

**THE PARISH OF CHIRK**  
**St. Mary's Church, Chirk & St. David's Church, Froncysyllte**  
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The theme of this year's Diocesan Conference was "What is Church For?" The title could also have been "What is Church?".

Bishop Gregory opened by referring to Revelation 3:8 "I set before you an open door". By quoting this, he was encouraging innovation and exploration in our thinking and action about Church. For example, he said, instead of talking about "going to church", we should be talking about "being church" – an emphasis on the church as Christians worshipping and witnessing and working together, rather than the church building (which is often cold, dark, and uncomfortable, and no place to represent Christ or invite a friend to). We should not simply be "restructuring" the church, but "re-imagining" the church, and thinking of new ways of being church.

The visiting speaker was The Rev Robin Gamble, author of many books about evangelism and a Diocesan Evangelism Officer in the Church of England. By his own admission, he is more adept at asking questions than answering them, and he raised the following questions (amongst many):

- Are you a mission church?
- Who is the church for ?
- Is your church growing stagnant, or declining ?
- Does your church have a strategy for growth ?
- Are you more concerned about present members or about potential members ?

My personal comment here is to endorse what both the bishop and Robin Gamble were saying (and asking). Having said that, these questions have been asked before: the British Council of Churches had a Lent course called "What is church for?" in 1986, whilst the Church Growth Movement of the 1970s was challenging us to grow in numbers, in knowledge, in spirituality, etc. etc.

What worries me is that unless church members act quickly and decisively, there will not be enough of us to build a "new church".