



THE GENERAL ELECTION 2017

A letter to Catholics in England and Wales from their Bishops

As we approach the General Election on 8 June, we offer you these considerations.

As Catholics and citizens of the UK, our lives are shaped by the vision inspired by our faith. Pope Francis says:

"An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters." Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* §183

These words encourage us to approach this General Election with a positive determination to consider carefully all that is at stake.

An important duty of every UK citizen with the right to vote is to take part in this General Election. Please make sure that you are registered. Please do vote. Your vote is a matter of conscience. It is your judgement about all that God wants of us, both personally and as a society.

Pope Francis reminds us of key principles to guide our thinking:

"...a deep desire to change this world and leave this earth a better place than we found it."

To do this we must name and face every injustice and exploitation which scars our society and world.

"We love this human family with all its tragedies and struggles"

The family is the basic model by which we think of humanity, for the family is indeed the fundamental unit of the human race and therefore to be protected and nurtured. The practical expression of this love is mercy and compassion, extended especially at times of illness, homelessness, bereavement, violence and desolation.

"The earth is our common home"

We cannot be indifferent to the struggles and disasters of people who live far away from us, and must strive to assist and protect them. We cannot be indifferent to the environmental impact of how we live and organise our creation of wealth and well-being.

"We are all brothers and sisters."

Here we insist that every person has a shared dignity that should never be denied or ignored. We are made in God's image and likeness, precious to him and each other, and this must be respected and valued.

These broad principles impact directly on many of the practical issues being debated at this time. Indeed, this General Election takes place at a pivotal moment in the life of our nations as we prepare to leave the European Union.

To a great extent the outcome of this election will determine the approach taken on how this is achieved, the priorities we pursue and the values we wish to treasure as our own in the UK and as partners with countries around the world. It will determine how we can heal divisions in our society, care for the vulnerable, how our public services are run and whether we can remain a united kingdom.

These principles shape our thinking about the issues that are being debated at this time. Attached are some questions you might consider yourselves and raise with candidates or those who seek your support.

LEAVING THE EUROPEAN UNION

There are over three million EU citizens living in the UK and about a million British citizens living elsewhere in the EU. They face an uncertain future. Where do your candidates stand on the future of EU citizens in the UK and reciprocal rights for UK citizens in the EU?

As our formal leaving of the EU approaches, new trade deals will be negotiated. It is important that in them human and workers' rights, the environment, and the development of the world's poorest countries are taken into account. What issues do your candidates think should be the top priority when forming new international partnerships?

ISSUES ON FAMILY AND LIFE

In 2015 Parliament voted overwhelmingly to protect society's most vulnerable people, by preventing the legalisation of assisted dying. Will your candidates uphold this decision? Will they support measures to promote the intrinsic value of life at every stage?

The family is at the heart of the health and well-being of society, above all the well-being of children. What policies do your candidates propose for the flourishing of family life?

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In a civilised society prisons should be places of redemption and rehabilitation. Our prison system faces unprecedented levels of violence and suicide. Do your candidates support urgent prison reform and better resourcing?

MIGRATION

The UK has long been a place of welcome for people from other countries. There needs to be a clear policy on migration, which works for the economy and is respectful of the unity of marriage and family life. How will your candidates ensure that we operate a fair migration system for people wanting to enter and work in the UK?

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The UK is currently committed to resettling at least 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees by 2020. Will your candidates work to ensure that this commitment is kept and options to expand the scheme are considered? Will they promote a welcoming society and stand against hate crime?

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Across the world millions of people are persecuted because of their beliefs. How do your candidates intend to promote freedom of religion or belief for all, and what steps could be taken as a priority in UK foreign policy to protect religious minorities, including Christian minorities?

HELPING THE WORLD'S POOREST

Aid provided by the UK saves lives and helps people out of poverty. Will your candidates commit to protecting and enhancing the international development budget?

CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE

There are many in our communities who are financially vulnerable and struggle to make ends meet or in need of decent housing. Where do your candidates stand on helping the poorest, in terms of health, social care and housing? How will they support people with mental health problems? How will they finance these services?

EDUCATION

Catholic schools make a positive contribution to society, serving over 845,000 children in England and Wales. Will your candidates support parental choice for the education of their children? Will they support Catholic schools as part of this choice for faith-based education?

MODERN SLAVERY

Modern slavery is a gross violation of human dignity affecting at least 14,000 people in the UK and millions more around the world. How will your candidate give political support to the fight against modern slavery and better assistance for its victims?

There are many other issues you will be considering. In all of them please bear in mind not only their impact on you and your family but also their impact on our wider world. The UK has a long and worthy tradition of generosity and justice. The values contained in these questions are fundamental to our way of life and the good of our society.

Lord grant us wisdom to act always with integrity, seeking the protection and flourishing of all, and building a society based on justice and peace.

Issued by the Archbishops of Westminster, Cardiff, Southwark, Birmingham and Liverpool on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.