

Friends

This Sunday, the 30th of June, marks the anniversary of the launch of the first ever emergency number. The 999 number was introduced in London after a house fire in Wimpole Street in 1935 in which five women died. Launched in 1937, it was later extended to the whole country. When 999 was dialled, a buzzer sounded and a red light flashed in the exchange to attract an operator's attention.

When the new service was launched, a notice in the Evening News advised the public how to use it:

"Only dial 999... if the matter is urgent; if for instance, the man in the flat next to yours is murdering his wife, or you have seen a heavily masked cat burglar peering round the stack pipe of the local bank building.

If the matter is less urgent, if you have merely lost little Towser or a lorry has come to rest in your front garden, just call the local police."

There are many things about this story that might interest us: the comparatively short length of time from the fire in November 1935 to June 1937 is one. In this 18-month period, the powers that be decided that they must stop the repeat of such a tragedy; figured out what to do about it; invented a system; and then launched it. I also love the Evening News advice - how much less burden there would be on our own over-stretched emergency services if people paid attention to when it was an appropriately serious event to dial 999 for.

As Christians however, we have an additional service to draw on, whether we want a cosy chat, or to send up emergency flares. We call it prayer. The wonderful thing about prayer is that it's not us who have to decide whether or not to call. God is available to us 24/7 and although he decides when to respond, he listens instantly. God may sometimes say "No," or "Not yet," to a request, but he never says: "You are held in a queue; the operator will be with you as soon as possible." He never says, "That is not something you should have dialled this number about." I very much hope that this is not a week in which you have to dial 999 on earth or in heaven, but I also

hope it is a week in which all of us remember that the lines to
God are always open.

God bless, Vicci