

GENERAL ELECTION 2024

A LETTER FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF SCOTLAND

This General Election presents us with an opportunity to connect our voting to our Catholic faith and elect an individual representative who reflects as closely as possible our values and beliefs.

It is an opportunity to proclaim the dignity and value of every human being, made in the image and likeness of God, and promote the common good. The human person is both the foundation and the goal of society, and the principal task of society is to defend and foster human dignity in its laws and institutions which should, in turn, support peace and justice at home and abroad.

During elections, a range of issues compete for our attention. And whilst the Bishops' Conference of Scotland does not endorse or support individual candidates or parties, we highlight some of the key issues here so that individual Catholics may reflect on, and raise them, with parliamentary candidates.

Human Life

It is the duty of all of us to uphold the most basic and fundamental human right – the right to life, which is both inalienable and inviolable. At the heart of the political response to the Covid Pandemic was the desire to protect and care for the most vulnerable. In a truly compassionate society, this desire to protect and care ought to extend to all people, including the unborn child in the womb. We should urge MPs to recognise human life from the moment of conception and ensure that the conditions are present to protect and care for both mother and child.

This also applies at the end of life. Dangerous proposals to legalise assisted suicide must be rejected in favour of improvements to palliative care and a commitment to meet the needs of vulnerable people at the end of life, including providing the care and compassion they need to help them live. Our politicians should be urged to learn the lessons of how assisted suicide legislation introduced in some countries has already become an intolerable and unjust pressure upon the elderly, the weak and the disabled to see themselves - and to be considered by others - a burden to society and thus to end their lives, or have their lives ended for them. This is an injustice that ought to be resisted before it can begin.

Marriage and the Family

Society relies on the building block of the family to exist. The love of man and woman in marriage and their openness to new life is the basic, fundamental cell upon which society is built. The wellbeing of society depends on the flourishing and health of family life and MPs should respond to this with policies that create economic and fiscal support for married couples and families with children.

Poverty and Immigration

Sadly, poverty continues to be a scourge for many at home and abroad. Too many people still struggle to make ends meet, homelessness is on the rise, and the two-child limit on tax credits is disproportionately affecting large families, including many families of faith. This reality cannot and should not endure in our country in the twenty-first century. Reliance on food and clothing banks is a damning indictment of a society that has forgotten its poor.

Our country persists in a tragic lack of charity and responsibility owed to our poorest brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. With this in mind, we should call on candidates to work for an immediate return to an overseas aid budget of 0.7% of GNI and provide debt-relief to low-income countries that need it.

We should welcome refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and remove the inhumane Rwanda policy and indefinite immigration detention and provide for those people living in and around conflict zones while committing to working towards the peaceful resolution of conflict.

The Environment

MPs should also commit the nation to responsible stewardship of the earth and all its resources, and act on Pope Francis' call to be 'protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.' We cannot be indifferent to the harmful effects of climate change.

War and Nuclear Weapons

A key task of the state is to ensure peace at home and abroad. We are deeply troubled by the tragedy of war in the world, including conflicts in Ukraine and the Holyland, and firmly believe it is incumbent on the UK Parliament and Government to foster peace where conflict exists and to do everything in its power to prevent bloodshed.

The use of weapons of mass destruction is a serious crime against God and humanity. While states are entitled to possess the means required for legitimate defence, this must not become an excuse for an excessive accumulation of weaponry which becomes a considerable threat to stability and freedom as well as a misuse of public funds that could serve to address the needs of the disadvantaged. The UK Government must work actively and seriously towards elimination of the UK's nuclear arsenal, and the promotion of a more peace-oriented manufacturing industry.

Freedom of Religion and Conscience

We believe that a creeping intolerance towards religious belief, including but not confined to Christianity, has become part of life in modern Britain. Certain politicians and citizens are finding it increasingly difficult to be true to their faith in an environment that tries to restrict religion to the private sphere. Our MPs should be urged to legislate for a liberal and tolerant society that is truly welcoming to all faiths and none. Nor can we be blind to the plight of millions of people worldwide who are persecuted for their beliefs. People of faith, including Christians, should be able to practise their faith freely and to bear witness to it in their lives without fear of prejudice, intolerance, abuse or violence.

Finally, as we engage in this General Election, please pray for those who will be charged with representing the nation's interests in Parliament. May they pursue peace and justice and put the human person at the centre of all political activity.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

- + Hugh Gilbert, President, Bishop of Aberdeen
- + John Keenan, Vice-President, Bishop of Paisley
- + Brian McGee, Episcopal Secretary, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles
- + Leo Cushley, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh
- + William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow
- + Joseph Toal, Bishop of Motherwell
- + Francis Dougan, Bishop of Galloway

Embedded within Catholic Social Teaching is the obligation to exercise our democratic prerogative through voting in the forthcoming UK general election: “All citizens...should be mindful of the right and also the duty to use their free vote to further the common good.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75).

We should do so guided by our faith, a central tenet of which is that those elected to positions of power must recognise, respect and uphold the inherent dignity and value of every human being, made in the image and likeness of God, and promote care for creation locally and globally.

The Bishops’ Conference of Scotland does not endorse or promote individual candidates or parties. However, ahead of deciding where to place an X on our ballot papers on July 4, the *Catholic Parliamentary Office* and *Justice and Peace Scotland* have prepared questions for candidates to complement the themes of the Catholic Bishops of Scotland’s Pastoral Letter. Asking candidates for their responses to these questions can help inform how we observe Church teaching in our electoral choices. If you are unable to question candidates in person, contact details can be found for those standing in your area on the CPO website (<https://rcpolitics.org/general-election-2024/>). Consulting party manifestos may give insight into party stances on these themes.

HUMAN LIFE

Will you place the intrinsic value and dignity of the human person at the heart of all your political decision making and vote to protect human life and dignity in all contexts?

Will you support social policies that will allow people in need, such as vulnerable mothers and their babies, the elderly, or terminally ill and their families to have access to quality support and care?

Will you reject dangerous proposals to legalise assisted suicide and commit to improvements in palliative care to meet the needs of vulnerable people at the end of life?

(Note: although abortion and assisted suicide are devolved matters, it is helpful to know candidates’ positions on these issues).

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Changes to the tax and benefit systems in recent years have significantly impacted the incomes of families with children, what are your plans to reform the current systems to make them fairer for families?

POVERTY AND IMMIGRATION

What will you do to address unprecedented at-home poverty across our society, where two million people use food banks every week, 30% of children live in poverty and over seven in ten low-income families across the UK are going without essentials each week?

Do you support the removal of the unjust two-child cap on Universal Credit payments, which significantly impacts the poorest and also those with larger families?

Do you condemn the hostile environment approach to migration, asylum seekers and refugees with its inflammatory rhetoric that has sown seeds of hatred and division in our communities while destroying compassion for our fellow human beings?

Will you support measures to repeal the cruel Rwanda Act, Illegal Migration Act and Nationality and Borders Act and instead champion the establishment of more safe routes to the UK for those fleeing violence and oppression?

THE ENVIRONMENT

What steps will you take to ensure that the UK upholds its international legal obligations under the Paris Agreement to ensure that global temperature increases do not rise above 1.5°C?

Do you accept that prohibition of new coal, oil and gas developments and licences are essential to ensure the UK achieves net-zero by 2050, and how would you deliver a just transition away from fossil fuels to ensure workers in fossil fuel related industries are protected?

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND CONSCIENCE

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are fundamental human rights which are protected in various international legal treaties, including the European Convention of Human Rights. Are you committed to ensuring the UK remains a signatory of the Convention, alongside almost every other country in Europe?

WAR AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

To what extent are you committed to non-violent solutions to conflict, and will you champion the UK as a peace-making nation committed to protecting human life when war and violence occur?

What are your plans to advocate for justice and peace in countries where conflict is currently present, including in The Holy Land and Ukraine?

Do you reject the immoral existence of nuclear weapons and the profits-before-human-lives activities of the UK arms trade and are you in favour of working alongside other nations on the path to nuclear disarmament, including the signing of the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons?