

# Mike's message .....

## Farewell 2016 .....

I'm writing this as 2016 enters it's final week.

I know that many people will not be sad to see the year come to an end. As in all years there are those who have encountered personal tragedies and bereavements in the last twelve months and for whom memories of 2016 will always be darkened by sadness. In the public realm much has been made of the number of deaths of well known names in spheres as diverse as entertainment, politics and science. All years hold sadness, but seemingly 2016 has brought more than it's fair share.



Then there's the wider world situation. 2016 brought with it the Referendum on the European Union. Which ever way we voted maybe we see the result as having brought growing uncertainty and instability economically and politically. All this at a time when, with terrorist threats from many quarters and the even greater threat of global warming, we need to be standing and working together rather than splitting, dividing and hiding behind national boundaries.

In the political sphere there are signs that alarm. many The USA has elected a President who seems to thrive on spreading hatred and suspicion about different groups. Elsewhere the rise of the political "Far Right" has seen parties and individuals elected who are intolerant of groups and individuals whose background is different. In our own communities Christians have been shocked and saddened to see how those in need, especially refugees and those seeking asylum, have been derided and ridiculed.

There are concerning times. How can Christians witness effectively about the prince of peace? How can we show, and encourage others to show, the love of Christ that knows no boundaries of race, faith or nation?

As we enter 2017 we celebrate the great Christian Feast of the Epiphany. It's the time when we recall the Magi (or Wise Men or Kings) arriving to worship the Infant Jesus. They came from diverse backgrounds; ancient traditions speak of an Arab on a camel, a Persian on horseback and an Indian on an elephant! Epiphany is also a time we are reminded that the atrocities we see in the world today are nothing new. As we see the horrors unfold in Aleppo we are reminded of Matthew's account of the genocide carried out by Herod to protect his 'power and status'. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and maybe others too, were able to flee to Egypt to seek refuge and asylum. As they were welcomed, we too are called to welcome those who need refuge today.

As Christians we celebrated Christmas, and prepare for Epiphany, by talking of light. In days of darkness our services were candlelit as a sign of Christ the Light of the World. If 2016 has been a year in which so often the darkness seemed to be envelop hope and love, let us pray, and by our example demonstrate that 2017 can be a year in which "the true light enlightens everyone". Let us spread the Good News of the "light that darkness can not overcome" as we say:

.....Welcome 2017

# Mike's message .....

## Farewell

This is my last letter for the St Andrew's 'Roundabout' because, at the beginning of March, I will be taking my last services at St Andrew's before moving on.

I hope that you'll be able to join us for my final services on Sunday 5th March. There's a 9.30am Communion service and then a special Farewell Service at 4.00pm followed by refreshments.



It's fourteen years since I arrived in West Bromwich to be Vicar of St Andrew's. It's been a time of both challenge and great joy. I've enjoyed being Vicar of St Andrew's and, during that time, playing an increasing role in the Methodist Circuit. The later has changed a great deal itself during this time and has been 'West Bromwich Circuit', 'Tipton and West Bromwich Circuit' and is now 'The Black Country Circuit'. For the last two years, in addition to St Andrew's, I've also been Minister of Wesley Church, West Bromwich and Ryders Green Road Methodist Church. Thank you to everyone who has been part of my ministry during that time. It has been a pleasure to serve in West Bromwich and on the wider Methodist Circuit.

I've always thought that I wouldn't move on elsewhere unless I found somewhere as ecumenically involved as St Andrew's. In September I saw an advert for the post of Minister of The Cotteridge Church and decided to apply.

The Cotteridge Church is as interesting place. Back in 1982 three different churches decided that their future was together. The churches were then; Kings Norton Methodist Church, Kings Norton United Reformed Church and the Church of England Parish Church of St Agnes, Cotteridge. The latter two buildings were later demolished and The Cotteridge Church is housed in the Methodist owned building right in the heart of Cotteridge. If you aren't sure where Cotteridge is it's in south-west Birmingham, between Bournville and Kings Norton or, in other terms, about a mile from Cadbury World.

The Cotteridge Church is a busy place. It's worship of three, sometimes four, services a week, is led by clergy or local preachers. Alongside the 10.30am service there is an active 'Young Church' with activities for 0 - 14 year olds. In addition to a range of Sunday worship styles and traditions it's also a very busy church during the week. It has a café open six days a week, operated the B30 Foodbank twice a week and has a Day Centre for the Elderly on weekdays. There's a Boys Brigade (7th Birmingham) and a Stay and Play Toddler Group. There's a whole range of other church groups and a variety of community activities - from Guides to Clog Dancers - that also use the building.

My Welcome Service at Cotteridge is on Thursday 23rd March at 7.30pm. Margaret Morgan (St Andrew's) and Beryl Price (Wesley) are arranging transport for those who would like to attend. Get in quick as when the places are gone they are gone.

# Mike's message .....

My name's Mike Claridge and on 23rd March I'll become your new Minister at The Cotteridge Church! I thought I'd write a few words of introduction.

I won't be joining you alone. I'll be joined by my wife Susan and our daughters Rose (21) and Anastasia (19 later this month). Susan will be looking for work as a Teaching Assistant (part time), Rose works as a Planning Assistant with Sandwell Council (she'll become very acquainted with the Outer Circle bus route), and Anastasia is currently working as a Domiciliary Carer but plans to go to University in the autumn to read English with a view to teaching in secondary school. Oh, and there's a cat too!



I was born in Pelsall and attended schools there and in Brownhills. After 'A' Levels I trained as a Environmental Health Officer with Wolverhampton Council specialising in food hygiene and general public health. In 1989 I was selected for training for the ordained ministry of the Church of England and studied at Queen's College, Birmingham. This included a year based in Handsworth with local church and community placements. This was followed by a year at the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute near Geneva where I studied alongside people from all over the world and of many denominations. I've maintained contact with some ever since and recently have renewed contact with others through social media.

I was ordained in 1992 and served three years at Harlescott, Shrewsbury where I met and married Susan. In 1995 we moved to Christ Church, Wellington, Telford where Rose and Anastasia were born. There I developed an interest in inter-faith dialogue with the sizeable Muslim community there. I also became Chaplain (and later Stadium Announcer!) at Telford United FC. In 2003 we moved to St Andrew's, West Bromwich, a C of E / Methodist LEP. While there I've taken on an increasing role on what is now the Black Country Circuit of the Methodist Church.

My interests have been varied and diverse. I was for many years a keen church bellringer. I am an enthusiastic family history researcher, with Kings Norton and Cotteridge figuring significantly in the Claridge lineage around the beginning of the 20th century! I enjoy cycling and completed London to Paris rides for Christian Aid in 2008 and 2012. Most recently I has taken to 'treading the boards' and this month take part in Wesley Church, West Bromwich's annual pantomime for the third year.

# Mike's message .....

## Hope

We've celebrated Easter and, as always we did so with the benefit of hindsight.

We believe that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead. But what was in the mind of those first disciples? What were their hopes and fears on that first day of the week, the day that would become known as the first Easter Day?



Sometimes we race through the days prior to Easter but, if we do, we miss so much of the meaning of Holy Week. The farewell and betrayal of Maundy Thursday. The tortures and trials of the night leading into Good Friday and the suffering and journey of Jesus to death on the Cross. The emptiness of Holy Saturday. The confusion of the disciples when confronted by the empty tomb.

After Jesus' death Jesus' friends would have grieved as we all do when someone we know has died. John's Gospel mentions that when confronted with the empty tomb, the disciples "did not yet know that he would rise from the dead". In fear for their own lives, and in the sorrow of bereavement, they would have been confused and heartbroken. What were they hoping for next?

On the Sunday morning the women who went to the tomb hoped to pay their respects at the place of burial. That would have meant anointing the corpse with spices including myrrh. They would also have hoped that someone would be around to roll back the stone from the tomb. But on their arrival the stone had already been rolled away and to their astonishment the body was nowhere to be seen.

The Gospels depict the following days as full of confusion and uncertainty. There are more questions than answers as they search for the meaning of the empty tomb. There's a message for the Church today. Sometimes the fullness of the Resurrection is hard to see in a world full of suffering and injustice. But there is hope. There are signs of the Resurrection all around us. In the elderly person who's able to escape their loneliness by coming to the Day Centre. In the person arriving downcast and hopeless at the Food Bank but leaving with hope and sustenance. In the child whose confidence grows in Young Church or Boys Brigade. These are all signs of Resurrection as people are filled with hope. That is our role as a Church and as individual Christians. To proclaim the hope of new life in the Risen Jesus.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

# Mike's message .....

## Christianity 2.1

Most of the time we take computers for granted. I suppose. That is until things go wrong!

There have been two examples of that on the national news recently. Firstly some parts of the NHS came to a halt because of a "hack". Someone with criminal intent had taken advantage of the out of date systems. In the second British Airways was grounded because of an error that occurred when someone had turned the system off and then, a little too quickly, back on again. The out of date components couldn't stand the shock of the power surge. Outdated hardware (the parts of the 'machine' itself) and software (programmes that computers use (word processing for example) are common reasons for failure.

A letter in 'The Methodist Recorder' newspaper recently suggested that some of the problems the churches, and Christians as individuals, face is because we haven't updated our own 'software'. He wasn't talking about computers. He was referring to the formal belief structures that we often expect people to believe. Beliefs that are often stranded in the language and ideas of 2000 years ago. He suggested we need to update our theological 'software' (thinking) for the present age. God's revelation, through the work of the Holy Spirit, didn't stop when the New Testament was compiled. If we think of the Word of God being The Bible, it becomes closed and dated, but The Word of God is alive, engaging with us, ever present from before time, through time and beyond time (John's Gospel Chapter 1).

Café Church has been looking at some of the ideas of American Bishop, Jack Spong who, in the 1980s, started offering new, radical theological ideas. Many, such as former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, think that Spong's ideas themselves are now tired and outdated and themselves need updating. We need to keep ourselves attentive to what God is saying to the churches. We've already seen that happening over the years in the role of women in the churches, in ordained ministry for example. The issue of same-sex marriage is a current area of discussion too. These are examples of how our churches are updating theological 'software'.

If theology is our software what's the parallel as our hardware? That's surely our buildings and the way we use them. The Cotteridge Church building was updated in the 1980s and now needs us to look at it again so that it will be ready to provide a base for vibrant and updated Christian mission and service here in Cotteridge.



# Mike's message .....

## Reformation 500

This year is the 500th Anniversary of The Reformation, the period in history that saw enormous changes in the life of the church and wider society.

In English minds The Reformation is often associated with King Henry VIII (1491 - 1547) and his break with Rome over marriage to Anne Boleyn in 1534. But a tide of reform was already washing over European churches. Henry was initially on the side of the Pope who, in 1521, declared Henry to be 'Defender of the Faith'. Henry was given this title to reward him for a document he wrote called "Defence of the Seven Sacraments". In it Henry criticised those who were attacking the theology of the Roman Church. Among those was the German theologian Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) and it's an action of Luther's that we are recalling on it's 500th Anniversary.



On 31st October 1517 Martin Luther nailed a document to the door of All Saints' Church, Wittenburg. The document, "The 95 Theses", criticised elements of (then) Roman Catholic thinking notably the "selling of indulgences". This was an idea that donations to the Church would ensure the giver had, following their death, a speedier entrance to heaven. It implied that "good works" were necessary to ensure salvation rather than "justification by faith alone". Luther's protest was the catalyst that started the greatest political and religious upheaval Europe has ever seen. Those that protested against Rome and it's teaching would become known as Protestants. But it would also lead to a root and branch reform of the Roman Catholic Church itself - known as the Counter Reformation.

In reality The Reformation is much more complex than a tiff between Luther and the Pope. It was a period that stretched over more than a century. At the death of Henry VIII the church in England had changed little, with services still in Latin for example. It would take the reigns of Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth until a distinctive Church of England emerged. Church leaders such as the Scot John Knox (1513 - 1572) were also influential. Knox was influenced by John Calvin (1509 - 1564) in Geneva and, on return to Scotland, started the ball moving that would lead to establishing the Presbyterian Church.

Change is constant and necessary. In time the Church of England would change further and from within it, two hundred years later, would emerge Methodism. The Presbyterian Church would also see many changes and, just a few decades ago, would in England join with other churches to form the United Reformed Church.

At The Cotteridge Church we represent a coming together of three reformed churches - each of those three themselves a drawing together of different traditions. We are a living sign that God's people are always changing through the life of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

You can find out more about Reformation 500 at: [www.reformation500.uk](http://www.reformation500.uk)

## **Mike's Message**

### **The season of Remembrance and Hope**

It's November. The year is already drawing towards it's close. Within a week or so of this magazine being published the German Christmas Market will be open in the City Centre. Christmas seems to sneak up on us earlier each year. But there's a lot to do before then.

November starts with a time of remembering. It's a time when the Church has traditionally thought, during the season of All Saints and All Souls, of those who have died. Then comes Remembrance, as we recall those who have died in conflict; long ago, more recently and in current combat. Next year, in 2018, Remembrance Sunday will fall on 11th November itself, exactly 100 years since the Armistice that brought the First World War towards it's end at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

As November draws to it's close we will still have that beautiful and reflective season of Advent ahead of us. Advent is very short this year, as the Fourth Sunday of Advent is Christmas Eve. We'll be holding a Study Group during Advent but, to get four sessions in, we'll be starting early. Join us on Tuesdays at 11.00am (28th November, 5th, 12th and 19th December) as we ask 'So what are you waiting for?' It looks at time and our attitude towards it. In

Advent we not only look back through time to the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, but also look forward towards his return at the end of time.

Then it'll be Christmas with all of it's excitement and reflection. There'll be special services and special events. A time of enjoyment and family. But of course for some it's a time of loneliness and fear, of memories of things past and hardships of the present. Together we all hope for the gift of Peace and Goodwill for all the earth.

Writing a magazine letter to cover this season of Remembrance and Hope brought to mind the following poem. It was written at Christmas 1916 by Leslie George Rub, an Australian soldier who had experienced the horrors of the Battle of the Somme. That particular battle had finished a month earlier but hazards still remained. Rub's sarcastic poem epitomises both the horror and futility of war. Rub ridicules both the war and his own officers in a forthright way maybe that's why it's not as well known as the world of some others:

#### ***Christmas Day On The Somme***

'Twas Christmas Day on the Somme  
The men stood on parade,  
The snow laid six feet on the ground  
Twas twenty in the shade.

Up spoke the Captain 'gallant man',  
"Just hear what I've to say,  
You may not have remembered that  
Today is Christmas Day."

"The General has expressed a wish  
This day may be observed,  
Today you will only work eight hours,  
A rest that's well deserved.

I hope you'll keep yourselves quite clean  
And smart and spruce and nice,  
The stream is frozen hard  
But a pick will break the ice."

"All men will get two biscuits each,  
I'm sure you're tired of bread,  
I'm sorry there's no turkey  
but there's Bully Beef instead.

The puddings plum have not arrived  
But they are on their way,  
I'll guarantee they'll be in time  
To eat next Christmas Day."

"You're parcels would have been in time  
But I regret to say

The vessel which conveyed them was  
Torpedoed on the way.  
The Quartermaster's got your rum  
But you may get some yet,  
Each man will be presented with  
A Woodbine Cigarette."

"The Huns have caught us in the rear  
And painted France all red,  
Pray do not let that trouble you,  
Tomorrow you'll be dead.

Now ere you go I wish you all  
This season of good cheer,  
A very happy Christmas and  
A prosperous New Year."

Leslie George Rub

<http://www.greatwar.nl/frames/default-christmaspoem.html>

Private Leslie George Rub died on 23rd September 1917 in  
the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele).

May this season be for you one of reflection and hope as  
we prepare to welcome the Prince of Peace.