

Kindness at Christmas and Hope for New Year

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Our tradition now places the Christmas Nativity in our winter. The presence of baby Jesus, born to the unhoused couple, matters more to Christians than the presents they will cherish from family and friends.

Mary, mother of Jesus is named more often in the Qur'an than in the New Testament. I am glad that most young people now know the traditions and beliefs of other religions and faiths although it would be a task to understand all the variations or to remember their causes.

It has been fascinating to listen to broadcast talks about the great preacher John Wesley and the different Methodists. One of my regrets was that a minority within the Church of England frustrated the reunion agreed with Methodists.

Locally, we have many thriving free churches. I respect their vibrancy and community outreach projects. The Arun Community Church displays encouragement to display the light for Everyone, Everywhere, Everyday. Each of our chapels and churches play their part. Friends in other faiths wish Christians well with heartfelt Seasons Greetings.

To each reader, I offer best wishes for Christmas. We can all try, remotely if not always by close contact, to include those who may not have family near to them. Letters, cards and telephone or internet calls can make a difference.

I cherish the memory of the 100th birthday lunch for my grandmother's cousin, an only child who gave much of her life to caring for her parents before helping each of her third and fourth cousins who came near. She did not only hold close her young relations; she gave practical help and often work to refugees.

This week I read an article about Sanctuary Hosting, a scheme started around Oxford and Berkshire, working with over 80 households to provide hosting, and to give 20,000 nights of accommodation for migrants and refugees most in need.

In the week coming to Christmas Day followed by the week to the New Year's Day I shall hold in my mind three groups of equal importance. One came sharply to mind when I took a part in Sunday's review of the year on Times Radio. The 'Mother of the House' is Harriet Harman, although Dame Margaret Beckett was elected before either of us, only to have a time of broken service.

We respect the private sector jobs on which we and public services depend, including farmers, retailers, delivery staff and manufacturers.

The day of publication of this last article coincides with a debate on the impact of Covid on fair grounds and travelling entertainments. Like seaside arcades, their seasons have been ruined. I am conscious of what the impact would have been if I had stayed in my last job before Parliament, leading a small firm specialising in front-of house displays for West End theatres and cinemas. We would have closed.

Painters, glass blowers, metalworkers and the alpinists who did the vertical outside work had been in their occupations for life. All would be gone. Remember those whose work lives have been suspended or ended during Covid.

I remain dedicated to the wide hospitality trades. Virginia and I have eaten out for enjoyment and to recognise the dedication of pub and restaurant owners and managers. They invest their talents and take on loans to build a business.

Let us together remember all who work over Christmas for the benefit of us all as we thank the posties, the Royal Mail teams who deliver our greeting cards and thank-you letters, together with the amazing increase in parcels. We are grateful to all.