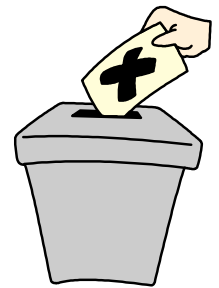


# Skateboard



## General Election 2010

Election Issue from the Diocese of Hereford's Council for Social Responsibility April 2010

# Make the Cross Count



The current recession, the credit crunch and the parliamentary expenses debacle have created, for many, a crisis of confidence in our social, economic and political systems. To

some, the political world appears to be in chaos and confusion. Trust in politicians is at a low point and the electorate will be casting around to find a suitable home for their vote. Traditional opposition parties no longer seem to offer alternatives.

Whilst this may lead to an interesting election it seems likely that some voters will opt out of the election altogether, whilst others may seek refuge in independent and minority parties whose policies have a simplistic and resonant appeal because they attempt to offer people a way out of their confusion.

Currently politicians are putting forward reform and control of the political system through legislation. This is offered as the panacea for the ills which have befallen the body politic. Producing new sets of parliamentary rules and un-elected watchdogs is not the answer because what we have before us is a moral crisis.

Today's situation is not unlike the period in the 1930's when Archbishop William Temple set out his three core principles of freedom, social fellowship and service. In 2009 the Archbishop of York spoke of the need for the church to regain the big vision for Britain. A prophetic church needs to have a clear moral vision for society, re-engage people with that vision and stimulate people into positive action.

The Most Revd Vincent Nichols calls for a return to the classical Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity in public and private life. A sound moral basis is one that eliminates excessive inequality and brings about a just, fair and even society. Liberty and parity are not a matter of political compromise, but have a common foundation in the ideal of a socially responsible society that recognises all its members as free and having equal value, whatever their status and background.

During the expenses scandal the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote, "Religious-based morality is often castigated for imposing irrational and arbitrary rules on people. But the truth is that religious-based morality is primarily concerned with how to encourage us to act in such a way that we can be glad of what we have done and can recognize that bad actions diminish us. Of course there is a debased religious morality that is about fear and punishment. But the major faiths see our task as becoming what we are made to be and called to be – as growing in integrity and responding to our vocation."

Our task is not so much to condemn the past failures but to consider carefully the policies of those seeking election and then to use our vote. In this way we shall help our communities find a sense of camaraderie, social cohesion and common purpose.

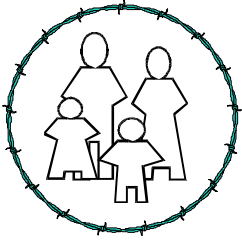
### A PRAYER



*I am only one but still I am one;  
I cannot do everything  
but I can do something;  
What I can do I ought to do;  
And what I ought to do  
by the grace of God I will do.*

Christians do Politics

## Global Community



The General Election is a key opportunity to ensure that the issue of international poverty is firmly on the political agenda.

So many millions of people around the world lack the basic needs for survival whilst the richer countries consume much of the earth's resources. Politicians should focus on offering long term solutions to deep-rooted challenges.

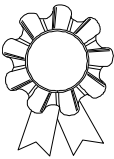
The reality of international terrorism has led to debates on the balances which need to be achieved between security and civil liberties.

The global common good needs to be promoted through respect for the rule of law and by strengthening international organisations such as the UN. It requires policies that challenge the root causes of injustice.

- ✗ What are we really prepared to do about the long term effects of irresponsible international economic policies and priorities which serve to reinforce instability in poorer nations?
- ✗ Can security be created in a world where we allow fear to make our decisions for us?
- ✗ When does the use of violence become a justification for maintaining the rule of law?

***The Election is an opportunity to renew the vision of a community united by mutual respect, high ethical standards and the pursuit of justice and peace.***

### Bishop Urges all to Vote

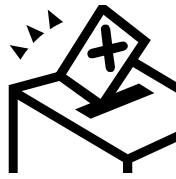


The Bishop of Ludlow, the Rt Revd Alistair Magowan, speaking to *Skateboard* ahead of the General Election, said, "Most of us realise the importance of making our communities better places and ensuring that the issues that face us are brought into the wider public agenda. Our MPs are there to serve us, so please read your *Skateboard* and don't let this important day pass without making your vote."

#### Ask the Candidates:

*What role do you think faith communities should play in politics and public life?*

## The Economy



Since the last Election, when the British economy was described as a "success story", the recession has bitten hard. The credit crunch dampened economic activity and bailing out the banks by the Government to prevent a catastrophic collapse has cost billions. Unemployment has risen quickly and no rapid recovery from the recession is in view. Levels of debt, both personal and national, are very high by historic standards.

Income inequality has widened. Research shows that the damaging impact of wide inequality on happiness, well-being and human relationships is very significant.

In the last decade the consensus of all parties has been that a continual increase in public spending is in the best interest of the country. In the light of the economic turbulence the role of public spending is now more disputed. Getting out of the present difficulties, without causing massive inflation or provoking a deeper depression, is the major dilemma facing any Government.

- ✗ What conditions should the Government impose on the banks in return for bailing them out of a crisis largely of their own making?
- ✗ Do you accept that treating growth as the only economic goal has made people in general less happy and has damaged social bonds?
- ✗ How can the Government and the economy serve human interests better?
- ✗ How can the Government work to redress the widening inequality of wealth?

*Our engagement in the political system can help bring integrity and service back to the heart of democracy.*

### Living in Clover?

The Diocese of Hereford is very rural. The relationship between the rural and urban is one of interdependence. Agriculture should not reduce those in the urban areas to just consumers because those in towns should be aware of the injustice and hardship felt by rural food producers.

Many key services in the rural areas are further away from the residents compared to the urban experience. Added to this, the average age of those living in the rural areas will rise significantly over the next decade.

- ✗ How can young people be encouraged to live in rural communities?
- ✗ How can health services be more accessible?
- ✗ What strategies exist to balance the needs of rural and urban people?

**On their own, targets, rules and regulations cannot improve the quality of our shared life. People do that. They do it by choosing the common good rather than pure self-interest.**



# A Vote for the Family!

Family issues need to be at the forefront of political debate. Concern is often expressed about the effect of family breakdown upon the future stability of society. The annual cost of family breakdown is huge in economic, financial, social and personal terms.

Whilst there can be no doubt of the benefit to children of a stable family unit, considerable demographic, social and economic changes have taken place which mean the family is under continual pressure.

In giving thought to the future well-being of the family, whatever form that may take, Christians need to push for policies which strengthen the stability of the family unit.



- ✗ Should measures be introduced to support the institution of marriage?
- ✗ Should financial support be given to a parent who remains at home as a child carer?
- ✗ Is it always beneficial for children to have a working single parent?

### Ask the Candidates:

*What values underpin your involvement in politics?*



## The Older Voter

As the parties make promises on pensions and care costs, it is quite possible that the 'grey vote' holds the key to success at the ballot box.

Among the challenges in the election will be age discrimination, the end of a mandatory retirement age and improved services in health, welfare and better pension provision.

- ✗ Should the basic state pension be increased rather than making one-off payments and relying on means-tested benefits?
- ✗ How can we develop a culture which challenges the assumption that older people just need 'looking after'?
- ✗ How can we pay for a National Care Service?

## Criminal Justice

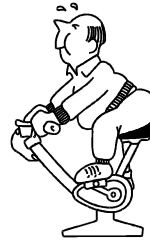
There are currently record levels of men and women in prison in England. Many prisons are overcrowded and unable to deliver adequate programmes of education and rehabilitation.

Prisons should not be seen as a dustbin for the difficulties which society fails to address elsewhere. Many people are in prison who primarily are in need of psychiatric care and support.

To be truly effective, criminal justice policy should not be isolated from other social policies such as education, training, health, housing and employment.

- ✗ How can the needs of those with mental illness or learning disabilities be addressed within the criminal justice system?
- ✗ What are the key elements of effective rehabilitation to restore offenders to the community and reduce the risk of re-offending?

## A Right to Health?



Health is so central to our well-being and the NHS so central to our experience of healthcare that it has to be a key election issue.

As well as the obvious concerns with the Health Service, there are issues such as adequate mental health provision.

Have people the 'right' to binge drink, overwork, sleep around and eat unhealthily, putting increased pressures on the Health Service?

Do we have unrealistic expectations? Should we see health in more holistic terms closer to those of the World Health Organization which defines health as, "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being"?

- ✗ How can people be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own health?
- ✗ How can we improve provision of services for people with mental health problems?
- ✗ With an older population, what support is needed to ensure excellent local care for those with dementia?

## Housing Issues

Whichever political party succeeds in forming the next Government, it is vital that housing and homelessness are high on the agenda. They are big issues which touch on all aspects of life. The gap between housing demand and supply is widening.

- ✗ In the light of tighter public spending what strategy do political parties have to manage the housing shortage?



**The common good is about how to live well together. It is the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a full, genuinely human life.**

## Live TV Hustings in Hereford

In the lead up to the General Election, the Politics Show in the Midlands will be holding three TV debates in the region including one at The Courtyard, Hereford.

The debates will be live and will take place on the three Sundays leading up to the General Election and will feature local candidates.

So if you are not sure who to vote for and want to put some tough questions to our party politicians then the Politics Show wants to hear from you!

Audience members are needed to take part in the programme and to ask those pressing questions in the coming weeks.

- To take part ☎ 0845 300 1138 and leave a message with your name and a daytime phone number or email Michael Wood at: michael.wood3@bbc.co.uk



## Which Way to Vote?

All political parties present their policies as the right ones for the British people, while suggesting that the other parties are offering misguided alternatives. How can we be wise and discerning over the way we decide to cast our vote at this General Election?

If we base our vote purely on things pleasing to narrow self-interest alone, this will quite likely bring a different opinion and judgement to that based on a desire for the common good. Is it possible from a Christian perspective to find some criteria to assist us in our judgement?

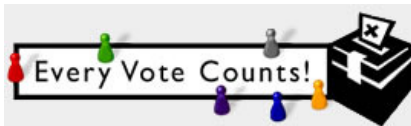
- ✗ Which party addresses the divide in the world between rich and poor?
- ✗ Which party has a commitment and strategy to protect and sustain our environment?
- ✗ Which party expresses most clearly the belief that every individual is precious to God in their policies on work, income, on the need for affordable homes, in their policies on law and order, health and education and policies for human development and human rights?
- ✗ Which party's foreign policy is most internationally progressive and ethical and most likely to encourage disarmament, peace and trust between nations?
- ✗ Which candidate seems to best understand local and regional needs?
- ✗ Which party takes a modest view of itself so that knowing the frailty of all political judgements we might trust them to be self-critical when things fail?

Revd David Clarke, URC Minister

**More information** - To explore General Election issues in more depth, **Churches Together in Britain and Ireland** have produced "Faith in Politics" - [http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf\\_view.php?id=437](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=437)

**The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales** has produced "Choosing the Common Good" - download at [www.catholicchurch.org.uk](http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk)

Visit **The Church of England** - <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/generalelection>



Every vote counts is a project designed to help people who have a learning disability get easy information about politics and how to get involved and have a say in how the country is run.

The website is supplemented by printed materials for people who have difficulty using a computer.

- [www.everyvotecounts.org.uk](http://www.everyvotecounts.org.uk)

## Get to the Hustings!

Details for hustings arranged by church groups for local constituencies are:

**Ludlow** - Tuesday, 13th April at 7.30 pm at Ludlow School

(questions in advance)

**Leominster** - Friday, 16th April at 7 pm in the Priory (questions in advance)

**Hereford** - ☎ 01432 373311

**Church Stretton** - Wednesday, 21st April at 7.30 pm in the Methodist Church

**Ross-on-Wye** - Friday, 23rd April at 7.30 pm in John Kyrle High School

(questions in advance) ☎ 01989 562175

**Tenbury Wells** - Sunday, 25th April at 3 pm at St Mary's Church

**Ledbury** - Contact Revd Paul Dunthorne for details ☎ 01531 631531

**Telford** - Contact Revd Andy Smith for details ☎ 01952 291904

- More details and confirmation of all these are available from Jackie Boys

☎ 01432 373311.



Skateboard is produced by Jackie Boys, Social Responsibility Officer, Diocese of Hereford. For further information contact Jackie Boys at the Gateway Office, The Palace, Hereford HR4 9BL ☎ 01432 373311 Email [j.boys@hereford.anglican.org](mailto:j.boys@hereford.anglican.org) Skateboard is on the web at [www.hereford.anglican.org](http://www.hereford.anglican.org).