

# Mike's message . . . .

## Referendum!

We're about to be able to vote in a referendum. That's a rarity in the United Kingdom as, apart from the Scottish Independence Referendum (for Scottish voters only), there hasn't been a referendum in this country for over forty years.

This, we keep being told, is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity. As the ballot papers on 23rd June will ask us the question is "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?".

Now let's get this straight. There's no 'right' way that Christians should vote. It's a matter for individual decision based on consideration of facts available. Some of the main churches in the country (*Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed and Church of Scotland*) have produced a guide called "Think, Pray, Vote: EU Referendum Guide for Churches". I've made it available at [www.mjclaridge.co.uk](http://www.mjclaridge.co.uk) and will ensure printed copies are available at the back of church. It covers issues as follows: Single market, Sovereignty and subsidiarity, Free movement of people, Work and benefits, Peace and international relations, Care for the environment, and Agriculture and food.

Some people will think that I should have avoided entering into this area at all. The phrase "Religion and politics should never be mixed" often gets touted about. I believe that statement is blasphemous! Why? The meaning if the word 'politics' is from the Greek language and means 'related to citizens'. Being related to, and involved with, the life of people is what the Incarnation (God living among us as Jesus Christ) is all about. The subject that Jesus speaks most about in the Gospels is money and its use. Saying the Gospel isn't about politics denies that 'God is with us', involved in our lives, in all our messy details, in the person of Jesus Christ.

I have said that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way for Christians to vote and I stand by that. However there are traps that Christians should avoid falling into. One is the 'demonisation', for want of a better terminology, of people who have arrived in this country as migrants. We need to remember that all people are created in God's image and, as God's people, we have a duty to welcome the alien and stranger in our midst. The whole Old Testament narrative is about God's people on journeys of migration. Of course this need not be a defining factor in itself and I know several Christians who are voting "Leave" but are advocating that this country's borders should remain open.

For what its worth I can tell you that I intend to vote 'Remain'. But I urge you to consider all the issues, and then think, pray and then vote, whether that be 'Remain' or 'Leave', according to your conscience on 23rd June.

