

## CSAN Statement on the General Election 2024

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“There is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards.”

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 195

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The Prime Minister has called a General Election to be held in the United Kingdom on Thursday 4 July 2024. This is an opportunity for the Catholic community to exercise active citizenship and contribute to the building up of God’s Kingdom of “love, justice and peace” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 39).

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reminded us of the **importance and purpose of voting**. They went so far as to call it a duty, and not just for Catholics. “All citizens, therefore, should be mindful of the right and also the duty to use their free vote to further the common good” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75).

For this reason, CSAN is launching a campaign - **#RegisterToVote** - to encourage everyone in the Catholic community who is eligible, to register to vote and to use their vote on 4 July. In this campaign, parishes, schools, colleges and university chaplaincies will have a particularly important role to play in encouraging their parishioners and students to register and to cast their vote on 4 July.

If you haven’t registered to vote in the General Election, you must do so by **23:59 on Tuesday, 18 June 2024**. If you are eligible, you can do so here: [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote). Photo ID is necessary in order to be permitted to vote. Use this link for more information: [gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate](https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate).

The Church does not tell people which party to vote for and, as our bishops reminded us prior to a previous election, “a general election must never be confused with a single-issue referendum” (*The Common Good*, 65), but the Church gives us the *principles* by which we can discern which candidate and which party will best advance the common good.

The **common good** has been a keystone of Catholic Social Teaching from the outset. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Fathers of the Council defined the common good as, “the sum of

those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26).

The Bishops of England and Wales reminded us that this definition is otherwise described as “integral human development” - the flourishing of the whole person - which we have a responsibility for, since “all are responsible for all, collectively, at the level of society, not only as individuals” (*The Common Good*, 48).

The promotion of the common good, the key criterion for determining who we vote for, means the flourishing of all people and the whole person, with no one left behind. Integral human development means that every person has a right to what is required to live a fully human life such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to raise a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to medical care, rest and social services (*Pacem in Terris*, 11; *Gaudium et Spes*, 26).

The common good is based on another foundational principle in Catholic Social Teaching, **the dignity of the human person**. This dignity is intrinsic, and indelible, conferred on us by our divine origin and eternal destiny. We are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), that is we are made in love and for love, “each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary” (Pope Benedict XVI, quoted in *Laudato Si'*, 65). The Church has always promoted and protected the dignity of the human person throughout the life course, from conception to the natural end of life.

All of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching are inspired by the Gospel, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ. At the heart of the Gospel is **love**, since “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and love is the new commandment given to us by Jesus (John 15:12). The will of God for human beings is that we live in unity and love. Our Father, who has a tender concern for everyone, “has willed that all people should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 25). The Church’s guiding vision of a “civilization of love” (Pope Paul VI) is based on the will of God for his children.

Love, as the Catechism reminds us, “is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Love inspires a life of self-giving” (*Catechism*, 1889). The Gospel begins in love but does not end there, but rather with what love insists upon, namely **justice and peace**, a society which is worthy of the human person.

With love at the heart of our approach to the General Election, a distinctive **style and tone** should characterise Catholics who take part in public discourse. Writing in 1996, the bishops



were keen “to raise the level of public debate” (*The Common Good*, 6). Since then, we have seen further deterioration in the tone and quality of public discourse, with increased polarisation and aggression, at times directed to MPs, with tragic consequences. A public discourse motivated by love will be patient and kind, as St Paul reminds us (1 Corinthians 13: 1-13). It will not be rude or resentful, but will rejoice in the truth.

Nor does a loving discourse imply that we shy away from difficult issues for fear of courting controversy. Another characteristic of a Catholic approach to public discourse at any time, and especially during a general election, will be **boldness** (*parrhesia*). Pope Francis reminds us that “holiness is also *parrhesia*: it is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 129). In this we are inspired by the Apostles in the early days of the Church who prayed, “grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29). We are called to raise a prophetic voice, “to identify and resist structures of injustice in [our] society” (*The Common Good*, 40).

We are called as Catholics by the teaching of the Church (*Mater et Magistra*, 236) to ‘see’ what is happening in our society, to ask the question, *what is going on?* In particular, we ask the question, what is going on with people who experience various types of poverty, be that material, relational or spiritual poverty? The Church has a **preferential option for the poor**, because “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Cor 8:9)” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 197). There will be many issues debated in the General Election, but one question should be at the forefront of any Catholic contribution: *what impact will any proposed policy have on the poorest members of the community?*

The Bishops of England and Wales, in their *Cost-of-Living Statement* in October 2023 had already confirmed this priority: “...the fact that many of the pressures facing the Government are long term in nature heightens, rather than lessens, the case for ensuring that the ‘preferential option for the poor’ is at the forefront of the Government’s priorities. This principle requires that policies are scrutinised for their impact on the poor: ‘Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God’ (Proverbs 14:31). And, in this difficult environment, new policy options should be considered that will promote human dignity and the common good more effectively.”

When we try to “see” what is going on with people in our society - with children and their mental health, with people who are sick, with those who need to use food banks because their income is inadequate for a dignified life, with people who are homeless, people in prison, with the elderly in care homes, or people coming to our country to seek asylum, as is their right - we need to be attentive to our way of seeing, in other words our own

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prejudices. We are called to see with the eyes of grace, to see people as God our merciful Father sees them.

We are then invited **to pray, to discern** what the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching tells us about what we see. What is of God, what is not of God? What is humanising, what is de-humanising? Where is the injustice, the exploitation, the isolation, the suffering? The Gospel forms us in a way of seeing and discerning which insists on **solidarity**, the truth that we are “all responsible for all” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38), not individuals motivated only by self-interest and material gain. We were made for relationship, for community. Life to the full means living in ‘right relationship’ with God, other people, and the earth, our common home.

Having prayed for the grace to see reality as it is, in other words as God sees reality, we discern what is the best thing we can **do** to promote the common good and the dignity of the person. Where is the need for renewal, for justice? This may involve a local project to improve the community, or a campaign to advance social justice, or the forming of a new group to bridge divisions, increase participation and reduce isolation and loneliness. In the General Election, this means choosing to vote for the candidate and political party we believe in good conscience will most effectively build up the common good.

In the coming weeks, the team at Caritas Social Action Network will produce more resources which you may find helpful in your discernment as a parish, school, chaplaincy, family, or an individual. You will find worksheets on particular issues on our Do Justice website:

<https://dojustice.co.uk/resources/downloads/>

Below you will find a list of resources for the General Election which have been prepared by the Christian denominations. We will add to this as we discover any more resources which might be helpful. If you would like any more support and guidance in your preparation for the General Election, or would like to signpost any other resources, please contact us at [admin@csan.org.uk](mailto:admin@csan.org.uk)

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“The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 69).

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## General Election Resources

We will update this page as we become aware of other General Election resources which may benefit the Catholic community in their discernment. If you would like to suggest a resource for us to signpost, please contact us at [admin@csan.org.uk](mailto:admin@csan.org.uk)

**Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales** has assembled a range of teaching resources of difference topics to guide the Catholic community in its discernment on how to vote for the common good. The resources can be found here:

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/election24/>

**Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN)** has published *Do Justice: A Vision for Spiritual and Civic Renewal in England and Wales*. This document might be a good place to begin your preparations for a Catholic response to the General Election, as a reminder of the Gospel-inspired principles which inform our reflections. The document and other Do Justice resources can be found here: <https://dojustice.co.uk/>

**CAFOD and the St Vincent de Paul Society** have produced a resource to help the Catholic community engage with their candidates in the election called, *A Year of Encounter*. You can find the resource here: <https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/uk-general-election-2024-a-guide-for-catholic-voters> with other CAFOD resources and here: <https://svp.org.uk/encounter> with other SVP resources.

**Centre for Catholic Social Thought and Practice**, based at Durham University, has produced a range of resources for parishes and first-time voters. You can access the resources here: <https://ccstp.org.uk/>

**Columban Missionaries** in Britain's Justice, Peace and Ecology team are inviting people to request extra copies of their latest "Vocation for Justice" magazine filled with thought-provoking content that they hope will be useful to Christians in preparation for the General Election on 4 July. You can order your copies here: <https://columbans.co.uk/justice-peace/14110/request-extra-copies-of-vocation-for-justice-election-edition/>

**The Catholic Union of Great Britain**, which has members of its team in Parliament, will be producing its election literature in due course. Visit their website for updates: <https://catholicunion.org.uk/2024/05/the-election-campaign-begins/>

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**The Church of England** is launching a campaign known as [#PrayYourPart](#) – to promote prayer and participation in the life of our nation and communities, both as voters and as citizens. A series of daily thematic reflections written by bishops, drawn from the Bible and exploring major themes will cover the final three weeks up to polling day. You'll find more information here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/general-election-2024-invitation-pray-nation>

**Churches Together in Britain and Ireland** has produced a set of resources and links on the General Election, including a round-up of news from Christian churches, a local hustings search and other resources. For more information visit: <https://www.churcheselection.org.uk/>

**Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)** of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reform Church, has produced a guide for praying and preaching in preparation for the General Election which you can find here: <https://jpit.uk/general-election-praying-and-preaching>

**Citizens UK.** Many Catholic parishes and individuals are involved with Citizens UK. Their manifesto outlines eight areas that community leaders are calling on the next UK government to change. You can access the manifesto here: <https://www.citizensuk.org/campaigns/citizens-manifesto/>

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