

Introduction to The Cotteridge Church 2017 Annual Report.

It's a pleasure to write this report for the Annual Meeting as we look back at 2017, and forward to 2018 and beyond.

It was a pleasure to join you all here at The Cotteridge Church, about a quarter of the way through 2017. When I did so I encountered a church building that is very busy, serving its own members and the wider community. Amongst its members are many gifted and hard working individuals. In the wider ministry of The Cotteridge Church they are joined by others who give devoted time and service to, for example, B30 Foodbank and the Day Centre.

The activities of The Cotteridge Church, and those of other groups that use the facilities, are diverse. As a church we have something to offer for most groups and ages or, as the old adage goes, "from cradle to the grave". But we must remember that we have a challenge! That is to increase the number and range of individuals who are part of our life of worship and service.

William Temple was Archbishop of Canterbury during part of World War Two. He was a great visionary who believed that the role of the Church was to prompt, and play a part in providing, a society that fair and just for all people. Among his most famous sayings was:

"The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."

There is a good quote to remember. It draws inspiration from the ministry of Jesus Christ. When we read the Gospels we encounter a Jesus who is constantly reaching out to those who are not part of 'his crowd', who are often at the margins of society. Who need to hear about the love of God which is free for all, that all may be free.

We all enjoy the social life and sense of being "a family" at The Cotteridge Church. However we must remember that is not our prime task. The Church is called to be an 'outward facing' organisation. The most vital part of our ministry as a church congregation is to reach out and proclaim the love of God in our community. Part of this is resourcing and encouraging those activities where we engage with those who are not church members. These include the Café, Saplings, Foodbank, Day Centre and Boys Brigade among others.

If we are called to be an outward facing organisation, engaging with those who live and work around us we need to be visible. Our building is a key

part in this. At present there is little outside to show passers by the variety and richness of the activities within - and that this is a place where All are Welcome and God's love is shown. The building, even on a Sunday, looks shut up and unwelcoming.

You will have heard that we have a 'Building Project' going on. I'd like to suggest that we don't call it a 'Building Project' but rather a Mission Project. Those who do already venture over the threshold are often surprised to find what goes on, and they feel welcomed. We are aided in this task by the space we have inside for activities to take place - and we have those who made decisions 35 years ago to thank for that. Now we need to think forward. What spaces and features do we need to provide for those who will be here in ten, twenty, thirty or forty years time?

Our challenge in 2018 and beyond is to build a church that has 'outward facing' members and an 'outward facing' building. A structure and membership that proclaims; All are welcome and all are loved.

Mike Claridge (Minister of The Cotteridge Church)