



Christians **in** Politics

**being salt and light
in politics and government**

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What does the Bible say about politics?

A POLITICAL MANDATE

Politics can often seem like a dirty business, and this perception has sometimes kept Christians away from it. However, it is important to understand that the practice of politics is necessary to govern, and the Bible clearly shows us that God is very much interested in good government. Indeed, it could be said that government is the ‘family business’ of God.

When people tell me that the Bible has nothing to do with politics, I ask them: ‘Which Bible are you talking about?’

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

In this sense, the Bible is full of political statements. God gave human beings authority to steward and govern His creation. That’s political! Abraham received a promise that his descendants would become a nation. That’s political! Moses said that following God’s laws would make the nation great and prosperous. That’s political! Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God; a way of living which directly challenged social norms both then and now. That’s political! His disciples’ first confession of faith was ‘Jesus is Lord’; a title normally reserved for the Roman emperor. That’s political!

And yet the Bible also speaks clearly about the limits of politics. The prophets of Israel were a constant irritant to their rulers. They blasted them for trusting in military force or political alliances rather than in God, and for allowing privilege and economic prosperity to over-ride concern for the poor. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was not on a warhorse, but riding a humble donkey surrounded by children shouting ‘hosanna’. Our Christian hope is fixed on a heavenly kingdom, not a political utopia. Yet, we have the responsibility to demonstrate or ‘preview’ that kingdom here and now - for God’s glory and for our healing.

Jesus’ instructions about our public witness are clear: we are to focus on being salt and light in the world. Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in The Message translation of Matthew 5:13-16:

“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand - shine!”

Being salt and light does not offer Christians a mandate to seize political power. It is a challenge to all believers to bring the flavour of Godliness and the light of

Christ to the most public and visible places in society. This is the kind of serving and leading that Christian political activity is all about.

FOUR REASONS TO ACT

How does the messy business of politics relate to the kind of life that Jesus commands his followers to live?

1. Christians are called to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This brings a responsibility to stand up for what's right. To be 'imitators of Christ' in politics means sacrificially serving and leading as He did; laying down our lives for others and speaking truth to power. For example, William Wilberforce committed his life to challenging the injustice of slavery and to restoring morality to the nation, pouring his life out for the benefit of many others.

2. Christians are called to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Politics is a practical way to show the love of God. There are many things that can be done to tackle injustice and unrighteousness at an individual level, but sometimes the roots of sinfulness can lie in unjust systems and laws. For example: buying 'fair trade' products can help a few producers in developing countries, but changing the rules to tackle the root causes of unfair trade can only be achieved through concerted political effort.

3. Christians are called to 'go and make disciples of all nations'. As public figures, Christians in political life have a unique opportunity to share their faith to a wide audience, and to explain how it applies to the issues which affect people in their everyday lives. In this sense, Christian integrity in politics provides a practical way to communicate the gospel to many.

4. Christian activism in politics can protect freedom of speech and action. The gospel requires, creates, and sustains freedom. But sadly there are many places in the world where people are denied basic human rights and civil liberties to share or receive the gospel message. It is important to speak out on their behalf, and never to take our own hard-won freedoms for granted.

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jnr.

BIBLICAL, MISSIONAL, AND POSSIBLE

Clearly the bible has a lot to say about politics and government. It shows not only that it is legitimate and biblical for Christians to get involved, but also that there is a cost associated with not doing so. Opting out is simply not an option!

As such, it is vitally important to see political involvement as a mission field, alongside preaching the gospel, serving our communities, and helping the poor and needy. When this aspect of mission is taken seriously, Christians respond by:

- developing and teaching sound, biblical theology for political involvement;
- identifying and pursuing work in this sphere as a genuine calling and ministry; • releasing resources like time, money, and people;
- encouraging and equipping individuals and groups to get involved, and supporting them as they do so;
- praying regularly for politics and government.

Effective Christian political engagement is not just biblical, missional and possible. It is also essential to achieve what William Wilberforce called 'making goodness fashionable'. Some will be inspired by the numerous Christian political figures from history like Shaftesbury, Gladstone or Martin Luther King Jr. Others look to more recent Christian-led campaigns such as the Jubilee 2000 campaign or Micah Challenge. Whether driven by issues such as health, poverty, families or education, the need is obvious and the call is clear.

Today there are many Churches, individuals, and Christian organisations working at local, national, and international levels in politics. They can provide inspiration, teach us some important lessons, and offer practical routes for you and your church to get involved.

There is not a square inch of domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign overall, does not cry: 'It is Mine!'

Abraham Kuyper, Dutch Theologian and Prime Minister



Can religion and politics mix today?

'WE DON'T DO GOD'...

It was Tony Blair's 'spin doctor' Alistair Campbell who infamously declared that "We don't do God". So strong was the pressure of secularism that even the Prime Minister was warned away from mixing politics and religion. This fear reflected the idea of a 'sacred / secular divide' encouraged by those who were opposed to faith having any real influence public life. To them, faith was something best kept private, something that was not welcome in cut and thrust of politics.

The confidence of such a view was based upon the idea that faith would eventually wane and even cease to exist in the brave new secular world. However, after over a century of so called 'secularisation', the inadequacies of this approach have been exposed. Christianity has always had profound implications for the decisions we make as a society, and it always will. Across the world, religion is re-asserting its influence in politics and government, and it is set to do so for the foreseeable future.

Even Tony Blair, who supposedly 'didn't do God', now recognises that faith has a vital role to play in determining the future of public policy.

Accept the premise that faith is not in decline...It is still here with us, not just surviving but thriving.

Tony Blair



Given the many inspiring examples of Christian men and women taking a lead in politics, why are Christians sometimes reluctant to consider getting involved? It has to be acknowledged that the history of Christian engagement in public and political life is not an unblemished one. Very real and damaging mistakes have been made. Although these mistakes have complex explanations, two key reasons for 'getting it wrong' can be easily identified.

GETTING IT WRONG: THEOCRACY

The first is the idea that God somehow expects the Church to 'take power' and enforce Godly laws and behaviours on society at large. In the booklet 'Neither Private nor Privileged', Nick Spencer of the think-tank Theos calls this the 'theocratic temptation'. At its most extreme it can lead to a kind of religious dictatorship (think of the Taliban or the worst excesses of the medieval church in Europe).

[our doctrine] has no intention of giving the Church power over the state. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith.

Pope Benedict XVI, 2005

It has been frequently pointed out that this kind of abuse is not confined to religious groups. Communist and fascist states behaved in a very similar way, combining a 'religiously held' set of atheistic

beliefs with a willingness to use brutal force to impose them. Nonetheless, the fact that this thinking has been used to justify evil acts committed in the name of Christ means that we must pay careful attention to the Bible's frequent warnings against abuse of worldly power.

Thankfully there are no credible voices today advocating the use of coercive power to enforce some kind of Christian state. The temptation to do so out of a misguided belief that 'the ends justify the means' is one that we must remain mindful of. But in modern Britain, it is probably the opposite extreme which has greater potential to cause problems.

GETTING IT WRONG: PRIVATISATION OF FAITH

The second error is to see our faith as an essentially 'private matter'. This is dangerous because it tempts us to separate our inward beliefs and spirituality from our outward words and actions. The result is an impotent and hypocritical form of Christianity which suggests that 'believing the right things' is all that God requires of us. As the letter of James tells us: "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:12, NIV).

In the political realm, a privatised faith will cause us either to feel that we are under no obligation to speak out against unrighteousness and injustice (because our beliefs are our own concern), or to look to purely human ideologies for answers to society's problems.

Today there are powerful forces at work in society asserting that Christians should keep away from public life and practice their faith privately. As long as we allow this to happen, biblical principles and Christian values will continue to be deliberately and systematically eroded in our culture.

At the same time, there are enormous opportunities to bring Godly wisdom to a world which is grappling with profound economic, social, and environmental challenges. As we have seen, many important social movements in history have been led or supported by Christians. If the same is to happen in our generation, we need to bring our faith in Jesus to a very public form of expression.

Faith is always personal but never private.

Jim Wallis, author and activist

GETTING IT RIGHT: DISTINCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Moving beyond the temptations of theocracy or a 'private' faith, Bishop Graham Cray has identified the main modes of engagement for disciples of Jesus living as citizens of society as involved distinctiveness and subversive engagement. As 'attitudes of the heart', these represent hope for a renewal of public discipleship

To be involved yet remain distinctive is to be 'in the world but not of it'. This means participating fully in society without losing essential Christian values, identity and vision in the process. Such a confident form of Christian engagement can accept the flaws and failures of our social and political institutions, not as an excuse to compromise our beliefs, but as the starting point

for a journey of redemption and restoration in a sinful world – and an opportunity to demonstrate signs of the kingdom of God.

If involved distinctiveness requires rolling up our sleeves and getting on with the messy business of political life, subversive engagement demands that we also offer a glimpse of a different way. All too often the world accepts selfishness and greed as the basis for our political and economic systems, yet Jesus commands his followers to love our neighbour as ourselves. All too often the world offers personal gratification and fulfilment as the ultimate goal, yet Jesus teaches that loving and honouring God is our highest calling. All too often the world is resigned to relationships tainted by fear and mistrust, yet Jesus calls his followers to live in communities characterised by love and mutual dependence. This way of life is ‘subversive’ in the sense that it has the potential to challenge current norms, in a way that glorifies God and brings healing and hope to people.



I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

Martin Luther King Jnr.

Politics can be tribal and divisive. Authentic Christian engagement can only take place within a counter-cultural community that recognises it as a ‘body ministry’. Whatever the campaign or party affiliation, unity of heart among believers must transcend all other demands upon our identity.

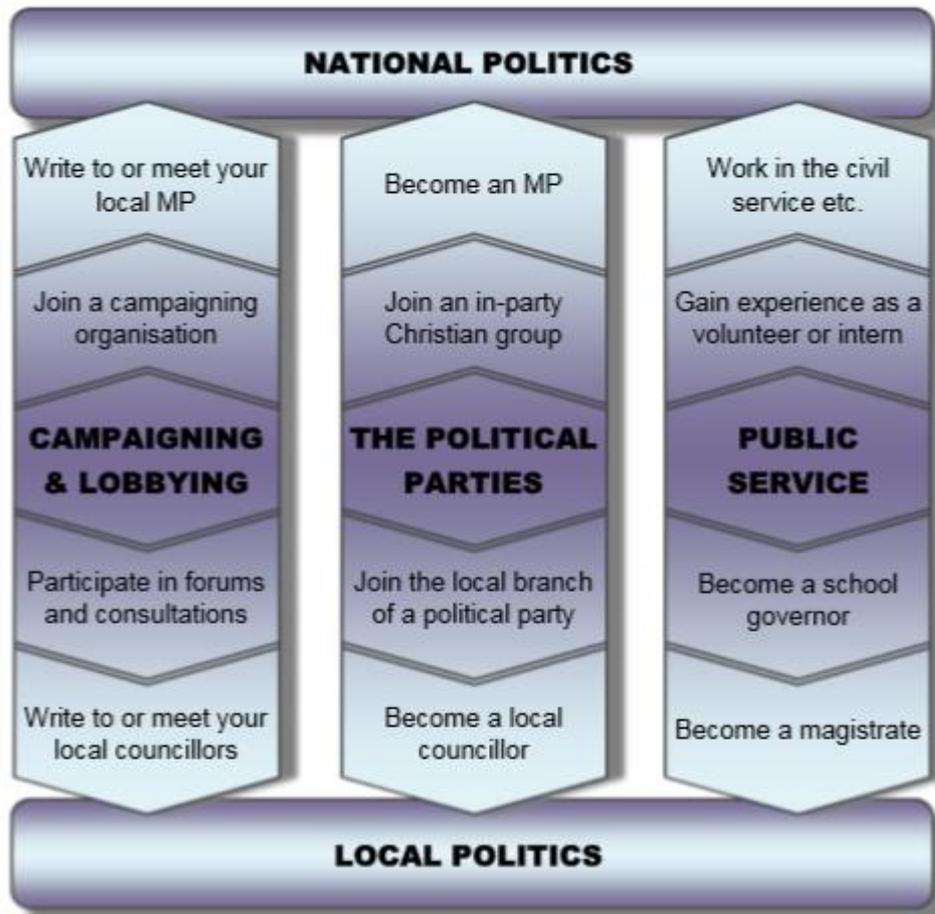
Being ‘distinctively engaged’ offers a dynamic and fruitful approach that avoids the fears and pitfalls that have historically limited Christian influence in politics. One which rejects the notion that ‘the end justifies the means’, and instead offers up all policies, issues, debates and positions as an outworking of the prayer: ‘Your kingdom come, Your will be done’.

The 'landscape' of political involvement

There are 3 main ways in which Christians can prayerfully get involved in the world of politics and public life:

- from 'outside the system', by campaigning and lobbying;
- from 'inside the system', by joining a political party;
- in a professional or voluntary capacity, through the work they do.

This diagram gives an overview of the main opportunities:



This booklet provides a brief introduction to these areas and practical information about how to get involved. You can find loads more detail, downloadable resource packs, videos, personal stories, and more on the Christians in Politics website (www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk).



Getting involved: in political issues

SINGLE ISSUE CAMPAIGNING

When people talk about Christian political involvement, we often think of specific issues. Campaigns to abolish slavery, win civil rights for black Americans and South Africans, improve conditions in prisons and workplaces, provide for poor children and families, and broaden access to healthcare and education, have all been led or strongly supported by Christians. We sometimes look back at these campaigns and almost envy the moral clarity which seems to surround the issues. By comparison, modern day debates about international trade and economics, the environment, sexuality, bio-ethics, and the family seem complex and confused. But we forget that this moral clarity only exists because Christians successfully won the day in convincing society that their ideas were right and in the public interest. At the time these issues were all hotly debated, with strongly held views on all sides.

CAMPAIGNING ORGANISATIONS

To win a political campaign requires three things:

1. Information.

A thorough understanding of the issues is essential. This includes how the issues relate to biblical and theological principles; what credible facts and figures exist; and what is the basis for opposing points of view.

2. Strategy.

In order to move beyond merely protesting about an issue, the practical outcomes of a campaign need to be considered. With a clear idea of who needs to be persuaded and influenced, these may include: a higher media profile; a shift in public opinion; a change in the law; a new international agreement; the adoption of a particular policy; or the defeat of an opposing campaign. Once the aims of a campaign have been decided, a strategy to achieve these aims can be developed and implemented.

3. Allies.

In a democracy, numbers (quite literally) matter, and winning debates requires broad public support. This can sometimes mean moving from a very rigid position to one which achieves most of your objectives but will win support from a broader coalition of organisations and individuals.

One of the best ways to find all of these is to connect with a campaigning organisation. They will have thoroughly researched the issues and can provide you with access to the information you need to make up your own mind and form a convincing argument. They will normally have a clearly defined strategy for each campaign area they are focussing on. And they enable you to join together with other like-minded people to ensure your voice is heard.

There are a huge number of Christian campaigning groups, who often succeed in bringing an authentically Christian perspective to political debate. However,

Christians also often get involved with campaigns which are not directly Christian led. Although sometimes challenging, this opportunity to influence an organisation and a campaign can be a very rewarding experience. Occasionally, being 'salt and light' in politics can involve going outside of the Christian comfort zone!

CONTACTING YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

As a citizen in a democracy, you have a right to contact your local elected representative. As a Christian, you have a responsibility to do so! This may be a local Councillor for issues in your own immediate area, or a Member of Parliament for those issues which are dealt with at national level.

Politicians at all levels are keenly aware of the need to respond to the views of their electorate if they want to hold on to their position! Because of this, they are normally very approachable and willing to listen to constituents, even if they do not always agree with what they are saying. Letters, emails, and phone calls will probably be the first point of contact. Effective Christian communication should be:

- short, clear, and to the point;
- courteous and respectful;
- well informed and backed up by facts and figures;
- careful to avoid religious jargon or reasoning;
- realistic about what the representative can achieve.

Alternatively, why not visit your MP or councillor at their 'surgery'? A face-to-face meeting will need preparation, but can be great way of building relationship, establishing trust, and getting your point across.

There are lots of practical resources in our leaflet **Making contact with your elected representatives** from www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk



Getting involved: in the parties

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Whether we like it or not, political parties are the dominant force in our political process. Although voters have the final say in who gets elected, the actual candidates we get to choose between and the policies that they adopt are decided within the parties.

All of our mainstream political parties have enjoyed a measure of Christian heritage and influence. Likewise, all of them have at times supported policies which most Christians would be very uncomfortable with! So there is no 'right party' for Christians to support. There is however a strong, credible, and growing Christian presence in ALL of the main parties. As they prayerfully seek to work together across the traditional political boundaries, Christ is witnessed and honoured. While Christians will naturally bring their own different experiences and perspectives to politics, the Lordship of Christ should always transcend party divisions.

CHRISTIANS IN THE PARTIES

The three largest UK parties all have official Christian groups operating inside them. These groups seek to build stronger connections between their party and Christians, and to provide a recognised Christian 'voice' within the party organisation. They include:

- Christians on the Left (Labour)
- Conservative Christian Fellowship (Conservatives)
- Liberal Democrat Christian Forum (Liberal Democrats)

Joining one of these groups is an excellent 'first step' towards getting involved in party politics. They provide a clear and well informed focus for prayer, debate, finding out information, building relationships, and taking action.

PARTY MEMBERSHIP

The life blood of all political parties is their local membership. Local branches raise funds, organise campaigns, deliver leaflets, talk to voters on the doorstep, and choose candidates to stand in local and national elections.

Few people understand the significant influence that local party members can have in UK politics. The average MP represents a constituency of 75,000 eligible voters. In most elections only one or two candidates from the major parties normally have a significant chance of winning. Often these candidates are chosen by local parties with a membership of only a few hundred people. Considering that there may well be 10,000 active Christians in the same area, the implications are clear. If even a small number from each congregation prayerfully decided to get involved in the local parties, the effect on national politics would be dramatic!

Local political parties are community organisations, staffed by volunteers. Far from being an alien environment, most Christians would find this to be a set-up that feels quite familiar, and one in which they are already well equipped to make a positive contribution.

LOCAL COUNCILLORS

Local councils make decisions on many of the things which affect people's everyday lives such as: schools, roads, new developments, waste collection, community and leisure facilities. Policies in these areas are decided by the elected councillors and then implemented by council officials.

In the UK, being a local councillor is a voluntary role, and councillors are not paid apart from relatively small allowances. A typical councillor might put in 10-20 hours per week, split between dealing with the issues of local people and

Very few people will approach us and ask if they can stand as a candidate; it is up to us to find people. So where should we look?

Local election manual of major UK political party

performing their formal duties in council meetings and committees. This is in addition to their work in their political party! Standing for election as a councillor is a practical way of helping and serving your local community, and many Christians already serve and lead in this capacity. Being a councillor gives Christians a voice on local issues, and sometimes the

chance to be involved in developing policy which becomes influential at a national level.

All of the parties are always on the look-out for good candidates with knowledge of their community and a commitment to serve. Depending on your local situation, becoming a councillor represents a great opportunity even for people who are relatively new to politics to get involved.

MPS

Members of Parliament (MPs) represent their area in the national Parliament at Westminster. They get to vote on changes to the law, decide who will form the next government, and help individual local people in their dealings with national government bodies. Members of the national assemblies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland perform a similar role on a narrower range of issues, and there also elections to the European Parliament.

Some of the most significant changes in society have been led or supported by Christian MPs. Likewise, some laws or government policies which many Christians feel concerned about have started as campaigns led by MPs who hold a very different world-view. Either way, the message is clear: if we want to fulfil our mandate to be 'salt and light', we need to see Christians being involved at this level.

I had a sense of calling into a 'wider work'...and had a day off work for prayer and fasting in a friend's flat to try and clarify the call. When I got home that evening my wife asked, 'Did you hear anything?' 'Yes,' I said, 'I believe God is calling us into politics!' 'Oh no!' she replied.

Gary Streeter MP

Being a MP is a full time job. It is a tough calling that involves a huge amount of dedication and self- sacrifice. Many people see this role as the culmination of a political career, and most MPs will have been involved in local politics and/or worked for their party at national level before being selected to stand for parliament. Even so, there is also an element of being ‘in the right place at the right time’, and many Christian MPs have surprising stories to tell about how their opportunity to be chosen as a candidate came about – and how prayer played an important part!



Christians who aspire to this kind of political role need to see it as a long-term calling. It is important to acquire the necessary political experience. It is also essential to have the support of other Christians along the journey. In this complex and high-pressure role it is vital that Christians prayerfully and practically support Christian MPs who are already in Parliament, or those who are seeking to be selected to stand as a candidate. Regardless of their party affiliation, we need to give them the confidence and courage to express their faith in politics.



Getting involved: as a local church

ENGAGING AS A 'COMMUNITY' OR 'FAITH' GROUP

The Christian church is by far and away the largest voluntary and community organisation in Britain today. It has more members, giving more time and other resources, in more places, than any other grouping. But Christians do not always use the influence that this brings wisely or effectively.

Government and other public bodies are keen to talk and work with faith and community groups, seeing them as key partners in tackling some of the toughest social problems. This is achieved through local and national consultations about government policy. These provide faith groups with an opportunity to influence how laws are made and implemented and how funds are allocated. Consultations are often 'open' in nature, and Christians have both a right and a real opportunity to get involved. They offer the opportunity for us to talk about what we stand 'for', rather than merely what we are 'against' (which unfortunately often defines the public perception of Christianity).

This can be a powerful way of breaking down the barriers that exist between the public and political sector and the church. Many officials and politicians are surprisingly ignorant of Christianity, in some cases having ideas based on inaccurate stereotypes or vaguely remembered R.E. lessons! As such, churches and their leaders will need to learn the language, jargon, structures, processes, and priorities of the public sector in order to engage effectively.

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

A practical commitment to 'loving our neighbours' has always been one of the features of the Christian faith. Christians in the UK have a long and distinguished record of involvement in areas such as education, welfare reform, and poverty relief. Today, Christian groups provide a wide range of vital local and community services.

As well as being a practical expression of our faith, it is important to recognise that this voluntary and community work is also a political act. It makes a practical statement about what we believe about poverty, homelessness, addiction, families, or young people. Policy makers may be sceptical of mere opinions, but they become much more receptive when these are backed up by initiatives 'on the ground' which are undeniably working! Partnering with government agencies is important to serve and lead in politics. As such, it is vital for Christian groups to establish credibility by building up a track record of excellent and professional service, and by developing good relationships with statutory bodies.

Where the state has responsibilities in the same area, it may be possible to extend the work by becoming a provider of public services, supported by government funding. Some Christian groups worry that they will be forced to compromise their ethos or start acting like a commercial organisation if they go down



this route. Vision and integrity are undoubtedly needed to avoid these pressures. But by becoming involved as ‘salt and light’ there is the opportunity to do much more than could otherwise have been achieved. Doing so will provide a ‘public witness’ to the love of God and the chance to influence with biblical values. And who knows; today’s local project can become tomorrow’s ‘beacon initiative’ and next year’s national policy!

SPEAKING OUT ON LOCAL ISSUES

Churches play an important role in the life of our communities. This gives Christian leaders a right and an obligation to speak out publicly on issues which affect those communities. This is especially true where we have a particular involvement in the area. Thus black majority churches can often speak with authority on issues affecting the black community, churches working in the areas of youth, addiction, crime, debt, or homelessness will have a credible voice on these issues, and traditional churches are very often at the heart of rural communities.

Finding a public voice should be regarded as an ongoing project for all churches. Leaders may need training in understanding the political landscape and communicating effectively through the media. Time invested in building relationships with local press, radio, and TV will enable leaders to be in a position to be heard when newsworthy issues come along.

In politics, the tone of communication is as important as the content. Although it is sometimes necessary to ‘make a stand’ against unrighteousness, unless this is done alongside a consistent positive message of hope, the impression will be given that Christians are mostly interested in complaining about things!

PRAYING FOR POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Prayer is not an ‘optional extra’ for Christians involved in politics and government. It must remain the heart-beat, the centre for all our personal and corporate engagement.

Prayer is also a vitally important ministry in its own right. The bible urges us to pray ‘for kings and all those in authority’ (1 Tim 2:1-2). If we are not willing to undertake this simple task, then we can hardly complain if governments and ‘those in authority’ make decisions that we do not agree with!

Praying for political leaders and for good government is a responsibility of every Christian. It’s vital because we are not praying so that God can do our will, but so that we can understand what God’s will is. There are many stories of how prayer continues to shape the destiny of nations, and there are lots of prayer networks that take the responsibility towards politics seriously. Whether as part of an individual prayer life, as a corporate expression through churches, or through church groups coming together to pray for city, region, or nation, prayer is indispensable for being salt and light in politics and government.

As a Christian politician I know the value of prayer. Through it we explicitly admit it isn’t about us, but that we are in the service of Our Lord and Saviour.

André Rouvoet, Dutch Deputy Prime Minister

For loads of creative ideas on personal and corporate prayer visit www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk



Getting involved: working in politics and government

VOLUNTEERING AND INTERNSHIPS

For many people, a first route into working in politics is by serving as a volunteer or intern. Working for free or a minimal wage, this is an excellent way to gain valuable experience of politics and government. There are over a thousand interns (mostly young adults) working in the Westminster parliament alone. Organisations that provide these kinds of placements and other opportunities for volunteers include:

- political parties;
- individual MPs and Members of the House of Lords;
- campaigning and lobbying organisations (including Christian ones);
- trade unions, charities, commercial and industrial bodies;
- ‘civic society’ groups (including ‘faith groups’ such as denominations);
- universities, think tanks, educational bodies and trusts.

The most popular internships are advertised and intensely competitive. Other opportunities can arise out of existing relationship or come via a speculative approach (i.e. writing a letter or email). Either way, they can provide a great way to get a ‘foot in the door’. Many people who now have important roles inside the political system gained their first experience through working as an intern or volunteer.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND CIVIL SERVICE

Being salt and light by working directly in government is hugely important. The ‘public sector’ in the UK employs well over 5 million people. Many of these perform practical jobs with no obvious political implications (nurses, refuse collectors, etc). However, public sector unions have a powerful political voice, and many workplaces have a policy of ‘consulting with faith groups’ which Christians can and should be actively involved in.

Importantly, many jobs in the Civil Service have a direct political influence (despite their formal political neutrality). Diplomats are in the front line of foreign policy, and senior civil servants in Whitehall are the people who actually write the detailed wording of policy, and are then responsible for determining how it is put into practise.

The civil service is a career like any other, and departments and ministries of state will recruit individuals who have the right qualifications and aptitude for the job. Christian civil servants may not have the public profile that politicians do, but in their work ‘behind the scenes’ they have many opportunities to pray, to witness, and to exert a professional influence on key decisions.

PARTIES, CHARITIES, AND THINK TANKS

While the public sector is officially politically neutral, the rest of the world of political employment definitely is not! There are a whole range of organisations working on issues with political agendas. These include:

- the parties themselves, who employ staff to work on policy, campaigns, communications, and organisation/admin;
- pressure groups and charities, who are involved in campaigning and lobbying government as part of their range of activities;
- ‘think tanks’ and academic units, which focus on researching, developing, and challenging the ideas which may become future policies;
- other groups which have a political or policy dimension to their work, such as trade unions, professional and commercial organisations, and even churches and denominations.

As with any paid job, gaining hired will involve acquiring the right skills and qualifications then applying for specific opportunities. Internships can provide a great route in for younger people, while more experienced workers may have transferable professional skills or experience from voluntary activities.

SCHOOL GOVERNORS AND MAGISTRATES

In the education and criminal justice systems, there are important roles reserved for volunteers from the local community.

School governors provide oversight of the school’s work, set policies in important and sensitive areas, and may have a role in areas like discipline and ethos. There are normally specific slots for parents and community representatives. Many Christians make a valuable contribution to the life of their local schools in this way, and can also have a voice on important areas like sex and relationships and religious education. A single voice combining conviction with common sense is often all that it takes to exert an influence.

Within the criminal justice system, many everyday cases are decided by **magistrates**, who are also trained volunteers. ‘Justice and mercy’ are key Christian themes; learning to apply these principles within the framework of the law can be an important ‘calling’ and a valuable contribution to society.

Personal action review

Seems like a lot to take in? Well don't worry; you're not called to do it all yourself!

It can be all too easy to read a book like this one, feel inspired for a while, but never really take any action. Why not take a few minutes to consider your own response by prayerfully completing this simple grid:

Action area	Specific options	(tick one)			(write down)
		Not now	Find out more	Take action!	My next step
Political issues	Contact my MP about a specific issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Join or support a campaigning group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Personal political action	Join a political party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Become a councillor or MP	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Action as a church	Encourage my church to do more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Start praying for politics & government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Careers and voluntary roles	Become a school governor / magistrate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Pursue a career in politics & government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

There are loads of resources available to help you, including testimonies and information to read, videos to inspire, and organisations to connect with. You can find all of these and more by visiting www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk



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