

NOTES AND QUOTES

From the Introduction to 'On the Threshold'

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (2000)

Crossing over the threshold into a new building can be both exciting and uncomfortable. It can be exciting because we are moving into a new place. It can be uncomfortable because we may be unsure about what we may discover. The word "threshold" has long been used as a symbol for moving from one way of life into another or from one way of thinking to another.

In our day and age many people now stand on the threshold of our Church. They have many questions:

Do I really want to go in?

Will there be someone to open the door to me?

What will stepping over the threshold involve?

Might I feel trapped?

Do I really want to be here anyway?

Would I rather walk away?

Will I be made welcome?

If I walk away now will I ever be able to come back? '

Whether it is on the presbytery doorstep or at the church or at the school entrance, standing on the threshold can be a nerve wracking experience, especially for those who, for whatever reason, do not feel at home in a church situation.

The local church community perhaps represented by the priest, the catechist or the teacher, also stands on the threshold. When we meet those who come knocking on our doors asking for initiation for themselves or their children, we too have questions. How are we to respond to them? Should we welcome them with open arms and no pre-conditions or should we make certain demands?

If so, what terms of membership should be required? Yet standing on the threshold means more than this. Thresholds are not just places where others stand. We stand there too. It is not only those who come to us who pause on the threshold with all their questions, indecision and uncertainty. We also stand there.

To really meet and stand with others on the threshold means to open ourselves up to our own sense of brokenness and vulnerability. This should not surprise us because it is doing what Jesus did; making himself vulnerable as he met people in order to offer them the way to new life and freedom.

'I believe that this old and respected structure of the parish has an indispensable mission of great contemporary importance'.

Paul VI (1963)

'Pope John Paul II once said that the parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a familiar and welcoming home.'

Donal Harrington in 'The Welcoming Parish'

In the structure of the parish, the church as a whole has committed itself to care for me. The parish as such is a statement to me, 'we care that you exist'.

Donal Harrington in 'The Welcoming Parish'

'Mission is about not creating individual believers but communities'.

Henri Godin (in '*France, pays de mission?*'1943)

SEEN ON A POSTER OUTSIDE A CHURCH IN CANADA:

'There are no strangers here, just friends we have not yet met'.