

GE2017

UK General Election 2017
election.eauk.org

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POLLING STATION

OPENING TIMES

7.00am–10.00pm

Note that as long as you are in the polling station, or in a queue outside, before 10.00pm you will be entitled to apply for a ballot paper

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How do we apply our Christian faith in our attitudes and actions as another election approaches? How do we understand and recover what is truly important amidst the spin and noise?

Following the EU referendum result and an increasing sense of fragmentation, the Evangelical Alliance has been developing a resource called: *What Kind of Society?* It will be launched later this year. But when the snap election was called, we felt that it was important to begin the conversation a little earlier than planned. So our election resources reflect the four core themes that will be explored further in *What Kind of Society*:

Love, freedom, justice and truth.

These themes run deeply through the Bible, from beginning to end. They are also core values for our society, which can be affirmed by people of all faiths and none. Most importantly, love, freedom, justice and truth are perfectly embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. As his followers, we seek to be more like him, and we long for all people to know him. It is in the light of his teaching, his example and the whole narrative of the Bible that we seek to understand these four values.

It is Jesus who holds the four in perfect tension: love and truth, justice and freedom. For the good governance of society, our challenge is to do the same. Christians can't remain silent or inactive in the face of hatred, oppression, injustice and lies – the antitheses of the four values we cover.

Legislation, policy and politics will only take us so far in the pursuit of these values. As Christians we don't believe that humans can create a perfect society on earth, but we attempt to demonstrate these values as much as we can. This is because we believe that God is sovereign and that He has made us His ambassadors of His Kingdom in society – His messengers who carry the light and life of the good news.

What follows is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list of how we should live and act, but a vision of the people and place we could become.

LOVE

Love is at the heart of our faith. Our God is love and He created us for a loving relationship with Him. God's love is displayed throughout biblical history, with the ultimate example of Christ giving himself for us on the cross. And God calls us to show this costly love, as we love our neighbours as ourselves.

That great commandment applies to all our relationships, but each one calls for love in a different form. It covers love for our family, for those in our community, for those in other communities and even for our enemies. It is a love that shapes how we act towards everyone, because everyone is made in the image of God.

We are called to love even – and perhaps especially – when it is hard to love. The most famous words on Christian love (1 Corinthians 13), come in a letter to a church so divided that love seemed impossible. It seems that love at its most difficult is love at its most necessary.

Our society too is crying out for this difficult love. It's a love that can reach across barriers to hold diverse communities together. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is well known outside the Church, but how many people know the background story of divided communities that made Jesus' call for love so radical? How do we build a community that allows us to face our differences honestly and encourages us to love each other in spite of them?

Love must also inform the way we debate. Disagreement too often gives way to demonisation. Isolation from those who have different views leaves us unprepared to face our divisions, such as in an election or a referendum. So we can't shut down our disagreements in the name of love, but must use love as the standard by which we judge those disagreements. Love must guide the way in which we debate truth.

So in this election, let's look for representatives who will lead by example in holding a better political debate. While we will not agree with all candidates, we can respect their shared commitment to serve their communities, which they have expressed by running for office. Public service is an act of love. Each candidate needs our prayers.



For an accompanying video visit election.eauk.org/love

Questions to ask your candidates

Co-operation – how will candidates cooperate with and facilitate the work of the Christian church in their local area?

Good disagreement - how do candidates propose to work constructively with those with whom they disagree, both nationally and locally?

Family - how will candidates support the institution of marriage and family life?

Public service - how will candidates promote and demonstrate an ethos of sacrificial public service?





FREEDOM

The gospel story is the good news of freedom. In the Old Testament, God liberated His people from Egypt to a life of political, economic, social and spiritual freedom. But the great Exodus narrative was only a sign of the greater freedom that was to come when God sent His son to free us from the slavery of sin.

This gospel of freedom has inspired Christians to struggle for liberty in all areas of people's lives. Evangelicals like John Newton and William Wilberforce threw themselves into campaigning against slavery – and this struggle is far from over. Christians today also support people breaking free of other slaveries, such as gambling or drug addiction.

Religious freedom is at the core of our commitment to liberty. In this year, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we remember persecuted dissenters who sought the freedom to worship in accordance with their conscience. This legacy commits us to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and speech as a right for all, both in this country and overseas.

This should never mean Christian privilege at the expense of other groups. We want freedom for everyone to express their beliefs, from the most dedicated evangelicals to our strongest opponents. Peaceful and lawful opinion is diverse and a commitment to freedom must recognise this fact. In a free society, we must all have the right to be wrong.

Freedom also means the right to live out one's beliefs. A right to private faith is no right at all. As highlighted in the *Speak Up* resource, we have tremendous freedom to share our faith respectfully with our neighbours. And our society has always respected freedom of conscience in different areas of life and work. We celebrate and stand by this historic respect.

Nonetheless, freedom is often controversial. Non-violent but unpopular beliefs are sometimes labelled 'extreme' - usually by those who wish to silence particular views. Restricting peaceful opinion in these cases may give the illusion of a secure or united society. And yet we believe that the most secure society is the one secure enough to tolerate peaceful dissent, and the most united is one which unites around freedom for all.



For an accompanying video visit election.eauk.org/freedom

Questions to ask your candidates

Gospel freedoms: Will candidates support the freedom of Churches and Sunday Schools to operate without registration and regulation by Ofsted?

A duty of reasonable accommodation – do candidates believe that employers should consider and accommodate, within reason, the requests of employees to express their religion at work?

Freedom of expression – will candidates uphold historic freedoms to preach the gospel in public, in print and online?

The right to change religion – do candidates affirm the right of any individual to change their religion and will they campaign for greater protection for anyone who does so?

Modern slavery – what will candidates do to continue the fight against modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK and overseas?

Freedom in action

Open Doors has an amazing 60 year history of resourcing, praying and advocating for the persecuted Church. Last year, Open Doors distributed 2.5 million Bibles, books and Christian resources across the globe in places where such materials are difficult to access.



Open Doors
60 years of serving persecuted Christians

Open Doors also works in the UK to encourage Christians to pray for their brothers and sisters around the world and annually publishes their World Watch List, which highlights the top 50 countries where Christians face persecution.

Open Doors regularly speaks out in the public square and engages with politicians, advocating for the freedom of persecuted Christians across our world.

JUSTICE



Without the call for justice there would be no biblical ethics. Justice flows from the gospel story of God putting the world to rights and restoring us into right relationship with Him and each other. We hear God's demand for justice again and again in the law and the prophets and it is this mission statement that Jesus adopts and fulfils. The first Christians then followed Jesus' teaching and example of compassion for those in need.



For an accompanying video visit election.eauk.org/justice

Evangelical Christians have always sought to live up to this legacy. They established hospitals and schools. They worked to abolish the slave trade. They reformed prisons and factories. Through this work they laid the foundations for provisions that we take for granted today. And they did so because of their deep evangelical convictions.

While some debate what perfect justice would look like, it has always been easier for us to identify injustice - injustice occurs when human beings are not treated with the dignity they deserve as beings made in the image of God. Such injustice may occur in all sorts of different areas: from access to education, economic opportunity, or institutions of justice, to instances of racial prejudice and discrimination. Injustice can also occur in local, national or global contexts.

What does it mean to seek justice in all these circumstances? Often it means paying greatest attention to groups with the smallest voice. In the Old Testament, such groups were highlighted: widows, orphans, strangers and the poor. Today these groups may include both minorities and majorities, including deprived communities, refugees, the disabled, the homeless or the unborn. God calls us to hear them, speak for them, and to consider them when we vote. Justice is not restricted to just-us.

Despite what some Twitter feeds might suggest, an election is not usually a choice between one just candidate and their unjust rivals. For Christians it is a prayerful choice between competing visions and plans to establish justice, at home and on the world stage. So the simple commitment to justice should not be the end of the debate, but its beginning. We should welcome this opportunity to debate what justice will look like in our society.

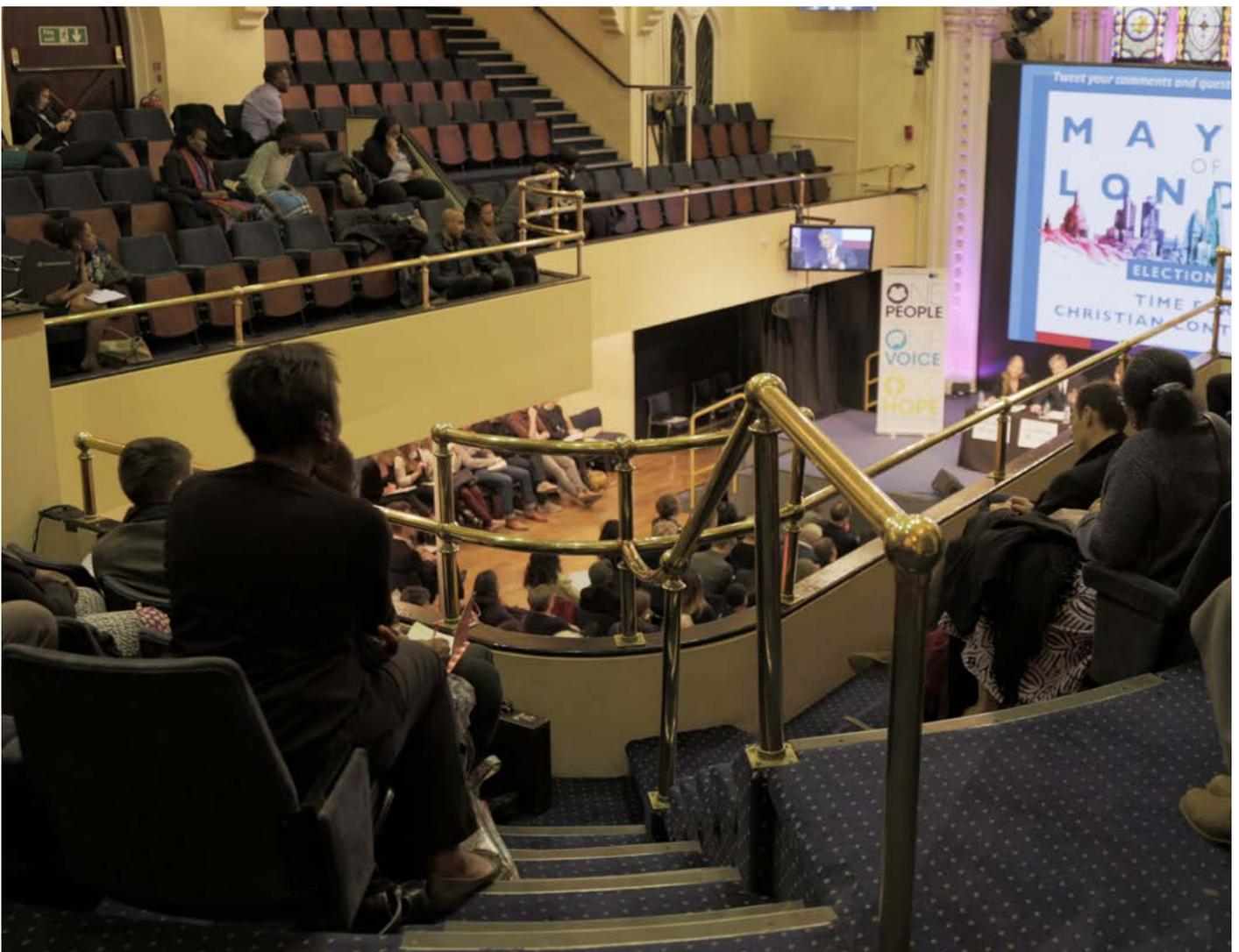
Questions to ask your candidates

Poverty – how will candidates protect the dignity and independence of all those in society who have insufficient resources to meet basic human needs?

Access to justice – how will candidates ensure that the most vulnerable in society have access to our legal institutions, in particular regarding family law and welfare assessments?

The persecuted Church – how will candidates support Christians and those of other faiths around the world who are persecuted for their beliefs?

Beginning of life - will candidates advocate for support services that help every woman and unborn child in the situation of crisis pregnancy?



TRUTH



We believe in a God of truth who reveals Himself to us. He spoke through the Old Testament prophets and through His Son, the Word made flesh. As evangelicals, we believe in the authority of God's written word and seek to live in its light. We believe that this God of truth has given us a true gospel message. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news for the whole world. We are a people of the book, and a people of truth.



For an accompanying video visit election.eauk.org/truth

But we are told that we live in a post-truth age. Some people are cynical of all truth-claims, especially political ones; others see one set of beliefs as a badge of their group, beyond criticism or debate. Regardless of this culture, we are called to be people of truth - especially at election time. We are witnesses to truth in how we judge claims and promises, and in how we decide who gets our vote.

For a society committed to truth, we will need leaders with integrity who inspire trust. We believe integrity to be a better goal for candidates than popularity. Most cynicism about politics assumes that candidates will flatter us, telling us what we want to hear rather than what they want to say. And yet a candidate telling us what they want to say is surely more trustworthy, as we can at least believe that they will stand by their words. Truth begets trust.

Accountability for leaders is vital for testing truth and building trust. Both candidates and governments must be held accountable for their promises and policies: that is what elections are for. Candidates rightly make themselves available, through hustings and in media appearances, during election campaigns. They aspire to an important office and such scrutiny is vital.

Those candidates who become MPs – of all parties – then have a duty to hold the government accountable. To elect an MP is to elect someone to speak truth to power. Their role will be to question ministers, lead debates and amend legislation on our behalf. MPs may have to go against their party on important issues and be strong on behalf of the weak. In our choice of candidates, we must keep this vital duty in mind.

Questions to ask your candidates

A voice for the voiceless – how have candidates demonstrated their willingness to speak truth to power?

Integrity – how do candidates propose to demonstrate integrity and grace in how they communicate and debate?

Trust – how will candidates be held accountable for specific promises?

Gospel truth – in what ways do candidates consider that the truth of the Christian gospel benefits society and how will they promote this if elected?

Truth in action

#ASKNI17 was an initiative from Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland and Summer Madness youth festival that sought to engage Christian young people with the March 2017 Assembly elections in Northern Ireland.

A number of crowdsourced questions were posed to representatives of the parties with seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly in 15 minute video interviews. The interviews covered a range of issues on themes of trust, honesty, moral questions, students and young people's issues alongside some light hearted questions.

This project sought to go beyond political rhetoric and help young voters find the party that aligns with their views and voices their concerns.

The logo consists of the text "#ASKNI17" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The "#", "A", and "N" are significantly larger than the other characters. The "S" is smaller and positioned between the "A" and "K". The "I" and "1" are also smaller and positioned between the "N" and "7". The "7" is the largest character in the second row.

This election falls at a significant moment for our nation. Not since the Second World War has there been so much national uncertainty - so much constitutional change at hand. The Brexit debates and divisions have left a nation in need of healing. Scotland and Northern Ireland are both in constitutional deadlock. Globally, the UK is about to define a new place in the world: a world where many old certainties are being swept away. Locally, huge challenges exist in funding public services, planning pensions, dealing with housing or promoting integration.

This is the context in which we must engage as Christians and serve as public leaders. For far too long the political debate has been dominated by personalities, simple economics and short-term thinking. And in the Brexit debate we saw some ugly politics, on both sides of the divide.

As Christians we are called to move the debate to both a higher and a deeper level. Higher to point people to God and consider what a good and godly society could be – and higher in terms of the standard of debate. Deeper to consider the real issues that face us as a nation, and not just scratch the surface with soundbites.

Crucially we are called to paint a picture of what a godly society could look like with biblical values at its heart. Love, freedom, justice and truth. It is with these values that our society will flourish because they come from God and they are good for us all.

So in this election what will you consider as you engage with your candidates and cast your vote? Will you get swept along by the media, the personalities and the 'clear choices' on offer? Will the 'pound in your pocket' be your primary driver?

Or will you look for the higher and the deeper, for the values that must drive our politics in a better direction? And as the people of God, will we help our nation ask the question of what kind of society we want to be?

The Evangelical Alliance is the largest and oldest body representing the UK's two million evangelical Christians. Formed in 1846, today we currently work across a diverse constituency of 81 denominations, 4,000 churches, 750 organisations and thousands of individual members. Throughout our history, the Alliance has campaigned for religious freedom and today our advocacy team represents the voice of evangelicals to politics, parliament and government.