

## **General Election 2024**

### **A letter from the Catholic Bishops of Scotland**

This General Election presents us with an opportunity to connect our voting to our Catholic faith and elect an individual representative who reflects as closely as possible our values and beliefs.

It is an opportunity to proclaim the dignity and value of every human being, made in the image and likeness of God, and promote the common good. The human person is both the foundation and the goal of society, and the principal task of society is to defend and foster human dignity in its laws and institutions which should, in turn, support peace and justice at home and abroad.

During elections, a range of issues compete for our attention. And whilst the Bishops' Conference of Scotland does not endorse or support individual candidates or parties, we highlight some of the key issues here so that individual Catholics may reflect on, and raise them, with parliamentary candidates.

#### **Human Life**

It is the duty of all of us to uphold the most basic and fundamental human right – the right to life, which is both inalienable and inviolable. At the heart of the political response to the Covid Pandemic was the desire to protect and care for the most vulnerable. In a truly compassionate society, this desire to protect and care ought to extend to all people, including the unborn child in the womb. We should urge MPs to recognise human life from the moment of conception and ensure that the conditions are present to protect and care for both mother and child.

This also applies at the end of life. Dangerous proposals to legalise assisted suicide must be rejected in favour of improvements to palliative care and a commitment to meet the needs of vulnerable people at the end of life, including providing the care and compassion they need to help them live. Our politicians should be urged to learn the lessons of how assisted suicide legislation introduced in some countries has already become an intolerable and unjust pressure upon the elderly, the weak and the disabled to see themselves - and to be considered by others - a burden to society and thus to end their lives, or have their lives ended for them. This is an injustice that ought to be resisted before it can begin.

#### **Marriage and the Family**

Society relies on the building block of the family to exist. The love of man and woman in marriage and their openness to new life is the basic, fundamental cell upon which society is built. The wellbeing of society depends on the flourishing and health of family life and MPs should respond to this with policies that create economic and fiscal support for married couples and families with children.

#### **Poverty and Immigration**

Sadly, poverty continues to be a scourge for many at home and abroad. Too many people still struggle to make ends meet, homelessness is on the rise, and the two-child limit on tax credits is disproportionately affecting large families, including many families of faith. This reality cannot and should not endure in our country in the twenty-first century. Reliance on food and clothing banks is a damning indictment of a society that has forgotten its poor.

Our country persists in a tragic lack of charity and responsibility owed to our poorest brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. With this in mind, we should call on candidates to work for an immediate return to an overseas aid budget of 0.7% of GNI and provide debt-relief to low-income countries that need it.

We should welcome refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and remove the inhumane Rwanda policy and indefinite immigration detention and provide for those people living in and around conflict zones while committing to working towards the peaceful resolution of conflict.

### **The Environment**

MPs should also commit the nation to responsible stewardship of the earth and all its resources, and act on Pope Francis' call to be 'protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.' We cannot be indifferent to the harmful effects of climate change.

### **War and Nuclear Weapons**

A key task of the state is to ensure peace at home and abroad. We are deeply troubled by the tragedy of war in the world, including conflicts in Ukraine and the Holyland, and firmly believe it is incumbent on the UK Parliament and Government to foster peace where conflict exists and to do everything in its power to prevent bloodshed.

The use of weapons of mass destruction is a serious crime against God and humanity. While states are entitled to possess the means required for legitimate defence, this must not become an excuse for an excessive accumulation of weaponry which becomes a considerable threat to stability and freedom as well as a misuse of public funds that could serve to address the needs of the disadvantaged. The UK Government must work actively and seriously towards elimination of the UK's nuclear arsenal, and the promotion of a more peace-oriented manufacturing industry.

### **Freedom of Religion and Conscience**

We believe that a creeping intolerance towards religious belief, including but not confined to Christianity, has become part of life in modern Britain. Certain politicians and citizens are finding it increasingly difficult to be true to their faith in an environment that tries to restrict religion to the private sphere. Our MPs should be urged to legislate for a liberal and tolerant society that is truly welcoming to all faiths and none. Nor can we be blind to the plight of millions of people worldwide who are persecuted for their beliefs. People of faith, including Christians, should be able to practise their faith freely and to bear witness to it in their lives without fear of prejudice, intolerance, abuse or violence.

Finally, as we engage in this General Election, please pray for those who will be charged with representing the nation's interests in Parliament. May they pursue peace and justice and put the human person at the centre of all political activity.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

- + Hugh Gilbert, President, Bishop of Aberdeen
- + John Keenan, Vice-President, Bishop of Paisley
- + Brian McGee, Episcopal Secretary, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles
- + Leo Cushley, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh
- + William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow
- + Joseph Toal, Bishop of Motherwell
- + Francis Dougan, Bishop of Galloway

### **Ad Clerum**

**This letter should be read and/or distributed at all Masses on 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> June**