*Transcript to video https://youtu.be/hhv-QcMTMnM*

**The courage to keep in touch**

A few years ago my sister bought me an annual membership to the National Gallery as a Christmas present. Just some idea that when I'm working in London, I have time to go and look round galleries. Well, during that year they sent me an e-newsletter, they sent me information, they sent me invitations and I enjoyed reading it all, and sometimes I got very close to actually going to the gallery. It just never happened.

At the end of that year no one was sat in an office in the National Gallery worrying about whether I was really a gallery going sort of person. No. In fact, what they did was just asked me if I'd like to continue my membership and hearing from them. And, of course, I did and I do. And eventually I went to the gallery.

But the other interesting thing that happened during that year is that I found myself more aware of galleries in general, of art in general. I went to visit galleries in smaller towns and in little communities because after all I am a gallery going kind of person.

It's never been easier for organisations to be in touch with us. You only have to look in my inbox or your inbox to know that interest groups, organisations, shops can just keep in touch with us in a variety of different ways. And the even better news for us as the Church of England is that those whom we meet through life's special moments want to be kept in touch with. In fact, across all our research the pattern is consistent. Nine out of ten people say that after one of life's special services they would like to hear from us again.

However, disappointingly, few of them feel that they have heard from us afterwards, other than perhaps a general parish newsletter.

What does being in touch look like? It means that we maintain contact, not just once, not just twice, but we keep on giving them information, invitations, sending them news about our church and encouraging them to be part of the story that they've joined. We don't know where that might take them.

It might be that we see them back in our church and it might take a long time. Our recent research with wedding couples shows that it can take three or four years before people become part of a worshipping community. But it might also be in a different place from the one where they had their special service. It might be that they return to a carol service at a church in a village where they come from or that they go to a church in a place where they now live. It might be somewhere completely different, where they light a candle as they remember someone that they loved.

But the important thing is that someone is maintaining contact. So don't give up. Have courage to keep in contact with people, not just once, not just for a short time, but to persist in that opportunity of maintaining contact, because that is how a relationship is built.

Our research is clear. If we don't keep in touch with people then the chances are they won't come back. But if we do keep in touch with them then they may just walk back through that door into a relationship with God and with God's people.