

**A MESSAGE FROM THE VERY REVEREND JOHN CLARKE
DEAN OF WELLS
ASSOCIATION VICE-PRESIDENT**

A rumour of God

The latest survey of British Social Attitudes paints a bleak picture of the future of the Church of England. It suggests that each generation is becoming more distant from the practice of faith, so that people in their thirties and younger have very few points of contact with the church, and have lost the art of what it means to worship. Those who continue to come, even on an occasional basis are usually born into of a church-going family.

The fear is that we are becoming a society deaf to the call of God, and that such deafness will lead to the disappearance of the church, and even to spiritual and moral chaos as the core values that hold British society together are no longer recognised.

I am not as pessimistic as that. There are plenty of churches in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, including the cathedral, which still attract people and nurture a faith in Christ that is equal to the demands of modern life. Nevertheless we need as a church to look outwards, to be flexible in the type of services that we offer, and to welcome the seeker, especially the younger seeker without expecting them to conform too closely to our ways. All this without losing the depth and comfort brought by familiar words, songs and hymns!

In this changing scene bellringers continue to play an important part. Bells keep alive the rumour of God to a generation who may not walk as far as the church, but who, when they hear the sound of the bells, may for a second pause and think of God, before returning to the Sunday papers. And as society changes, and lives become ever more complicated, it may be that the rumour of God will once again become an urgent and converting story that people realise they need in order to make sense of the world that we live in.

So, on behalf of the Diocese of Bath and Wells, a big thank you to members of the Diocesan Association of Change Ringers! Thank you for giving so generously of your time and skill and money to keep the bells ringing across the villages and towns of the historic county of Somerset. Without you the rumour would be less than a whisper!

John Clarke
Dean of Wells