

Why our faith and politics do mix



Cllr Antonia Harrison, from Church of the Good Shepherd, Crookhorn, argues that you can make a difference to our society

SOME people say Christians should not be involved with politics, but I do not agree.

I happen to combine being administrator at Church of the Good Shepherd in Crookhorn, and the parish of Portsdown and Purbrook, with being a Liberal Democrat councillor on Havant Borough Council. I am not involved with politics *in spite of* my Christian faith. I am involved *because of* my faith.

Politics affects every area of our lives, including education, health, crime, environment, housing, the economy and much more. As Christians, we're called to help transform our society because of what we believe, and politics is often the way those things are actually done at local level.

The Church can do so much – at Crookhorn, we have a Bus Stop Café, which offers food and friendship to local people, we have a debt counselling service, and we run the EcoChurch scheme because being responsible stewards of God's earth is important. We help those who are lonely, have mental health problems and addictions.

All of these things are great for the local church to be involved with. But if I want potholes repaired in the road or to find extra funding for a local community group, I need to engage with my local council. If I want to challenge some of the global injustices that keep millions in poverty, I might need to engage

with national governments.

In the recent General Election, we organised a local hustings event at Church of the Good Shepherd, so local people could hear what different candidates were promising and be better informed. We also wanted to increase turnout in this area, and encourage more people to have their say. Empowering people to feel involved with the political process is also something Christians should be doing.

'We are called to transform society and politics is often the way this is done'

I joined the Liberal Democrats in 1990 inspired by the words of the late Rt Hon Paddy Ashdown, then party leader. He talked a lot about fairness but also sound economics.

Many people say about politicians: "You're all the same". Not at all. Our values and our beliefs of a model of an ideal society are very different. I encourage people to vote and to find out what candidates are standing for, even between local and general elections. There is plenty of information. We are lucky to live in a democracy and have a vote.

It is entirely possible for Christians to embrace the policies of the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green or any other party

as the way they think best enshrines the Biblical principles of fairness and justice. There are Christians in all political parties. I happened to be impressed with our former leader Tim Farron when he stood up for Christian principles, but there are plenty of other examples.

So I'd like to encourage you to vote in all elections, to engage with your councillors and your MP about the things that bother you, and even to think about standing yourself as a candidate.

I was delighted to be elected in May to Havant Council, and to be its Cabinet representative for 'Thriving Waterlooville'. I'd like to think I can make a difference in housing policy, environmental challenges and improving the town centre. But so could you, if you wanted to commit some time and energy to making a real difference in your locality.

Local parties need people to stuff envelopes, write and deliver leaflets, make cakes, host events, and talk to people – as well as being upfront. I love meeting people on the doorstep, finding out how we can help.

You might enjoy that too, or you might want to be one of the army of people helping in the background, perhaps making videos for social media or crunching some data.

Do think about it. You really can make a difference to society.