

# Mike's message .....

## Issues matrimonial

We don't get many weddings here at The Cotteridge Church. Even so I recently had to pay a visit to Birmingham Register Office on wedding related matters. More about why in a moment.

While I was there the Registrar asked if we had many weddings. I explained that as far as location is concerned we are sandwiched between "Cadbury's Theme Park" Bournville and "Mediaeval Building Theme Park" Kings Norton. All we can offer is a busy traffic island! A bit flippant maybe but surroundings, and our lack of parking, don't make us the most attractive of nuptial venues for anyone other than the most faithful of church members.

My visit was to hand over our Marriage Registers, both the Church of England and Authorised Person (Methodist and URC) ones. Back on 1st May the procedure for registering marriages changed. The first significant change since 1837! There are no longer any registers to sign. Instead a printed schedule with all the details of the couple, occupations, parents, addresses etc is obtained and, at the ceremony, the couple, witnesses and minister all sign it. The document has to be returned to the Register Office as soon as possible after the service. Only then, within 14 days, do the couple get their Marriage Certificate, whereas before they were given it on the day. I'm not convinced the changes are for the better, and the delay in issuing the certificate can be problematical for some couples. One good thing though, the details registered on the schedule now include the names of the mothers of both the bride and groom - which marriage registers didn't.

The registrar asked, "Are you fully familiar with the new system?" I told him I'd watched the instructional videos but would brush up my knowledge in the event we actually get a wedding or I take one elsewhere. By the way, under C of E procedures, Banns remain the "preliminary to marriage" so you'll still be hearing those called in church from time to time.

The two systems, Church of England marriage and Authorised Person marriage, are very different in how the schedule is produced. As a result I had two lots of videos to watch! Both here, and in my previous appointment at West Bromwich, I've been registered to conduct weddings under either system. Which brings me to the other recent change.

At its Conference at the end of June The Methodist Church agreed that its buildings could be used for, and ministers could officiate at, same-sex marriages. In doing so The Methodist Church has followed the decision the URC made a few years ago. As an Ecumenical Partnership our situation is complicated somewhat by the C of E, which is still a long way off making a decision. I am hoping that our building can be registered to do same-sex marriages, even before the C of E agree or otherwise, and that, in my role as an Authorised Person, I can be registered to officiate at ceremonies here or elsewhere. Legalities may intervene so we'll have to wait and see.

