

JOINT STATEMENT

BY SENIOR WEST MIDLANDS CHURCH LEADERS AHEAD OF THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 4 JULY 2024

Tuesday 4 June 2024

The forthcoming General Election is a seminal moment for the West Midlands, as for the UK, since those who will be elected as Members of Parliament on 4 July will make decisions that affect the region, directly or indirectly, for many years to come. We give thanks for all those who will stand for election to public office with the intention of seeking the common good. We recognise the sacrifice that this entails for each candidate and the members of their family.

As leaders of Christian Churches in the West Midlands, we encourage each Parliamentary candidate to commit to working to erase systemic poverty. We note with great concern that Stoke-on-Trent, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Sandwell and Walsall had the highest percentages of households living in fuel poverty in the UK in 2022.ⁱ Behind these statistics lie stories of poverty affecting thousands of individuals, families and children, limiting their life-chances and negatively affecting their life-expectancy. We are thankful for the work of 'Church Action on Poverty,' the 'Joint Public Issues Team,' the 'JustMoney Movement' and all faith-based organisations which seek to alleviate the effects of poverty and to lift people out of debt.ⁱⁱ We pray for a society that reflects the Biblical values of justice and compassion, in which everyone can live life to the full.

As leaders of Christian Churches in the West Midlands, we encourage each Parliamentary candidate to commit to building an immigration system that operates with compassion, justice, transparency and speed in its decision-making. We note that many asylum-seekers are to be found in large centres of population around the West Midlands.

We are profoundly grateful for the work of ‘Restore’ and ‘St Chad’s Sanctuary’ in Birmingham, ‘Brushstrokes’ in Sandwell and all faith-based groups which live out Jesus’s call to ‘welcome the stranger’ through their work with asylum-seekers, at times in the face of opposition and prejudice.ⁱⁱⁱ We pray for a society in which asylum seekers are welcomed, valued and integrated.

As leaders of Christian Churches in the West Midlands, we encourage each Parliamentary candidate to commit to supporting efforts to create an environmentally sustainable future. We are concerned at the impact of the climate crisis around the world, including the West Midlands. We note the difficulties faced by the farming community due to the extremely high rainfall over the winter of 2023/2024 and the damage caused by increasingly frequent flooding for some living next to the Rivers Severn and Trent. We are grateful for the work of ‘A Rocha UK,’ ‘Operation Noah,’ ‘Green Christian’ and all faith-based organisations which work to raise awareness of climate change and to enable a change of mindset and lifestyle in order to safeguard the future.^{iv} We pray for a society in which all strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

We urge all people of faith to engage with their respective Parliamentary candidates in private conversation or at public hustings around these, and other, important issues. We urge that all such engagement is carried out in a spirit of respect, truth and kindness. We encourage everyone to exercise their democratic right to express their opinion through the ballot box, which will entail ensuring that their name is on the Electoral Roll and that they have photographic ID with them when they visit the Polling Station on 4 July.^v And we encourage all people of faith across the West Midlands to pray for all in authority before, during and after the General Election of 4 July.

Signatories

Revd Adrian Argile

(Regional Minister Team Leader, Heart of England Baptist Association)

The Right Revd Sarah Bullock

(Bishop of Shrewsbury, Diocese of Lichfield, Church of England)

Pastor Marcus Chilaka

(Provincial Pastor, Redeemed Christian Church of God)

Bishop Deverton Douglas

(Bishop, Handsworth District, New Testament Church of God)

Revd David Ellis

(Regional Minister, Heart of England Baptist Association)

Pastor Eniiwaju Etomi

(Assistant Provincial Pastor, Redeemed Christian Church of God)

Revd Steve Faber

(Moderator, West Midlands Synod, United Reformed Church)

Rhiannon Grant

(Appointed Ecumenical Representative, Central England Quakers)

Revd Novette Headley

(Chair, Birmingham District, Methodist Church)

The Right Revd John Inge

(Bishop of Worcester, Diocese of Worcester, Church of England)

The Right Revd Michael Ipgrave

(Bishop of Lichfield, Diocese of Lichfield, Church of England)

The Right Revd Richard Jackson

(Bishop of Hereford, Diocese of Hereford, Church of England)

Revd Helen Kirk

(Chair, Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District, Methodist Church)

Revd Neil Le Tissier

(Regional Minister, Heart of England Baptist Association)

The Most Revd Bernard Longley
(Archbishop, Archdiocese of Birmingham, Roman Catholic Church)

Bishop Paul McCalla
(Midlands Area Bishop, Church of God of Prophecy)

The Right Revd Matthew Parker
(Bishop of Stafford, Diocese of Lichfield, Church of England)

Bishop Mike Royal
(General Secretary, Churches Together in England)

Major Brian Slinn
(Commander, West Midlands Division, Salvation Army)

The Right Revd Michael Volland
(Bishop of Birmingham, Diocese of Birmingham, Church of England)

The Right Revd Ruth Worsley
(Bishop of Taunton and Acting Bishop of Coventry, Church of England)

Footnotes

ⁱ The figures for 2022 were released on 25 April 2024 and are accessible via <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-2024-2022-data>.

ⁱⁱ Church Action on Poverty's work is profiled at <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>. The website of the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church can be found at <https://jpit.uk/>. The JustMoney Movement's website is at <https://justmoney.org.uk/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Restore's website is at <https://www.restore-uk.org/> and St Chad's Sanctuary's at <https://www.stchadssanctuary.com/>. Brushstrokes Community Project can be found at <https://www.brushstrokessandwell.org.uk/>.

^{iv} The A Rocha UK website is at <https://arocha.org.uk/>. Operation Noah's website can be found at <https://www.operationnoah.org/> and Green Christian's at <https://greenchristian.org.uk/>.

^v Full details of how to ensure that you are able to cast your vote in the General Election can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote>.