

# Countering Political Extremism Resources

## Prayers, theological reflections and housegroup materials

This resource has been produced by the Joint Public Issues Team (the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church). For more information and resources, visit: [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk)

God of Justice and Peace,

### Prayers for elections

we desire the justice on earth known already in heaven.  
We pray for the coming elections and referendum.  
It is a privilege and a duty to play our part in the democratic process.  
May we use our votes wisely.

We pray for all who stand for election,  
that they may seek to unite rather than divide, to build up rather than break down,  
and that they may have in their hearts that same desire for justice which you sustain eternally.  
We pray in the name of Jesus.

**Amen**

*John Howard, Chair of the Countering Political Extremism Resource Group*

We praise you Creator God, for making humankind in your image, setting us free to make choices.  
As we approach this election we ask that you will give each of us the gift of discernment to cast our vote wisely

We praise you Risen Christ that you have opened our eyes to your offer of new life and redemption.  
As we approach this election, we pray that the political life of Westminster will be renewed, and led by people of wisdom and integrity

We praise you Holy Spirit that you are ever with us, and amongst us.

As we approach this election, save us from small-mindedness, and give us hearts full of love, so that the message and actions of our church community will influence our newly elected MP to strive with us for Peace and Justice.

May your kingdom come on earth.

**Amen**

*Baptist Union of Great Britain*

### **Responsive Prayer** *(based on Luke 4: 18-19)*

God of Justice and Peace, we recall Jesus' manifesto to "bring Good News to the poor."

We pray for our country as we approach this General Election. We ask that we will be aware of your presence at the ballot box, as we cast our votes. We pray that you will raise up clear-thinking political leaders, people of stature, realism and compassion, whose care is for the poor and disadvantaged, the homeless and the sick.

Living God: **Your Kingdom come on earth**

God of Justice and Peace, we recall Jesus' manifesto to "set the captive free".

We pray for a spirit of generosity as this country goes to the polls, at a time when the earth's precious resources are so unevenly distributed. We long for a world in which parents no longer have to watch their children dying from starvation or from polluted drinking water, or from the absence of medical care.

We pray that you will raise up politicians whose care is the support of international development, and who will work to cancel the national debts of the poorest countries, and release vital financial resources for education and healthcare.

Living God: **Your Kingdom come on earth**

God of Justice and Peace, we recall Jesus' manifesto to "recover sight for the blind".

We pray that you will protect our nation from extremist politics which engender hatred and division. We thank you for the rich diversity of cultures amongst the electorate, and their links with home countries around the globe. Open our hearts and minds to share the hospitality of the God of love, as we work to overcome all forms of prejudice and discrimination. We pray that you will raise up politicians whose care is to quench unjust discrimination and to build inclusive communities.

Living God: **Your Kingdom come on earth**

God of Justice and Peace, we recall Jesus' manifesto to "let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour".

May we be a part of the yeast which leavens the transformation of our society. We pray for a government which is committed to the welfare and human dignity of all people who live in this country, and we offer to you our individual voting capacity, and our lives.

Living God: **Your Kingdom come on earth**

We bring our prayers in the name of the Risen Jesus Christ.

**Amen**

*Baptist Union of Great Britain*

### **Call to worship**

We are called from the busyness of the world  
to meet God in this place.

Come let us worship the God of the everyday and the profound;  
who lives and works among us.

### **Prayers of Adoration and Confession**

Creator God

you made the rough terrain of the Earth  
and populated it with people in your own image.

From the valleys, the plains and the tops of the mountains:

**we praise you.**

Redeeming God

you walked amongst us,  
revealing love, healing brokenness, finding hope.

From urban streets, civic buildings, community centres and village halls:

**we praise you.**

Life-giving God

You breathe life into our neighbourhoods and call us to respond.

From schools and workplaces, kitchens and computers:

**we praise you.**

For the times we have looked at another and failed to see your creation:

**Father forgive us**

For the times when we have looked at another and failed to reach out in love and compassion:

**Father forgive us**

For the times when we have looked at another and felt only fear and hatred:

**Father forgive us**

For the times when we have looked at another and seen pain and fear but failed to act:

**Father forgive us**

Father God bless us with your forgiving love that we may reach out to another to

**recognise your creation**

**reveal your love**

**bring healing**

**and to speak out against injustice.**

**Amen**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

In this election time we pray for the world, our communities and ourselves.

We pray for all who govern:

For the leaders of nations and for all those who are elected to office.

We pray for candidates in the forthcoming election that they may seek justice and peace for all.

We pray for our communities:

That people may live together with mutual trust and understanding and together build lives of hope.

We pray for those who experience injustice as part of the everyday:

That racism and prejudice are challenged, that wrongs are put right and healing and reconciliation comes.

We pray for those who feel they have no voice:

Remembering the marginalized, the very young and the very old and those dependent upon care.

We pray for ourselves:

That we may respond with love and understanding to the responsibilities of living in a democracy.

Creator God

whose son Jesus challenged those who govern,

showed people how to live together,

listened to those who had no voice

and who brings love and wholeness to us

hear our prayer.

**Amen**

**Blessing**

God is with us.

Go in the power of the Lord  
to bring blessing, hope and peace.

**Amen**

*The Methodist Church*

## Theological Reflections

**“Racism and related forms of prejudice are evils that Christians are called to struggle against”**

### Engaging hope

‘Racism and related forms of prejudice are evils that Christians are called to struggle against as they seek the renewal of hearts and minds, as well as the transformation of our society.’

*Church of England House of Bishops*

God’s people are called to seek peace and human flourishing in the places they live (Isaiah 65:20-23 Jeremiah 29.7). Community cohesion and well-being depend on people being willing to build bridges between groups of different heritages – ethnic, religious, class or whatever.

Fear and distrust is often based on misunderstanding and misinformation, these are easily manipulated by those seeking to widen divisions.

The prophet Micah proclaimed that what God requires is for us ‘to do justice, love Mercy and to walk humbly with our God’ (Micah 6.8). That determination should enable us to have overcome our fears and live hopefully. Hope in a community’s future is a project in which everyone needs to join in.

Hope must overcome fears and low self-esteem in communities which often turn to extremist groups as a last resort. These groups reinforce nativity and pessimism, and isolate communities from other parts of their cities.

In the Christian tradition our redemption happens in a moment of extreme worthlessness – the crucifixion.- the moment and place where indifference and desperation meet, where negativity and marginalisation seem to triumph, Christian hope enables us to see a different story – it is the lies and toxicity that are nailed to the cross.

Despair is taken by God and transformed in Easter as a moment of new life and hope offered to all. ([See note](#)) ‘Do not be afraid’ ( Matthew 28.5,10) are the words at the heart the Easter movement.

The churches in Britain are well placed to articulate hope from below, as well as speak from a national platform. They must stay and engage in the places where extremist groups have attempted to distort and dominate communities which have been on the edge of recent economic prosperity, where difference is viewed with suspicion, and which now face more uncertain times as public spending in reduced.

Extremist groups in the political arena, or those attempting to occupy public space, do not share a common vision of human flourishing must be resisted and exposed.

Christians must maintain a critical saltiness ( Mark 9.50) within cultural or societal settings as part of a calling that seeks alternatives, as well as being willing to engage with the life affirming movements within the places we are called to be Christ's disciples.

Hope for Christians is obviously a strategic starting point as we call into our present the hope of a city where wealth is found in civic commons and in the diversity of its population, (Revelation 21) as well as in our commitment to negotiate our difference face to face with those who share the likeness and image of God (Genesis 1).

The possibility of such solidarity takes us out of our religious, ethnic, class based tribalisms into new spaces where hope together overcomes fear.

Note: See, for example, Ched Myers and Elaine Enns *Ambassadors of Reconciliation New Testament Reflections on Restorative Justice and Peacemaking* v. 1 ( Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2009).

## Housegroup Activities

**Let us be open to  
your challenge,  
assured of your love  
and empowered to  
act.**

Your housegroup may also wish to look at [The Art of the Possible](#) a free series of six sessions looking at how our faith and life relate in a political world.

### NOTES FOR LEADERS

These activities are designed for use in small groups to enable people to begin to explore the relevance of political issues in a particularly local setting, and the difficulties of taking political decisions. Different groups will take a different length of time to undertake an activity: you may wish to work through all of the activities or just focus on one, perhaps with a discussion on the church statements or the bible study.

### OPENING PRAYERS

Gracious God  
breathe your Holy Spirit into our time together  
that we may discern your will  
as we consider the decisions that are before us.  
Let us be open to your challenge,  
assured of your love  
and empowered to act. AMEN

### Activity A

Resources: several copies of the local paper for the previous week or election leaflets from all relevant parties.

As a group, 'thought shower' or brainstorm what you think are the key five issues for the area in which your church is based? (for example crime, antisocial behaviour, facilities for children and young people) Look at the local papers or election leaflets provided. Do you think these reflect the key issue that you identified? In what way are these issues presented? Do you feel that they should be considered differently?

Prepare some questions that you could address to a politician that would reveal what they thought about your concerns as a church. These may be questions that you would want to pose on the doorstep, at a hustings meeting or through the media.

Reflect:

Did you identify issues of racial tension as key for your communities?

Are these also key issues for your church?

Do you feel that your questions to politicians would enable you to find out what they really intend to do if elected?

How might you test their attitudes to race and asylum issues?

### **Activity B**

This activity helps to explore the tensions present in decision-making for politicians.

You are the members of Rivergreen Parish Council. The parish includes an old village with a number of very large houses and an extensive area of council housing that was built in the 1970s. Crime and anti social behaviour are key issues for the area. There are tensions between different communities within the parish. You have £35,000 raised from the parish precept (the money raised from the parish part of the council tax) to distribute in grants to local causes. The following applications have been received:

#### **Park Warden**

To provide a link between the community and the park. The warden will be present in the park on a daily basis and will specifically make links between the environment and local schools and other groups. It is hoped that this new post will help prevent vandalism by developing a relationship between the park and local children and young people. This post would be joint funded with the district council and a local wildlife trust.

AMOUNT REQUESTED £10,000

#### **Rivergreen Girls Football Club**

The Rivergreen Girls football Club was established in 1999. Since then it has been very successful in attracting girls into sport. The team needs its own strip now to enable it to play in the local league.

AMOUNT REQUESTED £4,000

#### **Graffiti art project**

This project will bring together the work of the detached youth workers and professional graffiti artists. It is hoped to encourage the artistic skills of those young people involved in 'tagging' and other illegal graffiti. The resulting art works will be displayed in prominent public places in the parish.

AMOUNT REQUESTED £8,000

#### **Pakistani Youths Cricket coach**

To enable a professional cricket coach to work with youngsters from the Pakistani community during the school summer holidays. Young people from this community play a lot of cricket. There have been tensions recently between the people who live on the edge of the green where the youths play and the youths themselves. It is hoped that the coach can improve the skills of the young people as well as encourage responsible play.

AMOUNT REQUESTED £3,500

#### Travellers Liaison Officer

To provide advice on services available to travellers on illegal encampments in the parish. To provide a link between the community and travellers and to advocate on behalf of travellers. This post will be partially sponsored by the Gypsy Council

AMOUNT REQUESTED £14,000

#### Messy Play Sessions

To provide Messy play sessions for 3-5 year olds once a week at the local community centre.

AMOUNT REQUESTED £4,000

#### Village Hall Kitchen

The village Hall kitchen does not meet health and hygiene standards. Many community groups, including a children's playgroup and an old people's luncheon club, use the Village Hall. If the kitchen is not refurbished these activities will have to stop. It will also be impossible to let the Village Hall out for functions that make an important contribution to the running costs.

AMOUNT REQUESTED £10,000

Decide how the Parish Council should allocate the money between these different projects.

Afterwards reflect on the following questions:

How did you decide to allocate the funding?

Did you find yourself developing criteria?

Did you consider how the voters of Rivergreen Parish might view your decisions?

In considering the applications where did you feel that your responsibility lay?

What do you feel you have learnt about the tensions faced by local (and national) politicians?

#### Activity C

Suggest that the group writes prayers for councillors, other politicians and your local area which could be used in a church service.

#### CLOSING PRAYERS

Father God

be with us as we walk our streets and greet our neighbours.

Give us the courage to challenge racism,

to seek justice

and to live lives that celebrate your everlasting love.

AMEN

**Produced by the Joint Public Issues Team**

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