

# CHURCHES TOGETHER FOR CHIPPING BARNET

## Justice and Peace Newsletter 27 April 2015



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#### 1. General Election

Should Christians vote at the General Election on 9<sup>th</sup> May?

The House of Bishops, in their letter “Who is my Neighbour?” to the people and parishes of the Church of England, is unequivocal: “It is the duty of every Christian to vote, even if it may have to be a vote for something less than a vision that inspires us”.

In the constituency of Chipping Barnet we have a plentiful choice of candidates: Theresa Villiers (Conservative), AM Poppy (Green), Amy Trevethan (Labour), Marisha Ray (Lib Dem) and Victor Kaye (UKIP).

They have all been invited to a public Hustings at the Parish Church of St John the Baptist, Chipping Barnet on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> April, starting at 8 pm. Questions have been formulated in advance, to deal with those issues that are of special concern to Christians, and do not deal with personalities:

**1. A Fair Society:** Britain is among the most unequal countries in Europe. The gap between the richest and poorest does not get any less. This is economically bad, socially divisive and morally wrong. What will you do about it?

**2. Welfare:** The welfare budget is enormous and takes up 25% of all government expenditure. Many feel that it encourages welfare dependence and is widely abused. Do you share that view? How would you ensure that the vulnerable in our society are properly protected?

**3. Child Poverty:** It must be a matter of great concern to everybody that nearly one third, 3.5 million, children in the UK live in poverty. How will you tackle this problem?

**4. Health:** The National Health Service is under great strain and with an ageing population needs ever bigger funding. We are fortunate in having Barnet Hospital nearby. How will you ensure that the NHS continues to meet local and national needs?

**5. Education:** After many years of experimentation, and rigid central control, the education system in England is now radically different, and many would say, inferior to that in Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland. What will you do to facilitate the return of the education system in England to its former respected position in the UK, Europe and the world?

**6. Immigration:** Everyone agrees that there needs to be some sort of control over immigration, but there are different views about whether immigrants are good or bad for this country. What view do you take and how would you like to see immigration controlled?

**7. The Environment:** The long-term consequences of global warming are acknowledged by most scientists to be extremely serious. As a member of the EU, Britain has been active in promoting remedial policies. What do you think should be done?

**8. International Affairs:** Britain seems to be playing a declining role on the world stage. Do you think this is good or bad? Should we be doing more to help countries where there is tyranny or where minorities, including Christians, are being persecuted?

**9. Overseas Aid:** Britain is one of the few countries that gives enough in aid to developing countries to achieve the UN target of 0.7% of GNP. There are still millions who live in dire poverty and go hungry. Government aid helps to bring relief to the poorest countries, to refugees and to victims of epidemics like Ebola and of natural disasters. Do you support maintaining the aid budget at 0.7%?

(The Letter from the House of Bishops “Who is My Neighbour?” is available to download from the Church of England website or can be bought from the Church House Bookshop for £2.99.)

## **2. True Humility**

At one of the sessions of the York Lent Course this year we were invited to give examples of humility. This true story was told:

Lord Mackay of Clashfern, Lord Chancellor from 1987 to 1997 and thus the most senior lawyer in England and Wales, was a devout Christian, a sabbatarian and an Elder of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (the Wee Frees). Two of his legal friends, Lord Wheatley and Lord Russell of Killowen, happened to be Roman Catholics, and when they died he attended their Requiem Masses. The Wee Frees objected that this was in contravention of their prohibition of support for Roman Catholicism, and they suspended him and withdrew his right to receive Holy Communion. Rather than walk away or pull rank, Lord Mackay humbly submitted to attending a review of his case by his fellow-Elders, at which he presented his defence - that he was doing no more than paying his respects to his former colleagues. The Elders ruled that the suspension and withdrawal should be lifted, but only if he would give an undertaking never to attend a Roman Catholic funeral in the future. This he refused to do. He simply resigned from the Wee Frees and moved to the Associated Presbyterian Church.

## **3. Barnet College Chaplaincy**

It is largely thanks to the determination of one person that there is now a chaplaincy and multifaith room at the Barnet College site on Wood Street: Joanna Sutherland-Young, Lecturer in Fashion and Textile in the Department of Art and Design. She says: several years ago the Muslim students in the College asked for a place where they could say their prayers. The college, being strictly secular, was uncertain how to respond, but eventually gave the students the use of an empty room, and when the college was rebuilt a room was assigned to them. Christian students, on the other hand, had nowhere to go and some came across the road to the parish church to pray, to light candles, and to ask Hall Speers to pray for them.

A couple of years ago, Joanna took a party of her students with her to Rome. On the Sunday she went to Mass at St Peter's, and was surprised to find that several of the students followed her there and sat in the pew behind her. She realised that the students had spiritual needs and that the prayer room in the college needed to be open to all students. She visited the multi-faith chapel at Heathrow Airport and the multi-faith room at Barnet Hospital to get ideas about decoration and religious furniture and presented them to the Director of Student Services at the college, using the argument that Christian students should be given equality with the Muslim ones. She also arranged a meeting between David Byrne (the Principal of Barnet and Southgate College of Further and Higher Education) and some of the local clergy in Barnet who were prepared to visit the college on a regular basis.

The result was that the multifaith room re-opened in October 2014 and there is a Christian presence there every Tuesday at 1 pm., rotating between Father Emmanuel Ntusi (Baptist), Father Tristan Chapman (Anglican) and Father John McKenna (Roman Catholic). About a dozen students attend regularly, mostly from Poland, Albania and West Africa, but a few white British students have started coming too.

Joanna's plans for the future include a notice-board where students can post their prayer requests, and the widening of the room's multi-faith use by the addition of Jewish and Sikh furnishings. It has not been an easy journey. Joanna had to put up with a lot of opposition. But the feedback she is getting now from staff and students is positive, and she thanks everyone who has supported her with their prayers.