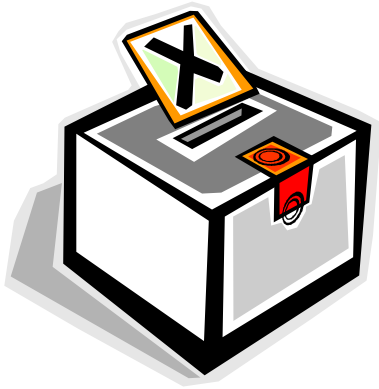


Why should we vote?



Another Northern Ireland Assembly election looms and it's tempting to think 'what's the point?'

The Assembly has been in suspension longer than it has ever been operational and once we've all been to the polls on 7 March there is still no guarantee that an Executive will be created.

So what is the point? It's easy to be apathetic, even easier to be cynical. But, God's people were never called to take the easy option. The point is we are called to be a people of hope and you can begin to

make a difference exactly where you are.

2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in the UK. At the forefront of the abolition movement were Christians, led by William Wilberforce who believed that their faith has something positive to contribute to their society and fellow human beings. There is no better time then to think about how we, as *good news people*, can positively engage with the world around us.

But here are some other thoughts:

✘ *Wise stewardship*

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground... Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1: 26 & 28



We are asked to be wise stewards of God's creation. The Northern Ireland Assembly will make decisions on how our local resources are used both in relation to our money but also about our natural environment. The result of the election will directly impact on how those resources are used, distributed or preserved. Using your vote is one way in which you can have an input in to how those decisions might be made.

✘ *Shine your light before men*

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven". Matthew 5:14 - 16



At times the world around us can appear to be a dark place and, in recent times increasingly hostile to Christians. However our calling is not to tell the darkness how dark it is, but instead to use that energy to create a little more light. Choosing to engage positively in our political process by voting is just one way to counteract the dark cynicism in our society today.

✘ *Responsible Citizens*

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men; whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right". 1 Peter 2:13 & 14

We have the assurance of our citizenship in Heaven but how do we act as responsible citizens for the remainder of our time here on earth? We may not like who is in power but we can do our part to make a change (or keep in the people we like!) by using our vote. We are called to submit to those in authority, so why not actively participate in how those people are chosen?

✘ *If you're not in... you can't win!*



So that's not from the Bible but the principle is a good one. We all like to complain about who is in charge but if we choose not to make our voice heard in the election then we've opted out of influencing that result.

Let's not forget that decisions made in the Assembly will have an impact on so many areas of our lives – education, rates, healthcare, local government, culture and the arts. Going to the polls is just the first step in connecting to the systems where those policies will be made.

Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland and CARE for Northern Ireland want to encourage each you to participate effectively in this election.

- ✘ Check out www.nielection2007.blogspot.com for news and comment on what's happening during the election campaign
- ✘ Think about having an 'Election Sunday' in your church, perhaps with a special time of prayer and reflection for our politicians, for the outcome of the poll on 7 March and for our country as a whole.

Finally, but most importantly, please pray about the outcome of the election, for party leaders and local candidates.