

## LANGUAGE & LONELINESS

I am always fascinated by the new words that appear in the dictionary every year:

'Snowflake' - an insult used against people who are judged to be over-sensitive.

'Hangry' - when you are really hungry and find yourself becoming increasingly angry.

'YOLO' which stands for 'you only live once' and therefore is used to explain reckless or impulsive behaviour.

Our language is always evolving and changing, and new words appear to help us describe what we experience as human beings.

Recently I made a really fascinating discovery that, up until the beginning of 19th century, the word 'Loneliness' didn't exist. Presumably, because people lived in small communities in which everyone knew everyone, there was no need for a language of loneliness. How things have changed! Today we have what has been termed an epidemic of loneliness.

I actually think faith communities have a lot to offer this epidemic; perhaps we do not need a new language to address this, but instead to redeem an ancient language that can offer meaning today:

'Presence' - a belief, not in a 'magic' God who takes away all life's problems, but one who promises again and again 'I will be with you', so we are never on our own.

'Church' - a gathering of people; a community that anyone can belong to, for there should be no qualification, just a welcome and an acceptance.

'Purpose' - to be part of something that makes a difference to the lives of others, through community engagement or support of charities.

'Sacred space' - a place, a community that we can belong to and be the people God created us to be. A community in which it is ok to be me.

In the next few months we will be hoping to start the building work on the 'Welcome Area'; much of the work is work that has needed to be done, such as improving disabled access; upgrading utilities; replacing structure that is tired or even falling down. The majority of the cost is due to much-needed infrastructure rather than a 'fancy' kitchen.

However, I also believe there is a bigger vision. To offer a safe space for welcome and belonging, to offer support to people who are struggling with loneliness. Perhaps it could be a 'listening space' for those who feel they have no one to hear them; perhaps a gathering place for parents of young children who feel isolated and alone; perhaps it could be a 'safe space' for those who are struggling to remember but may be prompted by shared memories; perhaps it could be a practical space for those who have no access to the internet in a world where everything is online.

These are some of the ideas that the Church Leadership Team are exploring, so that we might truly create a 'Welcome Area' that offers hospitality to those who need it most. Perhaps this changes the word 'Welcome' from an easily-used expression to a description of something that truly transforms.

Helen