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Did you know that your friends may be more willing to be invited to church this Christmas than you are to invite them? It's true. Research says that lots of non-church people are open to receiving an invitation, while many church people are anxious about asking.

Perhaps my friend will say no or even be offended. But most people are glad to be invited – after all, you only invite them because you care about them. Even if they say no, they will be touched that you asked.

The Church of England's Christmas campaign this year is 'Follow The Star: The Great Invitation'. Churches will use posters, leaflets, and social media to invite the parish to worship this Christmas. But the most effective invitation comes from an individual friend or neighbour. In other words, from you.

But how to invite people so that some of them, at least, will want to come? Here are three top tips.

1. **Pray.**

It's easy to think all this depends on us. But in fact, it's God who draws people. So pray before you invite. Ask God to show you who you should invite, and how, to prepare the person to receive the invitation, and to give you a good opportunity for the conversation.

Take some moments of silence to see if God puts any thoughts into your mind about any of this. Keep praying for the person after you have spoken with them, and trust that God will be at work.

2. **Prepare.**

Think about how to invite this person and prepare accordingly. What service are they likely to be most interested in? Traditional or informal? If they have family, would they like an invitation to something appropriate for all of them, or is this for your friend alone? How will you begin the conversation?

Don't stress about it or make it a big deal. Think about how you would invite this person for a coffee and then do something similar.

3. **Petition.**

OK, this is an old-fashioned word, but it simply means 'ask', and hopefully three words beginning with the same letter are easy to remember!

The best way to ask someone is simply to ask them. "I'm planning to go to the Carols by Candlelight service at St. Anne's. I went last year and it was beautiful. I wondered if you might like to come?" If they say yes, make arrangements. If they say no, try not to look disappointed and think

about who else you could approach.

It's a beautiful thought that God can use you and me to invite people into his love this Christmastime – and it's true! So, who will you invite?

Rev Stephen Hance

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