

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



The reformation 500 years on

Dear Friends,

I always feel close to the thoughts of the great reformers of the Church of England when leading the Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion service every Sunday at 8.00am. Their theology is so plain in the Collects, the choice of readings (Epistle and Gospel) and the Prayer over Communion.

The Reformers stressed that we are all God's children by adoption and grace through our Lord Jesus Christ and that our salvation was through faith in Him alone. They emphasised the central importance of the Bible and the priesthood of all believers, which affirms that we all have access to God through Christ and do not require an intermediary.

This year we remember 500 years of the Reformation in October. Martin Luther was a monk who became convinced that Church tradition had moved too far away from the basic teaching of the Bible. He wrote out his objections and nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg.

They reflected the fact that Luther had become increasingly concerned at some of the practices of the Church of his time, particularly the sale of indulgences. This practice stemmed from the idea that you could pay for your soul or even a relative's soul to go to heaven more quickly and spend less time in purgatory. Your eternal destiny depended on forgiveness of sins, which the church alone could offer, through its priests. Money given went to build the new St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Luther pointed out that the Bible says in Romans 5:1 that "*Since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*". He demanded reform within the church, but he was met with very strong opposition.

The challenge to the established order was so powerful that it caused a great deal of conflict and changed the face of Europe.

Within 17 years the Reformation had swept to England as the new theological outlook and its freedom from the institution of the Catholic Church was reflected in King Henry VIII's break with that Church, meaning that he could become head of a new Church of England. The new outlook of direct access to God's grace, including being able to read the Bible in your own language, coincided with Henry's matrimonial difficulties which the Pope would not condone.

I write this at the time of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, aware that there remain many divisions between Christians.

Sadly, the Reformation led to many churches breaking away from others with their own perceived insights. While this is understandable, since people who are given their freedom will naturally take it, this is not the way that Jesus prays for his followers in the Bible. Before his crucifixion Jesus prays "*that they may be onethat the world may believe*" John 17.20-21. Disunity is contrary to God's will and does nothing to further his mission to the world.

Today's reality is that, despite the ongoing lack of unity, the churches meet, pray and

work together in many ways. The Catholic Church has changed, as has the Church of England and other churches. Most of us recognise that what draws us together is far more significant and compelling than what keeps us apart. There is further to go in healing the wounds from 500 years of division, and we recognise that those in the churches today did not cause the division, but can be means of finding newness and reconciliation.

The Reformation, in its time, was in many ways cataclysmic. It shattered Christendom and the convictions on both sides brought much suffering. Indeed, it occasioned political strife due to national allegiances, and people died in the resultant conflicts.

Martin Luther's insights were essentially spiritual but it was a challenge to established traditions, and the insights which brought peace to the soul for many people carried very regrettable implications.

Today we live in a time of change and uncertainty, and many of us are very apprehensive about the ongoing implications of decisions reached in our nation, in the United States and on mainland Europe.

There are, of course, further challenges such as terrorism, the war in Syria and other conflicts in the Middle East, and the unprecedented flow of refugees. There are no easy answers, however we need to hold on to hope, and Martin Luther's Biblical insight that we all have access to God means that we can prayerfully seek ways of promoting peace and unity in the world and in the church.

Our human, warring ways are contrary to God's will, part of our sinful nature which Christ came to redeem, and amid this world's troubles there remains hope and a peaceful reliance on our loving creator which goes deep into our souls, bringing the forgiveness and newness which it is not an exaggeration to call Salvation.

Love, Jo

Leading Your Church into Growth (LYCiG)

"Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

These words which come at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew were the last words Jesus said to his disciples before he was taken up into Heaven. The fact that the disciples and all believers who came after them have taken up the challenge is why All Saints is here today as one of the many worshipping communities here in Hertford and part of the world wide Christian Church. Without the faith and commitment of the early Christians the Church would never have grown and Christ's commandment to love God and to love our neighbour would have long been forgotten.

Unfortunately Church attendance is declining with fewer and fewer people making a commitment to follow Christ in their lives. Are people too busy? Are we, as a church, out of touch? At All Saints we are not declining, our figures show a steady, and in some cases, slightly increasing numbers but we need to ensure that we also grow.

All of us who make up the family worshipping at All Saints are called upon to share what Christ means in our lives with all those who are outside the church. We would love to welcome more people to share what we have and to help them understand what Jesus means in our lives, but perhaps we don't feel that we are equipped to do so.

The Mission of the Church is to spread the Good News and to help all who believe in Christ to grow in their faith and share that faith so that the church continues to grow.

As a growing church we could do more to serve our local community, we could do more to serve the less able members of our own community and we could ensure that Christianity is seen a vibrant and growing faith which is as relevant to the lives of people living in 21st century Hertford as it was to the early Christians in the 1st century. Just like the early Christians we aren't called to do this on our own as Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be our help and our comforter.

Here at All Saints we are a reasonably stable church. As in any family we have recently lost many of the older members of our congregation, and some not so old, as they have been called home by our Heavenly Father, but we have also been joined by newer members who are now part of our regular worshipping congregation. There are also quite a large number of other enquirers who are more on the periphery, but who we would love to welcome to join us all on our journey of faith.

We are now challenged to consider how we might go from stability to growth.

Jo and the PCC have been considering this challenge and, as was reported in the November magazine, an Away day was held in October to consider how we might move on. This was followed by the thoughtful and prayerful meeting with Bishop Michael which was reported in the December magazine. We now want to encourage every member of our All Saints family to become involved in developing the way forward for our church and positioning it for a positive future.

This view is shared by the other churches in the Hertford Team and with this in mind a series of meetings designed to encourage us to consider how we can Lead Our Churches into Growth is being held, led by Rev Nick Sharp.


LYCiG is designed to help us look at how we might find ways of growing our churches, both in numbers attending but also in our own spirituality whilst increasing

our capacity to serve our community. We will be encouraged to:-

- learn key biblical teachings on growth
- discuss, ask questions and apply these teachings to our own situation
- become inspired and motivated
- make decisions, implement plans and discover new ways of working

This is part of the exciting opportunity for us all to truly put our faith into action and to share God's love around our parish and in the wider area. We would like as many people as possible to be involved and even if you cannot attend a course we are keen to hear your opinions and ask for your prayers. You can speak to Jo, to Colin or Janet or to Geoff or myself if you want to know more.

The Hertford Team does LYCiG Local in 2017!



LYCiG local is designed to stimulate, teach, equip and motivate ordinary church members to play their part in leading their church into growth.

This is a course where the local churches:

- learn key biblical teachings on growth
- discuss, ask questions and apply these teachings to their own situation
- become inspired and motivated
- make decisions, implement plans and discover new ways of working
- stick with these plans, reviewing and adapting them as they go along

Wednesday evenings, 8pm at St Andrew's Church, Hertford
Open to everyone in the churches

Phase 1

January 11th: Meeting of key leaders (by invitation)

January 25th: Focus

February 1st: Plan

February 8th: Culture

Phase 2 will follow later

If we're not leading our church into growth ...
Where are we leading it?

Please join us at the meetings on Wednesday 1st and 8th of February at 8pm, at St Andrew's Church Hertford.

Yours in Christ,
Janet Bird