

Faith and politics do mix!

From time to time, especially when a religious leader has spoken out against the actions of the Government, we hear comments like 'Faith and politics don't mix' and 'priests shouldn't stick their noses into politics, it doesn't concern them'. This never sits right with me.



After all, if we pray regularly 'thy kingdom come', we are praying for God's values to fill every corner, not just of our life, but our neighbourhood, town, country and world. As it is our politicians who make the decisions that affect so much of our lives, we have a duty to pray for them and to vote wisely.

Now, I'm not saying that it is generally right for religious leaders to use their position of authority or their public voice to promote a particular political party. However it is important that we as a church think about how the key virtues of our Christian faith – love, trust and hope - are best represented by our politicians.

My heart sank when I heard the announcement of the General Election, as did that of many people. Another period of listening to politicians arguing about why we should vote for them, news reports full of predictions about who's going to win and by how much, and then the inevitable unpleasant attempts to do down or smear political opponents.

However, I can't bury my head in the sand and ignore politics for the next few weeks. I am a passionate believer in the importance of every person using their vote – perhaps particularly as a woman, because it is not so long ago that women gave their lives so that I could cast my vote today – and so I shall be voting on June 8th.

Leaders of all the faiths in Greater Manchester, led by Bishop David issued this statement which I encourage you to consider carefully as the General Election approaches:

"Our country needs our vote. We urge all people to register and take part in the General Election on 8 June. These elections provide great opportunities to learn more about what is important for one another. Our democracy's health depends upon our ability to care for the interests of our fellow human beings, and not simply for ourselves. So we encourage everyone to get to know the individual candidates standing in their constituency - and to learn what they stand for.

We urge you to vote for people who will promote positive relationships and cohesion between all communities, and who oppose anything that causes racial or religious hatred or prejudice on grounds of race, nationality, gender, orientation or religion. We all have a say on 8 June."

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have issued a pastoral letter setting out in detail the issues that Christians should consider before voting and if you want to read it, you can find it online (www.churchofengland.org/media/3977056/electionletter_text.pdf) or ask me for a copy. They conclude the letter with these words:

“We keep in our prayers all those who are standing in this election and are deeply grateful for their commitment to public service. All of us as Christians, in holding fast to the vision of abundant life, should be open to the call to renounce cynicism, to engage prayerfully with the candidates and issues in this election and by doing so to participate together fully in the life of our communities.”

So mindful of all this, do pray for our politicians standing for election, for people to use their votes wisely, for ourselves in our decision making, and for the new Government elected on 8 June. Pray most of all, that through this election, our prayer ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ will become a closer reality.

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