

# I won't preach on the Brexit issue



**Canon Nick Ralph**, our director of social enterprise and engagement, explains his stance on Brexit

If you know anything about me, you'll know that I fundamentally oppose Brexit.

I think the EU referendum in 2016 was won on the basis of false information, and that some people beaten down by years of austerity were conned into thinking the EU was to blame for their perilous situation.

I believe they were given false hope of somehow 'taking back control' of their own lives – without any exploration of either how much we benefit from tariff-free trade with 26 other European countries, or how difficult it would be to disentangle ourselves from thousands of EU-wide agreements that have already been incorporated into UK law.

Now we may be heading for a no-deal Brexit that could cause real damage, not just to our national economy, but to the lives and livelihoods of our families and our communities.

However, you won't find me preaching any of that from the pulpit. Although my Christian faith compels me to believe that our national interests are best served by being part of Europe, I do understand that not everyone thinks as I do.

In our church congregations, there

are worshippers who passionately believe that we are best off out of the EU, as well as those who passionately believe that Brexit should be stopped. Our church communities are divided, just as wider society is.

I'm very happy to have a rational discussion with anyone about the issues, but I'm determined not to add to our febrile atmosphere in which emotions are heightened and anyone who suggests an alternative view is denounced as a traitor or extremist.

**'Let's take some positive action to bring people together'**

That doesn't mean we should simply ignore this, or any other political issue, concentrate purely on the spiritual side of life, and just hope that everything works out in the end.

Our role as Christians, surely, is to pray for those who lead our country to make the right decisions, and to pray for our society to be healed after what has been a traumatic three years.

It is also to take some positive action to bring people together who might disagree - to prove,

as the late MP Jo Cox said, that there genuinely is more that unites us within the UK than divides us. That positive action might be to bring family members together, or neighbours, or friends who might disagree about this issue.

Our role as churches is to be the places where those who disagree with each other on this issue can still find common ground, in our love for God and our care for our neighbours.

It might even be a place where we can debate political issues in a measured way, knowing that we still value and care for each other, despite our differences. That's why our churches often host hustings events at which different political candidates express their views in a safe, neutral space.

And our role as congregations is to continue to serve those who live in our parishes, whatever their views – even and especially if we find them objectionable.

The Good Samaritan knew he wouldn't agree with the political views of the Jewish man lying bleeding on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho but he still helped him. That is the real mark of a disciple of Jesus, and our example to follow.