



With Hearts and Minds for young people

(Moira Redmond, February 2009)

Take one group of teenagers, milling outside St Peter's on a Saturday morning. They're shuffling a bit, not quite sure what they're doing here – it's *church*, it's a *Saturday* – they're fiddling with their jackets and maybe they've only come 'cos their Mum made them. They're nervous because a priest is going to talk at them. About religion.

Take a look at the same group maybe half an hour later, and you'll find a gang of completely mesmerized theology students, arguing and questioning about what is undoubtedly *their church*, *their faith*. They are taking part in a special project for young people – and Canon Paul has worked his magic one more time.

When the With Hearts and Minds programme started in the Parish a couple of years ago, the youth group organizers thought it might be a good idea to offer something similar for young people. But, we decided, it should be simpler, straightforward: one morning session with Canon Paul Townsend, at the church, based on the format of the Mass, learning about their religion. At the end, the carrot: they could have a trip up the church tower – a rare privilege – and then a lunch party afterwards.

We didn't know what to expect the first time, or even if anyone would want to come. But we assembled a great group of kids of varied ages, and had an event that surpassed all our hopes, so we've repeated it several times since. The session resembles a journey, and it parallels the Mass. The Canon starts everyone outside on the street, then moves into the church. It's never quite the same twice, but roughly speaking he moves through the Sacraments, the Mass, the way a church is designed, what goes where, and the nuts and bolts of the sacred work of the Parish. The children can look at everything – including inside the safe in the Sacristy, and who wouldn't be fascinated? And they can ask any questions they want. And once they got started on those questions...: "So what exactly happens...I think they're all looking at something... looking *for* something...the space is God... but at the Last Judgment do we get our bodies back?.. is it like a ladder?...Is God looking at us?... what does *this* mean?...why is it shaped like that? ... well, why?... "

After climbing up the tower and looking out across Winchester, (oldies clinging to the flagpole, young ones leaning out and pointing) everyone assembles in Peterhouse for a proper lunch, sitting at a huge table. Anyone who has been will tell you it's the best lunch party ever – adults and teenagers enjoying their conversation and their food; parents, arriving to collect, pulling up a chair to sit down and join in – and it's fair to say everyone ends the session highly refreshed in every way, and looking at the Church with new eyes.

We try to run these events twice a year, and now the word has got out and parents want to muscle in. We had so many of them saying "Oh I'll volunteer to help out at Hearts and Minds – please? Please let me join in?" that we had too many chaperones, so we did a session just for adults.

We'll keep organizing Hearts and Minds as long as we have takers. Contact us (01962 861123), moirar@msn.com) if you are between 11 and 18, and would like an invitation when the next one is happening. If nothing else, your parents will be jealous that you got the chance...

Moira Redmond & Sue Broadbent