

“That’s the Wonder of Woolies.”

Dear Friends,

It is amazing how a simple slogan can stick so easily in the mind, sometimes long after its purpose has disappeared. So, it is with the phrase **“That’s the wonder of Woolies.”** By Woolworth’s 100th anniversary in 1979, it had become the largest department store chain in the world, (according to the Guinness Book of World Records). The real wonder, however, is that Woolworths lasted as long as it did. For soon after this I can recall obituaries being written, way back in the 1980s, for the chain, pointing out how grim its stores appeared compared to more sophisticated rivals, which even had carpet in their stores!

Had Woolies become complacent? Thinking **‘we have always done things this way,’** it is **‘our tradition,’** and it has always worked? Woolworths Group plc entered administration on 27 January 2009, and it was officially dissolved on 13 October 2015



So, where and when did Woolies go wrong? The quality and value for money in the stores was the same as it had always been, but the world had moved on. A few generations ago people’s home life was very much simpler, we did not have things like central heating, double glazing, fitted carpets and inside toilets, to name just a few. Now people expect more from their surroundings and environment, not only in their homes and offices, but also in the places that they visit, the doctor’s, the dentist, the hairdresser’s, schools and of course shops, the list is endless. The goods, the value for money and service may be up to scratch, but if a place looks out dated, uncared for, if it looks like the owner hasn’t been bothered with the place, then people are going to vote with their feet, especially if they can go elsewhere and get the same service, but in nicer surroundings, and who can blame them!

If this is true of businesses, it is also true of the church. More people come through our church doors during the week, than ever come to our worship on a Sunday. So, it is our building that gives people their first impression of God and of us as a worshiping community. We could have the most inspiring preaching in our services and the greatest worship songs and hymns, but the people who come during the week will not know this. Their first impression is from what they see.

So where do we start? We start with prayer and discerning God’s will for His church. We dream dreams and have visions! This is not simply about getting ‘more bums on seats.’ It is about being energized by faith enabling ourselves to experience God’s love, rather than just keeping things going or just trying to survive. It is about being deeply rooted in the local community. What we are offering people may be as good as it was generations ago, but if it is not presented in a contemporary and fresh environment many people will see the church as old-fashioned and therefore irrelevant and unconnected to their lives. The same goes for the words and phrases we use in our worship. In our singing and in our speaking. Are we still using words and phrases from the 16th century, or even further back? Or are we communicating in ways that folk feel are relevant for this day and age. If we are not then people will see us as out of touch with the ‘real world’ and therefore, insignificant. Christ spoke to people in a language they understood. Think of the disciples filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, speaking so all could understand. Surely the very least we can do is use language that is 21st century and not from hundreds of years ago. One very small example of this is The Lord’s Prayer. The contemporary form has been at the back of our hymn books for more than 40 years and in our worship books for 24 years! If nothing else, can we learn a lesson from Woolies? Every Blessing,

Pauline