

Views from the Pews: Variety

“I love variety,” said F as she reached for a jar of English marmalade instead of our usual Breakfast variety. “Doing things differently makes life so much more interesting.”

And, of course, she is so right. Without variety our world can simply shrink to the interest and enjoyment level of a daily cup of tea and slice of toast every morning except for Christmas Day - when our son insists we eat kippers. At the same time, variety is not always comfortable. Along with curiosity and a sense of adventure it requires levels of confidence and tolerance few of us actually possess.

I was often reminded of our quite determined resistance to variety, to novelty, and especially to change, during the last twelve months. Priestly rotation in the pulpit had given us two women and a bloke. One of the women brought with her an unmistakable US accent reflecting her interestingly different experience, and one brought up in the Tongan culture even added Tongan to her ministry. The bloke - the knighted Caucasian priest sent by Canterbury to the Vatican to build Anglo-Catholic bridges with the Pope, was fluent in Maori, and used it as if it was normal practice. Without any disrespect to the ministry of our other clergy, those three were headline different, especially when they preached. Humming and haahing in the pews was heard alongside the mutterings behind the pew sheets before the services occurred, and as it did during the week over gossip-inducingly-dangerous single shot flat whites. Then, millstone slowly, but clearly irreversibly, the triumvirate began winning over the flock.

Their shepherd's whistles were never directives. They were a welcoming invitation to consider new and enlightening perspectives on our place in modern society. The real value, however, was that not only were those perspectives presented with an extraordinary clarity and cloaked in elegant and revealing traditional cloth, but they came from three diverse cultural sources and offered three mutually enlightening different views of the one faith. Our tolerance

levels began to lift. We began to listen before we made up our minds. Those three priests, while sustaining us in the present by their tolerant, enlightened, and loving ministry, laid a foundation for the future which enables us to proceed in the utmost confidence and a quite unexpected joy. Oh, and a rather generous amount of love has seeped through the cracks as well. We want them to know how much they have enriched us with their variety, difference, and faith in the future.

Sam Edwards