

## Action Talk for National Ultreya

When I was asked to give the “Action” talk at the National Ultreya I had one of those moments when you open your mouth and suddenly hear yourself saying ‘yes’ when you were thinking ‘no’. Over the years this has happened several times to me so you would have thought I would have been prepared. The same thing happened when I was called by God to Lay Ministry through becoming a Reader; I avoided answering God for a long time, I even changed jobs but in the end I heard myself saying ‘yes’. It happened again when I was asked to give up the job that I loved to become the Church Maid at St. Mary’s Parish Church in Whitby, then again when I found myself as Lay Director of York Cursillo; each time I had the same ‘Did I mean to say that?’ moment.

But God as always was right and I believe and trust that he called me to these particular roles in order for me to witness to the Gospel and be where he wants me to be. Life as a Christian is not always easy; there can be many challenging times on our walk with the Lord but he is right there beside us never leaving our side. Isaiah Ch 6 v 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And I said here I am send me.”

I have been called by God to do some amazing things and this has only been possible through his Grace. “As the Father sent me, so I ‘m sending you” there is no getting away from this; for here is the secret of all Christian ministry, yours and mine, lay and ordained. It’s the secret of everything from being a quiet back row member of the church to being a platform speaker. If you are going to do any single solitary thing as a follower and servant of Jesus, this is what it’s built on.

The resurrection blows away the boundaries of possibility and entices us into new ways of being. As Christians we are being challenged and encouraged to move beyond our comfort zones to explore another dimension of Christian living, and this will for many of us mean that we will often face very challenging times in our lives and perhaps lead us in a new direction. When I used to hear the word action I would associate it with big, elaborate, extravagant gestures but often the smallest gesture can bring about the biggest changes in peoples lives. Prayer can be the simplest action we can offer and yet it can have the biggest impact in peoples’ lives.

When I took over as the Church Maid at St. Mary's Parish Church in Whitby I was handed a black bin bag full of prayer request slips, I just gasped when I looked inside – “Don't know what you going to do with them – Pray I replied – well you'll be on your knees for a while there's two more black bags in that pew.” It took me every day for over two weeks to work through those prayer requests.

Through my work I encounter hundreds of visitors every week. Sometimes an unexpected opportunity arises for me to talk to them about my faith; this may seem strange as I work in a Church, but our visitors are usually more interested in our unusual building and its box pews. Some people will approach me individually and ask questions or even seek reassurance – and it is through this I am able to talk of my love of Christ to very often non believing visitors in the hope that it will lead them to faith. Being attuned to what God might be doing in our lives and the lives of those around us we learn to expect the unexpected - as it says in Col 4 v 5-6;

“Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of Grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

St. Mary's is perched fairly close to the edge of the cliff and last year we became the first place the police came to when looking for missing people especially those who are extremely vulnerable and or intended to commit suicide. Sadly, a couple of people did jump over the cliff and did not survive. On occasion I have spent time with people who had come to the town with the intent of not going home again – but at the last minute had come into the church, these windows of opportunity are God given and after these brief encounters I have to lay it at the foot of the cross and leave it there. Because to carry someone else's burden is not healthy for any of us. Whitby for such a small seaside town went through a couple of years when there were a surprisingly high number of suicides, both locals and visitors to the town – our Church Wardens son in law, a member of one of our congregations and my nephew being among them.

Many people leave flowers and messages tied to the fence in the grave yard, we have been working to encourage them to come into the church and leave

their flowers and cards on the Chancel steps, this is going very well and we now have several regulars who come back to the church whilst visiting Whitby in order to remember their loved ones, to light a candle or to just sit quietly in the Chancel. My ministry involves being available as much as possible for when people want to talk, to pray or to simply just be there. Due to the volume of items left I have set aside two large box pews in the South Transept to keep them in, these pews are lined with messages, prayers, cards, photos and special items left by people. This area is not actually open to the public but people will come in and ask for a few moments in the special pews; for many these visits are a part of the healing process of their grief. This may sound quite miserable but there can be extreme joy amongst the sadness, a lady came to the church for four years before she asked me to pray with her; that was such a privilege as I knew not to offer to pray with her as this was not appropriate until she was ready. There was such joy and peace as at long last she let go of all her grief and became ready to move on.

We are sent into the world to represent Christ and his Church, to bear witness to him wherever we may be and to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world. We are called by the Gospel to "Make disciples of all nations" so that the church might be found everywhere. Our call to action requires us to tell people about Jesus Christ, to help people grow in their relationship with God and to transform society and its structures. Sometimes God surprises us with opportunities for action, although these opportunities are often unplanned, we can be prepared to respond through prayer and openness. Our Christian life is friendship with Christ and we want to share this friend with others. Our Christian action is our opportunity to share and spread the life of grace to others.

One of the first verses of scripture given to me when I became a Christian was John 15 v 16 "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last." This has stayed with me and it is also a reminder of how Cursillo has impacted on my life and how Cursillo has taught me to;

"Make a friend, Be a friend and Bring a friend to Jesus."

Ultreya