

Elections 2008

1 May 2008 – Election Day

Local council elections will take place on Thursday 1 May throughout Wales and in some parts of England. There will also be elections in London for the Greater London Assembly and Mayor.

Are you planning to vote? The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have all said that they strongly encourage church members to vote. Voting enables Christians to have a role in saying what sort of policies and principles are emphasised in public life. For Christians, carefully considering the political options and voting prayerfully is one way of showing care and concern for society.

Use your vote

Christians will not always agree with each other about how to approach political issues – and they will certainly not all vote for the same political party - but we can agree that working for a better society is part of Christian discipleship.

Where are the local elections taking place?

To find out if there are elections in your area this year, visit your local council website, or contact their offices by telephone (the number will be in the Phone Book).

- Wales – all Welsh local councils are having elections for every council seat.
- Durham and Northumberland County Councils are having elections for every council seat.
- All 36 English Metropolitan Boroughs are having elections for one third of council seats
- 19 (out of 46) English Unitary Authorities are having elections for one third of council seats
- 86 (out of 238) English District Councils are having elections for a third, or in a few cases a half, of council seats

What do local councils do?

District Councils are responsible for local planning, housing, local highways, building regulation, environmental health, recreation, cultural matters and rubbish collection.

County Councils are responsible for education, social services, transport, strategic planning, fire services, consumer protection, rubbish disposal, libraries and some cultural and recreation issues.

Metropolitan Borough Councils and **Unitary Authorities** have control over all of the above issues. In addition in large urban areas (such as Manchester or Birmingham), and in areas with Unitary Authorities (such as Humberside or Berkshire) some functions, such as fire, policing or transport are exercised through Joint Boards, to which all the relevant local councils appoint members.

What is happening in London?

Elections for the Mayor of London and the Greater London Assembly will also take place on 1 May.

The Mayor of London has powers relating to issues affecting the capital including transport, policing, cultural issues, planning and economic development.

The Evangelical Alliance together with the London Churches Group have arranged a hustings event for the Mayoral candidates. This will take place at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, 6-8pm on Wednesday 23 April.

The 25 member Greater London Assembly is also being elected, through a mixed system of constituencies and proportional representation.

**London Mayor Hustings
23 April 6pm
St Martin-in-the Fields**

Political Extremism

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have made clear their conviction that the policies of extremist political parties are incompatible with an understanding of God's love for all people.

They call on Christians to work actively to counter those who stir up hatred, and reject racist and intolerant political parties.

**we urge people
not to vote for
candidates
who promote
racist policies**
The Methodist Church
April 2004

Using your vote is crucial to stop far-right parties from being elected. In local elections the contests can be very close. In the London Assembly the additional member voting system means that a party with no constituency representatives only needs about 5% of the vote to gain a seat. At the last election, in 2004, the BNP were within 0.3% of the vote of winning a seat – so a high turnout of support for the mainstream parties is vital.

When local communities come together they can make a real difference, and can stop racist parties from winning, or even help to kick them out of their strongholds. For example, in Burnley a few years ago there were eight BNP councillors; there are now only four, and one is up for re-election this year.

Activists continue to promote values of hope and respect amongst communities, and to encourage people to reject the politics of discrimination and fear.

If far-right parties are active in your area, please think about how you can get involved. If you are a member of a mainstream party, encourage your branch to take the threat seriously and be active in campaigning.

**we call upon all local churches to
continue to practice and promote
racial justice and inclusion**
The United Reformed Church Mission Council
January 2004

**we believe that the policies
and practices of those who
promote racism and religious
intolerance are incompatible
with biblical teaching and our
understanding of the nature
of God as revealed in the life
and teaching of Jesus Christ.**

Baptist Union of Great Britain
Faith and Unity Executive, April 2007

One option is for local church leaders to issue a statement condemning policies and principles which are contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. More information is available on the *Countering Political Extremism* website (see below).

What can I do?

- ☒ Please consider using your **vote**, and telling your friends and colleagues that voting is important.
- ☒ Think carefully about which candidate or party most closely represents your views. Listen to your candidates, read their election material, watch party election broadcasts and visit the party websites so you can make an informed and thoughtful decision.
- ☒ If you are concerned that a far-right political party is active in your area, visit the **Countering Political Extremism** website for information and ideas about what action you can take.
- ☒ If you live in London, come to the hustings for the mayoral candidates at St Martin-in-the-Fields on 23 April at 6pm.

Further Information

Countering Political Extremism (Methodist)
www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoworld.content&cmid=1828

Social / Political Resources (Baptist Union of Great Britain)
www.baptist.org.uk/resources/social_political.html

Evangelical Alliance
www.eauk.org

London Churches Group for Social Action
www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk