

GENERAL ELECTION 2010 – CAMPAIGNING THEMES

CLIMATE CHANGE

- More than 80 percent of the greenhouse gases currently in the atmosphere are the result of emissions by rich, Northern countries.
- Some 262 million people were affected by climate disasters annually from 2000 to 2004, over 98 percent of them in the global south.

“The ecological crisis offers an historic opportunity to develop a common plan of action aimed at orienting the model of global development towards greater respect for creation and for an integral human development.”

Pope Benedict XVI

Useful websites:

www.cafod.org.uk

www.operationnoah.org

Question to candidates:

Do you support working towards a fair and binding global climate deal as an immediate priority? By a fair and binding global climate deal we mean this deal should:

- be legally binding,
- include emissions cuts of more than 40 per cent on 1990 levels by 2020,
- include US\$195 billion each year by 2020 on top of existing aid pledges to help poor countries cope with climate change.

PEACE

- The estimated costs of the replacement of Trident, the UK’s nuclear missile system, is in excess of £75 billion.
- Each year the UK exports around £5 billion worth of military equipment around the globe.

“We need to work at getting relationships right: relationships between people and relationships between people and planet. This is what peacemaking is about.”

Pat Gaffney, Pax Christi

Useful websites:

www.paxchristi.org.uk

www.rethinktrident.org.uk

www.caat.org.uk

Questions to candidates:

Do you think Trident should be replaced?

The UK Trade and Industry Defence & Security Organisation is a government unit which helps private companies sell military equipment and services overseas. Do you think this government unit should be closed?

What are the options for the future of Afghanistan?

FOOD AND WATER

■ Approximately 450 million small-scale farmers feed roughly two billion people, so they are a key group in fighting poverty.

■ If temperature increases in the Andes to the extent that glaciers disappear, the water supplies of up to 50 million people will be endangered.

“Continuing hunger is a deep stain on our world. The time has come to remove it – forever. We have the wealth and know-how to do so. Let us do our utmost to keep hunger at the centre of the political lens.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Useful websites:

www.progressio.org.uk

www.fairtrade.org.uk

Questions to candidates:

How can the UK government give greater support to the world’s small-scale farmers?

Do you support fairtrade initiatives?

What will you do to ensure the access of poor communities around the world to water?

DEBT

■ In 2006, Norway unilaterally cancelled \$80m in debt owed by five poor countries, on the grounds that the loans were examples of a “development policy failure” linked to irresponsible lending.

■ In November 2009, two vulture funds won £20 million against Liberia in the UK High Court. A ‘Vulture fund’ is a company that seeks to make profit by buying up cheap defaulted poor country debt and then attempting to recover the full amount immediately, often by suing through the courts.

“An imaginative and radical set of policies is needed to address the triple crunch of debt, peak oil and climate change.”

Ann Pettifor

Useful website:

www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk

Questions to candidates:

Would you recognise the concept of co-responsibility and illegitimacy in lending and take steps to deal with historical illegitimate debt?

Would you legislate to prohibit the activities of vulture funds in UK courts?

POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN BRITAIN

■ The gap between rich and poor in the UK is greater now than at any time in the past 40 years. This is not only unjust; research shows that inequality has a corrosive effect on the whole of society, linked with higher crime, health problems and other social ills.

■ People on low incomes who cannot get credit from mainstream banks are forced to borrow from doorstep lenders or ‘payday’ lenders. In the absence of any legal limit on cost of

loans, many are forced to pay interest rates as high as 1000 percent. This traps people in a cycle of debt.

“There must come a point at which the scale of the gap between the very wealthy and those at the bottom of the range of income begins to undermine the common good.”

*The Common Good, Catholic Bishops Conference
for England and Wales.*

Useful website:

www.church-poverty.org.uk

Questions to candidates:

Does the growing gap between rich and poor in this country concern you, and if so, what will you do about it?

Are you willing to call for a legal limit on the interest rates that can be charged by moneylenders, and would you support the *Debt on our Doorstep* campaign of Church Action on Poverty?

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

■ An estimated 500,000 people in England alone are ‘hidden homeless’. These people are not visible rough sleepers but are sofa surfers, squatters, or sleeping in their cars, in tents or in bin sheds.

■ More than 60,000 households in England are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. That is over 100,000 people and includes at least 87,000 children. About 20% of these households have been in temporary accommodation for more than two years.

“The change I think would do the most to end injustice and bring about righteousness in housing would be a move to think of the buildings we live in primarily as homes rather than as investments.”

Alison Gelder, Housing Justice

Useful websites:

www.housingjustice.org.uk

Questions to candidates:

It is widely recognised - at least by all the main parties - that there is a shortage of housing in our country. How do you propose to ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing in this area?

At the moment a large number of needy homeless people - for example single adults - fall outside the statutory duty of local authorities to provide housing. What would you do to help them?

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

■ Many people seeking sanctuary in the UK are destitute. No one knows exactly how many people have been left destitute at the end of the asylum process, without any status, permission to work, or access to benefits.

■ Tens of thousands of men, women and children (both immigrants and those seeking sanctuary) are detained under the UK’s immigration rules each year.

*“We need a ministry of welcome and accompaniment for migrants”
Bishop Patrick Lynch, auxiliary in
Southwark Diocese and Bishop with
pastoral responsibility for migrants.*

Useful websites:

www.jrsuk.net

Questions to candidates:

How can the system of asylum processing be improved to be swifter and fairer?

What are the alternatives to the detention of children and families of people seeking sanctuary?

ENVIRONMENT

■ During the past 45 years about a quarter of Britain’s hedgerows have been destroyed, at a rate of about 4,000 miles a year and with a massive loss of biodiversity.

■ Each family in the UK throws away an average of one tonne of waste per year! 73% of this goes to landfill, even though 90% of this is recoverable. It could be recycled, composted or used to generate energy.

*“Jesus encouraged love of children. If our generation continues to disrupt climate, not least with cars and planes, we will destroy our children’s future.”
Edward Echlin, Christian Ecology Link*

Useful websites:

www.christian-ecology.org.uk

Questions to candidates:

Will you demand that ministers and parliament promote sustainable quality of life rather than infinite growth?

How will you personally live a low carbon lifestyle, and persuade your constituents to do likewise?

General Election 2010

A General Election will be held sometime before 3 June 2010. Like everyone else, Christians will be engaging with a range of important issues facing our country. Some of the key issues for Justice and Peace activists are given in the centrespread of this issue.

One way in which Churches can contribute towards assessing local candidates is by hosting hustings meetings where candidates can be questioned by local voters. Very often, ecumenical hustings initiatives are organised locally.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, in collaboration with the Methodist Church, have prepared an excellent paper:

**FAITH IN POLITICS
Preparing Churches for the General Election 2010.**

It can be downloaded from:
www.churcheselection.org.uk

It looks at key issues, providing a concise overview, and then suggests questions to candidates. One of the headings is 'Faith in Public Life'. Concerns include the countering of religious-inspired terrorism and how far the churches are listened to when they speak up for the vulnerable in the public sphere, for example, condemning the detention of the children of asylum seekers and denouncing the British National Party when it claims to represent British Christians.

Further information and resources – including a regular newsletter and blog, and an analysis of the manifestos of the parties will be available throughout the election campaign at the Churches' election website, given above.

www.whytheyworkforyou.com is a really good site for finding out what your current MP has been doing. It includes easy-to-read summaries of how your MP voted on key issues and what their performance is like in parliament - how many times they have attended, voted or spoken and how much they have spent.

www.cafod.org.uk/election is CAFOD's election web page. Their Election Guides can be ordered through the site.

"I pay tribute not to those in the House, but to those outside it: those who saw the dangers of climate change and the actions that needed to be taken before the politicians did. I pay tribute to the campaigners who fought to bring it to public attention and above all the members of the public who wrote to us in record numbers."

Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, referring to lobbying on the UK Climate Change Bill

ORGANISING HUSTINGS

Form a planning group to organise a local meeting

Contact other local churches and active civil society groups. Provide information on organising meetings and keep a list of people involved and contact details. You don't need to wait until the election is called.

Book a suitable venue

A school or church hall is ideal. Make sure lighting and the sound system are good. Have a visible top table – preferably a stage.

Invite constituency candidates in good time

Candidates often respond positively to the timing of such meetings on the second or third Sunday during the election campaign. Sound out a few dates before making a firm booking. Guarantee them a good attendance and say that absence will be noted eg. an empty chair.

Advertise properly

Consider local press and radio, fliers in libraries and community centres, local newsletters and church bulletins.

Make resources available

Plenty of Christian agencies have election material. Distribute it in the churches to ensure that the people who come are as well prepared as possible.

Choose a good Chair

Try to find a well-known figure from the community, someone not connected with a particular party. Politicians and the public can be aggressive, evasive or irrelevant – a strong Chair is required. Brief the person carefully. A timekeeper could be appointed to support the Chair.

Questions

Decide how questions should be put from the floor. You could place cards and pens at the entrance and encourage people to write out questions in advance.

Statements

At the end of the meeting give candidates around three minutes each to make their own concluding statements. Throughout, record responses and statements.