



# Whose round is it?

They say that despite being better connected through social media, people have become more anti-social. We're spending too much time locked up in our homes, waiting for an online shopping delivery, or swiping our way to the next level of that addictive gaming app.

And yet, none of us lives very far away from a bastion of social interaction, and the hub of many a community: the pub. Once the nemesis of respectable, Victorian evangelicals, the pub now has overcome its branding as a hotbed of vice and debauchery (mostly!), and is being recognized and heralded for its community value. This venue for social interaction can prove to be a (perhaps) unlikely location for Christian witness.

The disciples, with the instructions of Christ's mission fresh in their minds were equipped by the Holy Spirit with special tools for spreading the good news: tongues to communicate with all people (Acts 2:1-4). This tells us something very simple about the nature of disciples' mission, and of our own: we are supposed to communicate with others; we should

be visible and *audible* witnesses. Our Christian calling is not just about Sunday mornings, it's about Friday nights too!

I haven't set about to whack people over the head with evangelism, or go door-knocking... But throughout my own Christian journey I have spoken often to people in the pub about my developments, and about the goings on at the church in the village. People began to know me as a church-goer, and as a Christian, not just as a barman. We have seen a stronger link develop between both pub and church communities, and in fact I've noticed a few extra faces in the pews too.

Besides being a platform for reaching the social heart of the village, the pub is already an existing resource for the church's mission in our community. I have been amazed sometimes at how openly some people will talk to one another, and to me, in the pub. There's a real sense of openness in that common space; bereavements, separations, illnesses, money problems, all get shared, and there is genuine fellowship and support.

On one occasion a woman came up to the bar, and she said to me quietly and plainly that her son (about my age) had committed suicide. I didn't know what



to say, and I was thankful that she didn't really want to hear anything; she just wanted someone to talk to, someone to tell... and she found it at the pub.

I believe that the mission we all have as Christians requires us to get up off the sofa, and start engaging with the community around us... we need to get the lamp out from under the bushel (Matt 5:15). This all starts with a willingness to interact with others, and I have the pub to thank for making me a more sociable person. If we want to learn to love our neighbours, maybe we can try getting to know them first. Whose round is it..?

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