

**EXTRACTS OF THE PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE ARCHBISHOPS OF
CANTERBURY AND YORK** **6th May 2017**

In a pastoral letter to the parishes and chaplaincies of the Church of England, Archbishops Justin Welby and John Sentamu urge people to set aside "apathy and cynicism" and draw new inspiration from the ancient Christian virtues of "love, trust and hope". The three-page letter encourages voters to remember Britain's Christian history and heritage as well as a concern for future generations and God's creation as they make their decisions.

Following divisions of recent years, it calls for reconciliation drawing on shared British values based on cohesion, courage and stability. It upholds marriage, family and households as the building blocks of society which should be "nurtured and supported" as a "blessing". At a time when political differences may be felt more intensely than ever, the Archbishops insist that Christians' "first obligation" during the election and beyond is to pray for those standing for office and recognise the personal costs and burdens carried by those in political life and by their families. But Christians also have a duty to play an active part in the process, they add.

The letter also calls for space for faith in political debate and says politicians must be free to speak openly about their own beliefs and convictions and treated fairly for doing so. "This election is being contested against the backdrop of deep and profound questions of identity," they say. "Opportunities to renew and re-imagine our shared values as a country and a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland only come around every few generations. "We are in such a time. "Our Christian heritage, our current choices and our obligations to future generations and to God's world will all play a shaping role. "If our shared British values are to carry the weight of where we now stand and the challenges ahead of us, they must have at their core cohesion, courage and stability."

The Archbishops highlight major concerns over poverty, housing and the dangers of "crushing" debt among other issues. They call for a generous and hospitable welcome to refugees and migrants but also warn against being "deaf to the legitimate concerns" about the scale of migration into some communities. They also single out the importance of standing up for those suffering persecution on grounds of faith around the world. Faith, they argue, has a unique role to play in preventing extremism and religiously motivated violence. "Contemporary politics needs to re-evaluate the importance of religious belief," they insist. "The assumptions of secularism are not a reliable guide to the way the world works, nor will they enable us to understand the place of faith in other people's lives.

"Parishes and Chaplaincies of the Church of England serve people of all faiths and none. "Their contribution and that of other denominations and faiths to the well-being of the nation is immense - schools, food banks, social support, childcare among many others - and is freely offered. But the role of faith in society is not just measured in terms of service delivery. "The new Parliament, if it is to take religious freedom seriously, must treat as an essential task the improvement of religious literacy." They add: "Political responses to the problems of religiously-motivated violence and extremism, at home and overseas, must also recognise that solutions will not be found simply in further secularisation of the public realm."

(Copies of the full letter can be taken from the book table at the back of Church)