Melanie Quinton

I’m Melanie Quinton. I was born in 1966 in London and we moved to Ipswich when I was about two.

I began to worship at St Margaret’s as a little girl, when I was about six and nowadays I go to the same church with my family.

Over the years, I’ve come and gone. As a student I went away, and chose other churches to go to and I spent ten years freelancing in London as a musician, and then got married and came back to live in Ipswich and have been at the church ever since.

Q What was church like when you were a child?

It was very different to how it is now. The services were much more formal. We tended to use books – the prayer book which we still use today for some things, and other books as well. And it was very much more, I would say clergy led. The clergy were at the front of the church and the congregation stayed sitting or standing up to sing.

Q What was it like for children at church?

Children were seen and not heard, and I think people did tend to wear their Sunday best in those days. We were generally very quiet. I do remember other children going to services with their parents but there were also children’s groups at the church, like a Sunday School which I joined after a few months.

Q Can you think back again to the church services and how they were presented?

The clergy I think were almost always robed, which they still are today, but there was very much more use of the pulpit . I think nowadays they tend to stand at the front from the reading desk on the floor level, the same level that the congregation sit. But in those days, they went up the steps. They still do sometimes, but less so now. And you’d be looking up at them, listening to the sermon.

Q What about the size of the congregation, can you remember anything about the people who worshipped there?

I think congregations were probably much the same. There were fewer services though in those days. Nowadays we have usually four services on a Sunday and I think then there would have been at most, three. I think in terms of numbers we probably have more people through the doors now, but they are spread out amongst the different services.

Q And the people who came along – what were they like in ages, how they dressed?

I think men were very much in suits, or certainly shirts and ties, ladies in dresses. But people didn’t go to church in their jeans and trainers.

Q How does that compare to today? Are you happy with how services have progressed today?

Oh, I think the church has to move with the times and it’s certainly done that. I think there are many positives about how we worship today. Firstly I think there is very much more variety in the styles of worship now. And we still have the very traditional eight o’clock communion service but the other services during the day follow a different pattern each week depending on which Sunday of the month it is.

Q How do children fit into the services?

I think the vast majority of children now go to the 9.30, what we call the Rise and Shine service and they go with their families. It’s a very informal service There’s communion once a month at that 9.30 service. People feel quite free to move around a lot, which is nice. Very often there are activities with pens and paper and colouring. Once a month we split into groups so there’ll be a little group for babies and toddlers and there’ll be another group for Pre-Schoolers and what we call Key Stage One children and then a group for the older children. And then there’ll be an activity for the adults, usually for people sitting and listening to the vicar doing a talk or something. That’s usually quite bible-based. The children are very very much part of that service, they are not shushed at all. It can be quite noisy. But that’s nice. The children obviously feel very welcome and that’s right that they should be there.

Q Can you explain what church meant to you as you were growing up?

I’ve come to my faith very gradually over the years. I haven’t had an overnight conversion like some people have. I have looked at older Christians as well and seen how they live out their faith. That’s very, very important, as well as the actual teaching that goes on inside the church.

I remember one lady in particular who was one of my Sunday School teachers. She was very quiet but she had a real, very deep and strong faith, and she was a woman of prayer, I would say. I just knew that she prayed a lot. That was wonderful.

Q How does the support help people going through difficult times?

I think there’s an awful lot of prayer goes on actually. I know nowadays there’s a prayer chain in the church, and if people know somebody is in particular need or having a certain problem, there’s a prayer chain and we will phone each other and I think it’s lovely for people to know that they are supported in that way.

Q In a big church, how do people feel they are being noticed?

I think at St Margaret’s we do try very hard to welcome people. Some people like to slip in and out unnoticed and it’s perfectly right that they should be able to do that. But I think also we do try and notice people who are there for the first time and welcome them in. There’s always coffee and biscuits, which the children love after two of the morning services – the 9.30 and the 11 o’clock service and again that’s a chance to chat and for people to share what’s been going on in their lives with each other.

Q What do you remember about the church community outside the Sunday services?

We used to have a youth club on a Saturday night which was run by a very lovely man who is sadly no longer with us, and his wife. Then there are home groups where people have bible study and get to know each other in much smaller groups.

Q What memories do you have of the social occasions?

I think we’ve had a few church walks over the years. I remember doing a walk called Beating the Bounds around the edge of the parish and everyone walking along with pushchairs as I think we did with our own children, and harvest lunches. We’ve got a church centre over the road from the church which is a fantastic space for get-togethers. And we had a really wonderful Millennium Party at the turn of the millennium which we’ve got lots of photos of, and that was a lovely occasion.

Q What happened there?

It was in the church hall and we had a big meal and there was dancing and purple and silver balloons everywhere.

Q How important are the traditional events for you as a family now?

I think church is for me by far the biggest part of Christmas. I can do without all the rest, the presents and everything, just going to church and a family meal would be enough really.

Q Anything about the other services at church today and how they differ from your childhood?

The 11 o’clock happens every week and it is a bit more traditional, slightly more depth to the worship and the congregation generally are a bit more mature in years on the whole. It’s generally liturgy based and so we have service books that we use. Having said that there are different music styles within that service, so one week we’ll have a choir, another week we’ll have a music group which is people playing guitars, with a keyboard accompaniment and people singing through microphones so that’s quite nice. We have a communion service at 11 o’clock three times a month and then, on the second Sunday of the month, is the traditional prayer book Morning Prayer service, so that’s choir led with the worship there. But I think there’s probably more involvement from the congregation than there may have been in the past. People other than clergy will do the readings, and usually the intercessions, which are the prayers. Also administering communion - whilst the clergy give out the bread, it’s usually lay people, people from the congregation who are licensed to give out the wine which is quite nice as well.

Q Why do you think it’s important, from your perspective, to have other people involved in the service like that?

Because we are all part of God’s family. I think that’s as it should be.

Q You have an evening service as well?

We do, that happens at 6.30 every week. Again, that has a very varied pattern. At the moment on the first Sunday of the month, there’s something we call the Celtic style service. And then on the second Sunday of the month, there’s always a communion service which takes place, in what we call the Lady Chapel area of the church which is quite light and airy, and that’s quite a nice and intimate service. And then on the third Sunday of the month, we have a service of evening prayer, people tend to sit in the choir stalls for that, facing each other which I think some people like and some people don’t! But that’s quite a reflective service. There’s a lot of candle lighting and it is quite symbolic and that’s usually led from the organ with one or two hymns and psalms. And on the fourth Sunday of the month, we have a big service of Choral Evensong which is very traditional and the congregation tend to listen rather than participate other than the hymns which they tend to sing, the choir tend to sing the responses and so on.

Q If I was interested in coming to St Margaret’s, how would I be received?

I think you would be given a good welcome, I hope. And you would be given either books at the door as you come in or sometimes no books because we do have an overhead projector and screen, and very often the words of songs would be up on the screen for people to look at rather than to read. But you’ll always be given what we call pew news, which is a sheet of notices for the week and very often page numbers in the books so that you can follow the service. For example, if you’ve got a Bible reading, it will say which page of the Bible it is on and that can be quite helpful.

Q How have you built up friendships in the church?

I don’t think I’ve talked about the link between the church and the school, that’s a very, very big part of St Margaret’s, we have lots of families who have children at the school who come into church. And then I think also through smaller groups like home group, Bible study groups. I think I have been in my particular group for 25 years now so some of those people I have got to know very well and that’s lovely, because there are all these people you can call on and ask for prayer support or indeed give them support. It’s a very special thing.

services that they sing at, because most of the children are at other services.

Q You said you tried other churches, what brought you back to St Margaret’s?

I suppose it’s like coming home. It’s like putting on a comfy pair of slippers – though church shouldn’t feel comfortable, there should be times when you feel uncomfortable and you are made to think and get outside your comfort zone. But there are also family connections because my parents both worship there now, and there is a sense of community.

End

*Highlights 3m 30s*