

When I met with the Mayor in order to discuss this service. it was clear that the desire was to celebrate our common unity or community and by building on the many positives to minimise any fears or anxieties that may exist between the diverse cultures that make St Ives the wonderful place it is to live in

Recent events elsewhere have shown that it is all too easy, thanks to the media, to be fearful as there are factions of society in this country that are not just unpleasant but plain evil.

Now evil can be defeated, but only by love, violence is not the answer. Love can be a very emotive word and I know I touched on that last year by giving examples, well this year I am just using what the Greek calls agape, the purest form of love that simply wants the best for the other person regardless of any personal cost.

This is the love that conquers evil. We should look on each other person as our neighbour or brother or sister regardless of colour, creed or any other factor. Think of each person being a child of God and you start to get glimpses of a larger picture in which we can celebrate our diversity as a outpouring of God's grace and love for each one of us.

If our various different communities work and share together then we soon learn to understand and appreciate each other and this helps build us up and overcome any fears

All Saint's is the parish church for St Ives which means it exists as a symbol of the presence of God in our midst for all who live within the parish boundary regardless of any faith belief or indeed none. Likewise as Vicar, my role is unique as I am also here for all and not just the congregation on a Sunday. This is the unique role of the established church and is something we should all value as an integral part of the fabric of society.

Ultimately, God is God, if you of the Jewish, Christian or Islamic Faith it is ultimately the same deity. Therefore, I rejoice and am proud that in this country it is still possible for people of faith to be called into public service, to be unashamed of their faith, and that the church is still able to contribute some insights in public discourse. And I would urge everyone here to do all you can to resist the constant pressure to put our own faith into a box and to take faith entirely out of our public life, we will all be poorer for that.

In a recent work Sam Wells puts forward a theory that with the advent of the welfare state the government took over the roles that historically had been provided by the church: education, Healthcare, looking after the vulnerable, housing the sick and caring for the elderly. In short the state wanted to become the church. Now seventy years later the state has discovered it can no longer afford to be the church and is or has withdrawn from many of those things, leaving a gap that often faith groups try to fill but now they are unable to achieve this as in the interim that they have become marginalised and with the disadvantages that generations have disconnected from church as it has no visible relevance, presence or role in their everyday lives[. Hence today it too does not have the resources needed to fill the gaps created by the withdrawal of the state from the work of caritas or charity rooted in love

The growth of our food bank here in St Ives is living proof of the continued need caused by failure of the state welfare system and the inherent goodness in peoples demonstrated by their generosity to the Foodbank. I am also sure that if it was not run as a separate entity from the church SIFB would not be viable as giving to 'Church' does not tug the heart string in the way that donating to a foodbank collection point does, even if the outcome is the same!

And in the same way that people of faith should be able to express themselves freely. I believe too that the Church exists not merely to look after the needs of individual Christians but to act as a voice for the whole of society. The relationship between Church and State is nothing new its roots go back to go back to 313 AD when the Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity.

Some both Christians and non-Christians would like to undo this and see church and state go their own way. However I believe that to take God out of the heart of our civic society is as damaging to that society as to take God out of our own hearts.

You may be aware of the controversies around the roles of the Lord's Spiritual, the Anglican Bishops in the House of Lords their role can easily be misconstrued as being elitist and unjustified, but a short examination of what the bishops speak out against in debate shows their's is a voice that consistently speaks up for the marginalised and under privileged in society regardless of faith creed or colour. Take that voice away or dilute it by having other bodies represented and everyone ends up defending their position rather than being an impartial voice of reason. what then is left?

Let us remember that Christ came not for his own people, the Jews, but for everyone. Indeed it had been said that Christianity is nothing other than Judaism after Jesus Christ, and Islam is nothing other than Christianity after Mohammed.

In conclusion and above all else we should give thanks for the freedom and diversity we enjoy and rejoice that God can call us in so many different ways

May this parish church serve this community together with our Town council for generations to come. Standing as it does as a symbol of God's inclusive love for the whole of creation.