

'Seeking the welfare of the city'

As we approach another set of elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 7 March, and with many important decisions to be made in the weeks to come, we should take time to reflect and pray for our leaders, our politicians and our country.

Below are some suggested prayers and readings which you might like to use on Sunday 4 March.

Reading 1 – Exiles in a foreign land

“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: “Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:4-7 (NLT)

Sometimes as Christians we can feel like exiles in a foreign land. Our calling is not to merely wish for the day when our exile will be over. We should be prepared to work for the peace and prosperity of the places and communities in which God has placed us, here and now... to be ‘good news’ citizens. God tells the Israelites to take a keen interest in what is going on and to contribute to society around them. So we too are called to contribute to our own communities and the opportunity to do that this week is by casting your vote.

Reading 2 – Prayer for those in authority

“The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Saviour God wants us to live”. 1 Tim 2: 1- 3 (The Message)

We should never forget to continually pray for those who are in authority over us. Following the outcome of the election many important decisions must be made. We can pray for wisdom, integrity and courage for our leaders as they take the next steps.

Prayer

Lord God of all Creation
Maker of all things seen and unseen,
and through whom all things are held together,
we bring our country before you in prayer at this election time.

We pray for the candidates in our local area and also for their families, who perhaps have not seen much of them in recent weeks.

We pray that Wednesday 7 March would be a peaceful day, that those working at voting stations would do so without fear or threat.

We pray for ourselves that we would take seriously our responsibility as Christians to seek the welfare of our local community.

We pray for those who will be elected that they will be men and women of integrity, that you would grant them wisdom and courage in all the decisions that they make.

And we also pray for the Governments of Britain and Ireland as they make decisions about how to move forward.

Lord you know our history has brought its own hurt, frustration, anger and pain. And we look to the future with uncertainty, unsure what will happen next.

God of Hope, God of Peace, God of the Future
We place our country in to your hands and ask that you would be merciful to us.

Amen

Other suggested thoughts

- ✘ Uncertainty & fear
Sometimes our engagement politically (or lack of it) is based more on a negative fear of what might happen rather than a positive view of what we can contribute. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not yet see. How would our approach to an election change as we seek the peace and prosperity of our community based on our certain hope in Christ?
- ✘ Shaping & sharing the future
Jim Wallis has said that 'God is personal, but never private'. Taking part in elections is just one way in which we can contribute to the future of our community. Like the priest in the story of the Good Samaritan do we take a good look at the problems around us but then cross over to the other side? How can we live out our calling to be good news people and begin transforming society around us?

Liturgy – Seeking the welfare of the city

Lord, as your people, exiles in a foreign land
We recognise that, not only our politicians but we too, have a responsibility to
seek the welfare of the community in which you have placed us

Help us to be gospel people in our neighbourhoods
To think beyond our own needs
To build bridges where there is division
To offer hope to those who have given up
To bring love to places of heartache and sorrow

In our street – help us to shine as your people
In our community – help us to be good news people
In our country – help us to be people of hope

Show us the small acts of kindness which will make a difference amongst our
neighbours
Show us the dark places where your light needs to shine
Show us the needs of our society and make us agents of change

Help us bring your peace in moments of stress
Help us bring your hope in times of uncertainty
Help us bring your love in times of despair