

## Tough Calls

When do you take your Christmas decorations down? It's a tough call - almost as difficult as the decision of when to put them up! For many, twelfth night is the big day, the eve of the Epiphany. For others, they come down just before they return to work and for some, the vestiges of Christmas remain until February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Candlemas. Whatever decision you make, you can be sure that some will think differently.

Making decisions about Christmas decoration is one thing, but during 2019 there are some pretty serious decisions to be made about our place and role in Europe. For those with political responsibility it's yet another tough call which just has to be made irrespective of what some might think.

Decision making is not always easy, particularly when the decisions we make affect others' lives. For the Christian, Christian leaders in secular employment as well as leaders within the church, one of the biggest challenges in our decision making is how people expect Christians and Christian leaders to behave. 'The norm of niceness' can often prevent honest dialogue and frustrate any meaningful discussion.

This phrase 'the norm of niceness' appears in an essay by the psychologist Sara Savage in a book called *The Future of the Parish System*. She writes, 'Clergy are expected to be nice..... The norm of Christian niceness is ubiquitous, despite the portrait the Gospels paint of Jesus as an assertive, sometimes acerbic personality who readily confronted people in order to pursue their spiritual welfare.' She goes on to suggest that the real problem with niceness is an aversion to conflict which can eventually causes real trouble in church life or any decision-making process. She suggests that the unwritten rule is that clergy should never upset anyone!

But isn't conflict a normal and healthy part of being human? Our ability to discuss difference and hold our unity must surely be a sign of a mature community not a broken one. 'The norm of niceness' can easily blind us to this truth and inhibit personal and spiritual growth when we succumb to this insidious trait.

New Year is often a time for fresh starts and renewed determination to do things differently. This New Year, why not consider encouraging a more honest approach to problem solving at home, at work and in your church community. It may well be a tough call but the reward could be transformational.