoor market traders, and any reduction in those markets will hit the RAG market as well. So this is the background for those of us who are market chaplains.



For me in the RAG, regular questions and comments include:- “Have you heard anything new about the Wholesale? How are other traders doing? I don't think I can last out another winter paying out more rent than my takings each week”. But it's even more than that because the City Council run the markets and as we all know, the Council is having to cut staff and services in all directions and this is having an understandable knock-on effect in the markets.

You might think with all this that I wish I didn't have to be there, but strangely it's quite the opposite – it makes me feel pleased that I am there and am able to share in the difficulties they are all facing. In time the Chaplain becomes

'one of us'. As a trader told me once: You share in their lives – joys and sorrows. But sharing is a two-way thing and so the chaplain needs to do the same so that they also share in yours. It took me quite a time to realise this. You don't just listen – you don't just listen to a friend. You can only become a friend by sharing in each other's lives.

But I know that chaplaincy is more than this as we have a role to play in sharing the love that God has given us, and this is not so easy. And yet I believe that just being there is important, as people know that we are there - from the church - and that stands for something that we cannot easily measure.