

BREXIT

A group of Church of England bishops has issued an open letter on the prospect of a 'no-deal' Brexit and the need for national reconciliation, notwithstanding the prorogation of Parliament. The full text can be found below:

The Archbishop of Canterbury has conditionally agreed to chair a Citizens Forum in Coventry and, without prejudice for any particular outcome, we support this move to have all voices in the current Brexit debate heard.

However, we also have particular concerns about the potential cost of a No Deal Brexit to those least resilient to economic shocks.

As bishops with pastoral responsibilities in communities across urban and rural England, we respond to the call by Jesus to tell the truth and defend the poor. We also recognise that our obligations go beyond England and impact on relations with the wider UK and our neighbours in the EU.

Exiting the EU without an agreement is likely to have a massive impact on all our people and the Government is rightly preparing for this outcome. The Government believes that leaving the EU on 31st October is essential to restoring trust and confidence. It is unlikely, however, that leaving without an agreement, regardless of consequences, will lead to reconciliation or peace in a fractured country. "Getting Brexit done" will not happen on exit day, and we have to be transparent about the years of work ahead of us in bringing the country together for a better future. We also need to be frank about the potential costs.

Our main social and political priority must be to leave well, paying

particular attention to the impact of political decisions on those most vulnerable.

We hold different views about Brexit and how our country should proceed from here. However, although we agree that respecting a public vote is essential, democracy and committed debate do not end after the counting of votes. Our concern for the common good leads us to express concern about a number of matters. Our conviction is that good governance can only ever be based on the confidence of the governed, and that includes minorities whose voice is not as loud as others.

Seeing the evidence of division in every part of England, we are deeply concerned about:

- Political polarisation and language that appears to sanction hate crime: the reframing of the language of political discourse is urgent, especially given the abuse and threats levelled at MPs doing their job.
- The ease with which lies can be told and misrepresentation encouraged: leaders must be honest about the costs of political choices, especially for those most vulnerable.
- The levels of fear, uncertainty and marginalisation in society, much of which lies behind the vote for Brexit, but will not be addressed by Brexit: poor people, EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in Europe must be listened to and respected.
- The Irish border is not a mere political totem and peace in Ireland is not a ball to be kicked by the English: respect for the concerns on both sides of the border is essential.
- The sovereignty of Parliament is not just an empty term, it is based on institutions to be honoured and

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respected: our democracy is endangered by cavalier disregard for these.

- Attention must be paid not only to the Union, but also to the meaning of Englishness.

Churches serve communities of every shape, size and complexion. We continue to serve, regardless of political persuasion. We invite politicians to pay attention with us to the concerns we register above and encourage a recovery of civil debate and reconciliation.

The Rt Rev Nick Baines, Bishop of Leeds
The Rt Rev Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough

The Rt Rev Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter
The Rt Rev Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool
The Rt Rev Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham
The Rt Rev Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark

The Rt Rev Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry

The Rt Rev Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford

The Rt Rev Tim Dakin, Bishop of Winchester
The Rt Rev Vivienne Faull, Bishop of Bristol
The Rt Rev Christopher Foster, Bishop of Portsmouth

The Rt Rev Richard Frith, Bishop of Hereford
The Rt Rev Christine Hardman, Bishop of Newcastle

The Rt Rev Nicholas Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury

The Rt Rev Dr John Inge, Bishop of Worcester
The Rt Rev Dr Michael Ipgrave, Bishop of Lichfield

The Rt Revd James Langstaff, Bishop of Rochester

The Rt Rev Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Truro

The Rt Rev and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, Bishop of London

The Rt Rev Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans
The Rt Rev Martyn Snow, Bishop of Leicester

The Rt Rev Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich
The Rt Rev Dr David Walker, Bishop Of Manchester

The Rt Rev Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford

The Rt Rev Dr Pete Wilcox, Bishop of Sheffield

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