

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

17 July 2013: Rev'd Will Hughes, St Peter's, Petersfield

The family of the church

One of the things Vicars often hear is 'I'm a religious person, I just don't need to go to church'. I've struggled with this, because it is obviously right: we can talk to God anywhere, at home, in the car, when we go to bed. We don't need to go to a special place to be near to God. So why do we go to church? What's the point?

There are several reasons, but one of the best explanations lies in the statement I heard the other day. 'I've got lots of brothers and sisters, I just never see them'. This statement is also true. Brothers and sisters are flesh and blood, and you don't have to see them to be related to them, but if we do see them, they can be so much more than people with a genetic link to us. A family is a family whatever we do, but if we spend time with them, they become a family in a whole different way.

We go to church, not because we need to in order to talk to God, but because we need to in order to be with God together - to be the family of the church.

That's why the church isn't only for services, though they are at the heart of what the church does. It's a place for the family, the community, to come together, and to enjoy being brothers and sisters.

That's why on 18th July we'll be launching **Refresh**: a weekly café and social space where anyone can come and have coffee and cake, and chat. It will be free, supported only by donations. It will run every Thursday from 10 to 12, and everyone is very welcome.

Because some of our relationships are not face to face, St Peter's also has free wi-fi every day, from 9 to 5. We've done this now because as the library is shut it's harder to find somewhere to go online in the town centre, and because at 'Refresh' you might rather surf than chat.

Jesus asked us to do two things: to love God, and to love our neighbour. The church is a place and a people who work to do both. We can be religious on our own, but it means missing out on a whole part of what life can be.

