



Bishop's Letter

The Diocese of St Albans in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton & Barnet

How should Christians vote in the forthcoming EU referendum?

I am not going to tell you (or anyone else, for that matter) which way I think you should vote in the EU referendum. What I do want to do, however, is to think about how we as Christians should participate in the debate and vote in the referendum.



First, at the heart of Christian worship there is an act of remembering ("Do this in remembrance of me"). We need to recall that the European ideal began after centuries of bloodshed, culminating in two terrible world wars

that killed around 80 million people. One of the aims was to bind countries so closely together that we would never again go to war. If we leave the EU, we need to think about how we are going to protect that legacy and ensure that Europe never again descends into killing and genocide. Secondly, much of the popular discussion in the media so far has been narrow-minded and mean-spirited. It has tended to focus around two main themes:

- Are we going to be economically worse or better off if we stay or leave?
- Which option is going to help us keep the most migrants and asylum seekers out of our country?

Virtually no one seems to be grappling with the big questions about what sort of society we want. Few people are asking how we can all co-operate to build a better, fairer world. Only a few voices are asking how a reformed EU could contribute to solving some of the big challenges facing us, such as climate change and poverty.

Thirdly, rather than being motivated by the fear that is being engendered by both sides of the debate, can we find a better way to engage with the issues, rooted in prayer?

Week by week, individually and corporately, many of us pray the Living God's Love prayer. What does it mean in the context of this referendum to pray that we may live God's love 'with generosity and joy, imagination and courage'?



Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans

Instead of being consumed with anxiety, might we ask "How can we approach the debates and the referendum with generosity and joy?" Instead of giving into fear, we might ask for the 'imagination and courage' to think about what we can contribute for the flourishing of our world, rather than simply asking "What can I get out of it?" To really pray the Living God's Love prayer might just change us and allow us, under God, to make a distinctive contribution to the discussions and debates that we will all be having over the coming months.

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The Diocesan Europe Group has produced a new downloadable leaflet containing information about the diocese's European links here:

www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/european-links/