

Reimagine

A good news vision
for Northern Ireland

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known





Where are we now?



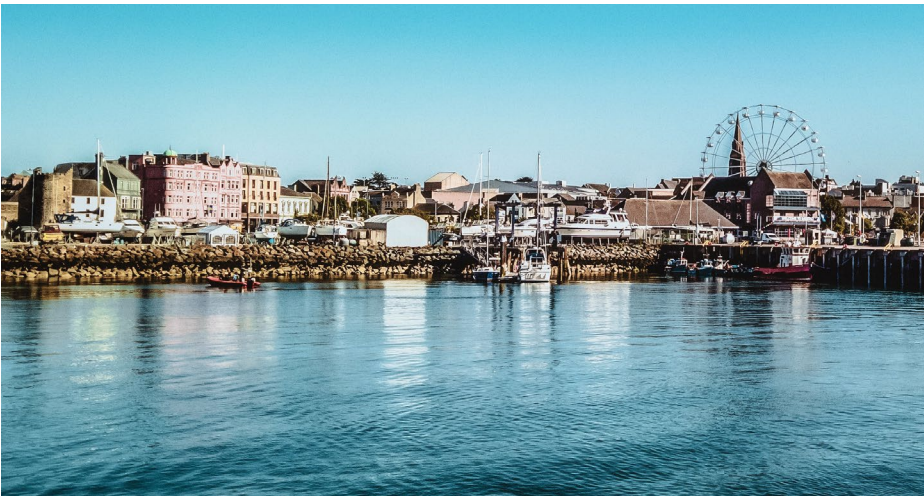
We are living through extraordinary times. Political, economic and media experts tell us that change is the new normal and that we must become flexible to adapt. But the speed of change locally and globally has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and exhaustion.

Around the world, nations have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the damaging effects of climate change, while the war in Ukraine has seriously unnerved global energy markets.

In the UK, political instability and disunity are driving uncertainty. With the rising cost of food, energy and borrowing, families and businesses across the nations are anxious about our economic future.

Here in Northern Ireland, peace seems more fragile than ever as Brexit protocol negotiations continue to create disagreement and ongoing political instability. 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement it is clear that difficulties remain with power sharing and questions about a border poll continue.

In the midst of all this change, now is a good time to **reimagine** the kind of place Northern Ireland could be.



Clashing worldviews

We all have a worldview, a way of seeing and making sense of the world. As evangelical Christians, our worldview is shaped by the Bible. The story of God and of Jesus is the foundation on which we base our values, such as justice, truth, compassion and equality. We believe that these values are good, not just for our own lives, but for flourishing local communities and our wider society too.

2021 census figures for Northern Ireland show that society is changing in age, ethnicity and religious background. The challenge for Christians in this changing culture is to find common ground with the surrounding culture while holding a distinctive identity.

Evangelical Christians want to play their part to help *reimagine* a good news vision for Northern Ireland:

- 1** Evangelicals believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that it still contains wisdom and truth for our culture today.
- 2** Evangelicals believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the most important events in human history and sit right at the centre of our lives and society.
- 3** Evangelicals believe and teach that being evangelical means being active in the world by serving God and sharing His love. Like the evangelicals who have gone before us who abolished the slave trade, reformed our justice system and championed education for all, we are dedicated to blessing those around us. Today, it is evangelicals who are at the heart of debt counselling, street pastors, night shelters and foodbanks. Today, it is active evangelical faith in politics, education, evangelism, church planting, the arts and every other aspect of culture which is making a profound difference throughout our communities for the sake of the gospel. We speak up on behalf of those who are maligned and marginalised, affirming freedoms, and proclaiming the good news of Jesus in words and in action.

Northern Ireland reimagined

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Proverbs 29:18

Across Northern Ireland, we see churches playing a vital role in local community life. In our experience, cliched tropes that the church is out of touch, or holding Northern Ireland back, could not be further from the truth. Christians in every community lend a hand, open their homes and give of their time and money for the sake of others. We know the Christian faith cannot be forced on anyone and so we humbly offer our good news vision for a flourishing Northern Ireland as part of the public conversation.

→ Our vision for society:

- A place of deep relationships where everyone is willing to pursue peace and reconciliation across all borders.
- A safe place for everyone to live regardless of their religious beliefs, political affiliation, gender or race.
- A place where we right the wrongs of injustice for the most vulnerable and address the inequalities in our society.
- A commitment to care for the place where we live by protecting our natural resources, consuming less and making sustainable choices.



→ Our vision for government:

- Leaders who will govern our people and our place with integrity and honour.
- Political parties that can disagree well and show respect for those with different views.
- A public square where we have good conversations and public debate that includes different voices.

→ Our vision for communities:

- A vibrant mix of people of all backgrounds, ages and ethnicities living and working together.
- Everyone taking collective responsibility for caring for the vulnerable, the poor and the lonely.
- A warm welcome for those seeking asylum and refuge in Northern Ireland, who find themselves isolated from community.
- Churches playing a central role right at the heart of our communities in living out how to be good neighbours.

→ Our vision for families:

- Strong family relationships helping to form the foundations of healthy relationships across communities and society.
- Marriage between a man and a woman understood as good for children, families and society.
- Parents being recognised and supported by the state and local authorities as the primary caregivers to their child(ren).
- Every child protected, valued and cherished as a unique gift from God.
- Families as communities where those on the outside are welcomed in, and homes as places where we care for extended family, children in care and refugees.

→ Our vision for individuals:

- The human dignity of every individual recognised, and everyone knowing the valuable part they play in the bigger picture of family, community and society.
- Human rights honoured as vital, but each of us being encouraged to look beyond our individual rights, taking personal responsibility and building good relationships.
- No one feeling isolated or lonely and everyone taking part in a community where they are known, cared for, celebrated and supported.



Faith runs through it all

The Christian story has always been a story of what it means to be human – what it looks like to thrive and flourish and live abundantly. It starts in Genesis with a picture of God, the Creator of all things, in relationship with His people. It ends in Revelation with a picture of God reconciling all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe to Himself. Christians believe that the gospel of Jesus is good news for everyone and that we have the best story to share about what it means to be human.

Christianity is not a private hobby but a bold declaration of public truth. We believe it forms the basis of everything that is good, true and beautiful. We want to see everyone given the opportunity to hear the good news about Jesus and to respond.

Issues we care about

The Christian faith is lived out every day in prayerful and practical actions and words. Christians are sometimes known for what they are against; here are some things we stand for:



1

Care for creation – Protecting and stewarding the world and environment where we live and work.

2

Value of all life – Valuing every human life and advocating for those who have no voice, live on the margins and/or are vulnerable to exploitation.

3

Healthy identity – Every person, created in the image of God, is treated with equality, dignity and respect.

4

Welcoming the 'outsider' – Opening our hearts and homes to asylum seekers, refugees, children in care, the elderly, and those who are sick or disabled or marginalised for any reason.

5

Human rights – Affirming the connection between modern human rights and their origins in Christianity and advocating for the freedom of religion, conscience and belief.

6

Good governance – A stable political framework, trustworthy leaders, robust and transparent policy-making and healthy public debate.

7

Education – Equal opportunity for all, whatever the system, with a strong emphasis on forming good character in every child as well as providing a rounded education.

8

Civil society and reconciliation – A robust, creative and resourceful civic society which inhabits the spaces where government cannot reach and builds new and thriving relationships across old divisions.

9

Poverty and work – An economy not measured by productivity alone but built on fair and sustainable employment and dignified care and support for those who cannot work.

10

Health and wellbeing – Access for everyone to a well-resourced and fair system of health and social care and to initiatives which encourage good physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

and reconciliation

and work

and wellbeing

CASE STUDY

How is the Evangelical Alliance speaking up and speaking out on a changing Northern Ireland?

United church voice in response to poverty in Northern Ireland

Throughout 2022, the Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland team facilitated gatherings and online discussions with representatives from a breadth of churches and Christian faith-based charities in Northern Ireland. We gathered to explore how the church could speak out on the ever-growing poverty crisis affecting the wellbeing of our families, communities, and wider society.

These churches, charities and organisations were seeing the effects of the rising cost of living on their doorsteps. The need for their services was rising at an alarming rate and they were looking ahead and realising that it was only going to increase.

In August 2022, we issued an open letter to all political parties with over 20 signatures. We highlighted the unique role that churches play right in the heart of our local communities, and told them of the impact of rising living costs on those who were already experiencing poverty, many of whom are now driven towards destitution.

We reminded the parties that the real, raw, immediate needs of individuals and families cannot be left to the voluntary, faith and third sectors alone. We called on every elected representative and political party to work together, to play their vital role and to prioritise a strategic intervention that will protect the most vulnerable in our society.



Rev. Brian Anderson from member organisation, East Belfast Mission, speaking at parliamentary event, 'Crushed by the Cost of Living'

Facilitating this kind of coalition around an important issue and speaking up on what matters to the church in the public square is what the Evangelical Alliance advocacy team does. The local Northern Ireland team will continue to collaborate with churches and faith groups to advocate across a range of issues. On 21 September 2022 several members of our poverty group participated in the cost-of-living parliamentary event held at Stormont.

Evangelical Alliance

This is a brief but broad overview of the hopeful vision we have for this place. It tells you something about who we are, and what we care about, as an alliance of evangelical Christians, churches and organisations. We invite policy makers and shapers to work with us to reimagine all that Northern Ireland can be.

If you want to find out more about the Evangelical Alliance advocacy team in Northern Ireland and the good news vision that we have for our nation, please contact:



Danielle McElhinney

Public policy officer
d.mcelhinney@eauk.org
Tel: 028 9073 9079



Membership

It is quick and easy to become an Evangelical Alliance member online. We are an alliance dedicated to sharing a wealth of resources with the church, representing the church in politics, media and civil society, and building strong relationships across the church – all because we know that together we can achieve much more than we can ever achieve alone. Together, we make Jesus known.



eauk.org/joinus





First Floor Ravenhill House, 105 Ravenhill Road, Belfast, BT6 8DR
T 028 9073 9079 | E nireland@eauk.org | W eauk.org

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