

The Yorkshire Church On Show - - Meeting People Where They Are

Display Development

Five years ago the ecumenical Yorkshire Church on Show Committee challenged its Design Team to work together in designing and implementing a display for the Great Yorkshire Show that would more effectively attract many more Yorkshire Show visitors to engage with the Church on Show display.

The content of previous displays had chiefly been a static visual and informative display about churches and ministry in Yorkshire. In the period preceding 2004 as few as 600, chiefly older church members, were visiting the display over the three days, mostly for only a few minutes and with very little interaction with a small number of stewards.



Gossiping the Gospel

The change of approach was to re-focus the display entirely on relevant Gospel themes that our churches share and are called to share.

Using fun and thought-provoking interactive activities the overall aim has been to explore the Gospel with those of all ages, in a way that engages those of all faiths and none. Emphasis has been given to what the Church has to say and believes, rather than what the Church is and does.

Over the past five years the number of visitors to the display has consistently grown and draws up to 4,500 visitors over the three days appealing to a wide age-range. The average time and interaction with visitors has each year substantially increased and a growing number of visitors tell us they make a priority of allowing more time to return each year.

In fact, in the past two years we have had to increase the space available, reduce the number of features, and at times subtly marshal the flow of visitors to cope with demand and maintain the quality of interaction.

We believe the statistics and visitor comments bear out the success and effectiveness of our change in approach.



Response to a Parable Approach

Much like Parables, the show display is currently encountered by visitors on many differing levels:

- *some* appreciate it as fun and entertaining;
- *some* find it simplistic & superficial;
- *some* find it connects with personal experience;
- *some* find it challenges preconceived ideas and attitudes;
- *some* are confused, challenged or surprised by its meaning to them;
- *many* find it offers points of reference & reflection for months and years to come;
- others discover it explores the relevance of God's Kingdom in a fresh and new way with potential life-changing consequence.

Whilst the Design Team have a clear message in mind and prayerful expectation in what we present at the show, we are non-prescriptive and encourage visitors to explore their own understanding of its meaning and purpose.

Inevitably some seed will fall on stony ground and will fail to take root.

However, we are continually encouraged by substantial anecdotal evidence that much seed falls on more fertile ground and by God's grace has great potential to flourish.



Whilst the design team endeavors to create a visually inspiring & attractive environment, the quality of visitor involvement relies mostly on friendly non-threatening interaction with stewards, most of who enjoy the interactive opportunities the display offers.

Visitor Feedback

Each year stewards carefully record an array of unsolicited comments made by visitors. These have helped the Design Team develop aspects of the display that most appeal and engage such a wide variety of visitors. In recent years the vast majority of typical comment about the display is positive using such terms as *'though provoking'*, *'inspiring'*, and *'special'*, which encourages us to continue to present the Gospel in this way.

However, there are also each year a very few negative criticisms, These are almost entirely made by declared Christians, who generally believe the display fails to meet with their particular expectations. This is usually in regard to lack of material about specific churches or church events, and insufficient reference to Jesus, sin and/or salvation.

Sadly our observation is that these few individuals have most often not taken time to personally engage with the variety of activity and material on offer, or observed the level and depth to which other visitors are positively responding to the challenges of the display.

We rejoice and are encouraged that many, many more church members engage with the display. Inspired and excited by the effectiveness of this expression of the Gospel, many tell us they will take away aspects of the format to replicate and explore further in their own churches, groups and communities.

Nic Sheppard – Design Team

