

Message from Bishop Rachel

16 April 2024



In this season of Easter as we celebrate Christ's resurrection how do we live and speak of Christ's transforming love, hope and life in all its fulness, as we pay attention to the struggles, challenges and hopes of people's lives (children, young people and adults)? And what might that mean for the ways we engage with political decisions and priorities at local and national level?

Today is the final day for registering to vote in the local elections on 2 May, including the election of local Police and Crime commissioners. I wonder what percentage of our communities, including our worshipping communities, are registered to vote and what percentages will actually do so. I recognise that for a number of chaplains, and those primarily engaged with children and young people, this question is less relevant, although the issues are no less pertinent. Those we will elect will have significant influence on the lives of all people in our different contexts.

At some point this year we will have a general election. We don't yet know when it will be, but I believe that as Christians we should be getting ourselves prepared as manifestoes are written and priorities are identified. An immediate practicality is encouraging people to register to vote. Furthermore, in this Bulletin there is information regarding the hosting of hustings and how we might be thinking ahead and working with ecumenical partners and across deaneries. The guidance has been produced by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches, in collaboration with other ecumenical bodies, and is intended to help churches organise safe events which comply with the law.

I'm aware that a number of people may respond by saying it is not the role of the Church to be involved in such political processes but my response would echo that of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu who once famously said that 'When people say that the Bible and politics don't mix, I ask them which Bible they are reading.'

Thirty years ago in April 1994 I was in my final year at theological college preparing to be ordained, and I was in South Africa undertaking a placement with a church in the Cape where Desmond Tutu was the Archbishop. For the first time, people of all colours were about to vote in the first democratic elections in South Africa. The abhorrence of racial apartheid was officially at an end.

What struck me with great force was not only how many in the Anglican Church had participated in the struggle against apartheid, but also how the Church was actively involved in preparing people for those first elections. Training sessions around the practicalities of voting, including how to mark the extremely long voting paper, were held in church buildings and even included at the end of times of worship. The excitement of many people who would be voting for the first time was palpable. One thing which was definitely absent was apathy. The voting right of all people, regardless of colour, had been hard won and was not to be taken lightly.

As we prepare for a general election in 2024 it is not about the Church being party-political but rather recognising that as Christians we can be proactive in enabling people to use their voice, action and who they are, to shape the sort of country and world they want to see.

Thank you for your partnership in the gospel. May you continue to discover ever greater depths to Christ's love and hope in these days of Eastertide. Alleluia! Christ is risen.

+ Rachel