



**JOINT PUBLIC  
ISSUES TEAM**

CHURCHES WORKING  
FOR PEACE & JUSTICE



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# Introduction

Talking about things we disagree over can be difficult. This pack will help churches hold constructive conversations about the sort of society in which we wish to live, and hope to leave to future generations.

Such conversations can be important at any time but the extraordinary political events of 2016 have made the need more pressing. The EU Referendum campaign was bitter and divisive. People on both sides felt lied to, misrepresented and misunderstood. The result has left some mourning the loss of an important identity, while others are delighted by the opportunities that lie ahead. Many of us are uncertain about what the future holds.

The process of leaving the European Union means making many important decisions that will shape the UK for years to come. For some this is hopeful, for others it is frightening, but for many it is simply confusing. The news is full of talk about the details and mechanisms of leaving the European Union; Article 50, trade agreements, tariffs and much more.

This resource invites you to discuss the important underlying question – what kind of society should we be seeking to create? In particular, there are four questions to explore:

- What kind of society do we want for future generations?
- How should we treat others?
- How should we use our resources?
- How should we make decisions?

This resource is designed to be flexible and can be used in a variety of settings from small groups to larger gatherings.

The model provided in this pack is a suggestion for one way to use the resource, over a series of sessions. You may wish to use it differently, perhaps by tailoring it to local issues specific to

your area, or by choosing one session to run if four feels like too many.

The aim is to provide a simple framework to allow people who may hold very different views to talk, listen and learn from each other, and ultimately involve their faith in understanding and shaping the world around them.

The pack contains prayers and reflections that can be used and adapted. There are also suggestions on how to ensure that all participants are heard, and the conversations are constructive and respectful.

At the end of each session there will be the opportunity for the group to write their own prayers. We invite you to share your prayers with us by emailing them to [enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk). We'll be hosting them on our website ([www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conversationwelcome](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conversationwelcome)), where you can see other prayers that have been written as part of the session.

You can also find video versions of the reflections on our website, which you may wish to use in place of reading the reflections yourself.

We welcome comments, suggestions and improvements by email and will place additional material on the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) website as we hear back from churches using the pack.



# Guidance for using this pack

## Venue

- Choose a location that will allow for the group to gather as a whole and to break into small groups.
- The size of the group may dictate your choice of venue. Obviously a large group cannot meet in a person's house.
- A private home can be the most comfortable venue for conversation, but it is usually not possible to break into buzz groups. There can also be a temptation to socialise rather than have a more challenging conversation.
- If meeting in a church building, you may wish to consider whether having the conversation in the sanctuary will stifle or enable honest conversation.
- Make an effort to create a sense of warmth and purpose. A circle of chairs will usually enable people to speak more freely.

## Refreshments

- It is a good idea to include refreshments at some point (the programme suggests having them at the 'Time for Tea' midway through the session). Having small snacks like grapes, nuts or sweets available during the conversation can add to the sense that this is a pleasant experience.
- It isn't easy to act as host and facilitator simultaneously.
- Overdoing the preparation of refreshments is to be avoided.

## Hints for group leaders

The overall aim is to make the conversation safe enough for all to feel able to contribute, but challenging enough to go beneath social pleasantries and leave everyone feeling stretched. Here are some suggestions for helping that to happen:

- When people are signing up for the group, make sure they know exactly what it is about and how many meetings there will be.

- Although we have framed this resource around the UK's plans to leave the EU, make sure people know this isn't an opportunity to have intense political debate or to persuade others that they voted incorrectly. Emphasise that Conversation Welcome is designed to enable meaningful conversations about our shared values as Christians.
- Ensure that the group will start and finish on time. If people want to stay longer or continue conversations this can take after the formal end of the session.
- Remember that for some people the result of the EU Referendum is still very sensitive. For example, they may have been arguments and division within families or between friends, others may be worried about changes in immigration status or job prospects.
- When breaking into small groups, a small size of two or three is often helpful. In groups that are fewer than either this can feel artificial, but for groups over this size it is the only way to ensure that all feel safe enough to speak.
- Remind members of the group that the conversation is intended to be open-ended and exploratory – so rushing to firm conclusions is not helpful and may silence people.

Below are some suggestions about ways to have good conversations.

## Preparation checklist

- Arrange the room in a way that encourages conversation (eg café style).
- Print off "how to have good conversations sheet" (one or two per conversation group)
- Print off question cards relevant to your session (one per person):
  - What kind of a society do we want for future generations?
  - How should we treat others?
  - How should we use our resources?
  - How should we make decisions?
- Pens (one per person)
- Post-it notes (one per person)
- Tea, coffee and other refreshments

# Session outline: how to facilitate a Welcome Conversation

Total suggested running time:  
1 hour 35 minutes per session

## Welcome and prayer (5 min)

Offer a brief welcome, an explanation of why the conversations are happening and a prayer. There is a prayer provided alongside each reflection.

## Food for thought (5 min)

This is a chance to set the scene and to provide a common point of reflection for the group.

People are not being asked for feedback or comment at this point, but instead are invited to reflect on what God might be saying to them about society and what it could be like.

You could simply read out the reflection for the particular question you are exploring this session, or reflect in your own words. There are videos of these reflections which you may wish to show at this point. You may wish to read the bible verse again as you end the reflection.

## Time to think (10 min)

Hand out the relevant question card to the participants and ask them to split into smaller groups. Once there, read out the reflections around each question on the card, leaving enough time in between each one for individuals to write down a thoughtful response.

## Time to share (30 min)

Ask the group(s) to read the “How to have good conversations” pullout and agree to follow the guidelines.

In group(s) give individuals the chance to share what they wrote on their cards. The conversation should then be allowed to flow as people ask questions of each other, really listen and try to understand, and start to explore such questions as "What does our faith ask of us?" and "What might that look like in practice?"

As the conversation begins to fade, hand out post-it notes (one per person) and ask each individual to write down one thing that has struck them over the course of their conversation (this could be a story, a thought, a question or an action that they now wish to do) and to stick it on a wall (choose somewhere prominent for all the post-it notes).



### Time for tea (15 min)

Offer everyone a break to have tea/coffee etc, and the opportunity to look at all the post-it notes on the wall.

### Time to write (20 min)

Ask everyone to return to their group and together write a prayer for our society based on the things that have struck them over the course of the session. If you have a confident group this may not require a great deal of facilitation; alternatively you may choose to suggest that each person picks up an idea that has been raised and writes a line for that particular idea.

### Time to pray (10 min)

Ask the group(s) to share their prayer to finish the session.

Thank everyone for coming, remind them of any future meetings, and close the session.

### Get in touch and share your prayer

After your session get in touch with us at [enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk), and share the prayers each group wrote. You can also go online and see prayers that others have written on the Joint Public Issues Team website ([www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conversationwelcome](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conversationwelcome)).



.....  
What principles are important to you?  
.....

Which do you think should shape the future of our society?  
.....

- “Teach them to your children”

Much of the language speaks of engaging with future generations and taking actions that served the long-term well-being of the nation. The people who had first left Egypt were not the ones who entered the new land – it was their children and grandchildren. Their entire journey was a personal sacrifice for the sake of the next generation.

.....  
What do you think we can do to safeguard the well-being of future generations?  
.....

- “What other nation?”

However, we relate to the EU or any other political entity, we are part of an international community. The narrative reminds us that respect for a nation comes not through one-off actions or political grandstanding, but by an ongoing commitment to building a wholesome and just society.

.....  
What do we want to be known for in the world?  
.....

## Prayer

Timeless and eternal God,  
your love extends from generation to generation.

As we stand at new thresholds,  
and explore new pathways in the life of our earthly nations,

help us embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead,

with humility to learn from those who have gone before

and a renewed commitment to seek your coming kingdom.

Make us mindful of those whose tomorrows depend upon how we spend our today.

May we be remembered

as those who pursued higher interests than just our own,

and did not sacrifice the future

through our failure to see beyond the here and now. Amen.

## Reflection 2: How should we treat others?

*“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”*

### Philippians 2:3-5 (NRSV)

## Reflection

The early Christian community was serious in its commitment to embrace the principles of justice and mutuality that they found reflected both in the teachings of Jesus and the documents of the Old Testament. They often spoke of this as seeking “the kingdom of God”. Working for a world that embraces those principles is nowhere more profoundly expressed than in the words of the Lord’s Prayer in which we are invited to pray “Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven ...”.

The early Church was an international community. They were born in different places; some had fled as migrants and refugees, particularly in the face of intense religious persecution. They came from a whole variety of social backgrounds – some wealthy landowners, others were slaves. Jesus had already broken with social convention by treating men, women and children as being of equal worth, and being prepared to cross some bitter racial divides. Each of these encounters, in different ways, provides Jesus' tangible response to that question: How should we treat others?

The laws and principles that govern our society are a reflection of those core values that define us. One of those foundational convictions is how we treat others, not only in our personal lives but also as a society. Who can share our country? How do we prioritise different needs that people have? On whom do we choose to spend our country's money? With which nations do we

choose to forge relationships? All of these reflect our response to that defining question: How should we treat others?

Reflecting all of this to one of the early Church communities, the Apostle Paul wrote the words above. He summarised a series of principles that have value and worth across the whole of society.

## Question cards

- “Having the same love”

It may seem unusual and perhaps a little uncomfortable to describe the common bond across a community as one of “love”. This goes well beyond the scope of terms like tolerance, inclusion, respect and other entirely virtuous attitudes.

What do you think 'having the same love for one another' would look like for us today?



- “Do nothing from selfish ambition”

Many will speak of building bridges and including others, but this is often on the proviso of looking after ourselves first. These words challenge us to set aside our own interests and ambitions, choosing instead to allow the common good to define our political decisions and actions.

.....  
Reflect on your own hopes. Could any of them be described as ‘selfish ambitions’ which need to be laid aside?  
.....

What might they be? And how might you lay them aside?  
.....

- “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”

People of many and indeed no faith traditions nonetheless share a common respect for the words and teachings of Jesus. The term ‘Christ Jesus’ is a poignant one – “Christ” identifies Jesus as a great historic Messiah, yet the verses that follow describe his selfless sacrifice to the point of death on a cross.

.....  
Whose examples do you think we are following today?  
.....

How does this change the way we treat others?  
.....

## Prayer

God of all life and being,  
help us to see others as you would see them;  
embracing those things that we have in  
common,  
and recognising our shared humanity  
as a reflection that we are each made in  
your image.  
Inspired afresh by your example of selfless  
sacrifice,  
may we also be those who place the needs  
of others above our own.  
Confronted afresh by the relentless challenge  
of your teaching,  
help us to love those who might otherwise  
be dismissed as enemies.  
Guide and lead us, we pray,  
to build a society where the interests of no  
individual  
are of greater worth than the common good  
of all. Amen.

# Reflection 3:

## How should we use our resources?

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. ... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ... But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:24, 28-30, 33 (NRSV)

### Reflection

Jesus spent a great deal of time talking about how we should use the resources at our disposal. Whether it was time, money, talents or the natural world around us, Jesus highlights that what we have is not ours but God's; a reality that should shape what we do with what we have.

As we look to the future, the need for economic growth is at the heart of many decisions. How much does this quest for growth obscure other questions about whether economic growth is the right goal, and how we decide what is fair for the individual as well as the country? People might assert that wealth generation is a communal endeavour and the benefits should be shared more evenly amongst everyone, including those who have simply not had the opportunities that others have. Equally others can argue that those whose skill, enterprise or sheer good fortune has enabled them to create wealth deserve to reap the financial rewards.

In terms of the natural world, scientists and conservationists are increasingly warning us of the consequences of using natural resources irresponsibly. Resources located and consumed in one country, can impact whole continents and beyond, while our actions impact future generations as well. As an old saying goes, we

do not inherit the world from our ancestors, we merely borrow it from our children.

Jesus's challenge remains today as we explore how we should use the resources we have before us.

### Question cards

- “You cannot serve God and Mammon [wealth]”

The term ‘mammon’ is difficult to translate (the NRSV uses the word ‘wealth’), and refers to a pre-occupation with financial gain. Some see this as expressing a disconnect between faith and finance, yet Jesus is saying the opposite, he is outlining what we might call ‘a conflict of interest’ – it is because the two are so deeply interconnected that you cannot serve both.



.....  
How do you think that our attitudes to financial decisions should be shaped by our faith?  
.....

.....  
If so, what do you think that would look like?  
.....

- “Consider the lilies of the field”

As well as challenging us not to become pre-occupied with personal wealth, we are invited to pay attention to the world around us and to recognise how our well-being depends on it.

.....  
What are our needs of the planet?  
.....

.....  
How do we balance our needs with those of the rest of creation?  
.....

- “Strive first for God’s kingdom and his righteousness”

Although couched in religious language, this expresses a vision that can be embraced across our society. Righteousness simply means ‘doing the right thing’; the kingdom of God is a phrase that encapsulates the principles of justice and fairness that are expressed throughout the Bible.

.....  
What are the things that you think we should be striving for as a society?  
.....

.....  
How might this shape how we use the resources available to us?  
.....

## Prayer

God of creation,  
who has entrusted to our hands  
the care of that which you have made,  
may we see this world’s resources,  
not as something to be possessed,  
but that of which we are but temporary  
guardians.

When they are ours to share – may we act  
with generosity;

when they are ours to receive – may we do  
so with grace and gratitude;

when we have sufficient – may we learn the  
virtue of contentment;

when they are unequally shared – may we  
be strengthened in our resolve to seek  
your justice.

So help us to live with the selfless courage  
that seeks your kingdom and pursues true  
righteousness. Amen.

## Reflection 4: How should we make decisions?

“Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, with the following letter: ‘The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials.’”

Acts 15:22-28 (NRSV)

## Reflection

In any community there will always be different perspectives, convictions and conflicting needs and priorities.

Often the interests of one group can only be served at the expense of others – in such circumstances who decides whose needs take priority?

The EU Referendum has perhaps shown us this more than ever. How should we respond when there are such opposing views – when a group, region or nation disagrees profoundly with the overall outcome; when those communities who voted ‘leave’ feel misunderstood by those who voted ‘remain’? Some have questioned why we had a referendum at all, believing it to be the responsibility of our elected representatives to make decisions on our behalf. Others are outraged at any suggestion that the British people are less than capable of determining their own future.

As a growing international community of people from very different backgrounds and cultures

the early Christians faced very similar questions. Some took for granted that certain cultural conventions were a pre-requisite, others believed with equal conviction that this was not necessary. The passage above come at the conclusion of a council brought together to try and resolve this issue.

## Question cards

- “With the consent of the whole church”  
The outcome was not the decision of any individual or pressure group, but the community as a whole. Some took a lead in enabling debate and deliberation, but they offered the outcomes for the scrutiny of everyone.



.....  
How involved do you feel in the country's decisions?  
.....

.....  
How do you think we could help everyone to participate in decision making?  
.....

- "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"

It is unlikely that any political decision maker would describe something as seeming "good to the Holy Spirit" today, but this recognises a more general principle that decision makers also need to look beyond themselves in finding good ways forward.

.....  
What sources of wisdom and shared experience do we need to listen to when decisions are made today?  
.....

.....  
How can we hear from them?  
.....

- "No further burden than these essentials"

The eventual outcome did not disregard those of a more orthodox background altogether: it offered a degree of regulation, but did not impose one group's cultural expectations on another.

.....  
When we make decisions how can we leave room for difference?  
.....

## Prayer

God of all knowledge and understanding, when others make decisions on our behalf grant us the wisdom and grace to recognise when deeper insights and broader interests should prevail, and when we should challenge that which is misguided and unfair.

Help us rise to the responsibilities and opportunities of true citizenship; to share our understandings with clarity and grace;

to encounter disagreement with a willingness to learn;

to welcome perspectives that differ from our own;

and to empower others when their voices are not heard.

So help us together to discern that which is truly right rather than what is merely popular. Amen.





## *What kind of society do we want for future generations?*

- What principles are important to you?
- Which do you think should shape the future of our society?
- What do you think we can do to protect and promote the long-term well-being of future generations?
- What do we want to be known for in the world?

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## How should we treat others?

- What do you think “having the same love for one another” would look like for us today?
- Reflect on your own hopes. Could any of them be described as ‘selfish ambitions’ which need to be laid aside?
- What might they be? And how might you lay them aside?
- Whose examples do you think we are following today?
- How does this change the way we treat others?

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## *How should we use our resources?*

- Do you think that our attitudes to financial decisions should be shaped by our faith?
- If so what do you think that would look like?
- What are our needs of the planet?
- How do we balance our needs with those of the rest of creation?
- What are the things that you think we should be striving for as a society?
- How might this shape how we use the resources available to us?

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## *How should we make decisions?*

- How involved do you feel in the country's decisions?
- How do you think we could help everyone to participate in decision making?
- What sources of wisdom and shared experience do we need to listen to when decisions are made today? How can we hear from them?
- When we make decisions how can we leave room for difference?

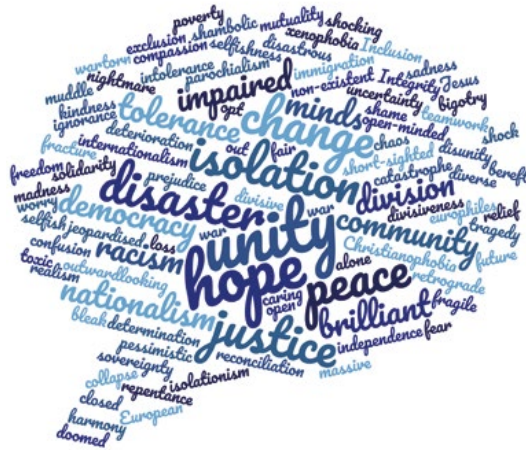
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