

Diverse Identities, Shared Values

We are the Faith & Belief Policy Collective (F&BPC), a group of individuals and organisations with diverse faith and belief identities and backgrounds. We are convened by the Faith & Belief Forum (F&BF) and the Faiths and Civil Society Unit (FCSU), Goldsmiths, University of London to share ideas about the deep challenges currently facing our society, explore how faith and belief communities in the UK are addressing them in partnership with others, and provide support and solidarity in the face of growing social polarisation. This letter is sent in a spirit of collaboration and dialogue to an incoming government, to be elected on 4th July 2024. It sets out our vision, values and recommendations for a repaired and re-humanised society. We look forward to the discussions it stimulates.

A Letter to an Incoming Government from Voices in the Faith & Belief Sector, June 2024

As election day approaches, we propose a profound and strategic re-imagining of the role and contribution of religion and belief in British society. We seek a more flourishing and equitable future for all citizens, in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The nature of these challenges can feel overwhelming. The COVID-19 pandemic, deepening impacts of climate change, war at the edges of Europe and the Middle East, the collapse of our public services, deepening social and economic inequalities, widening societal polarisation, leave many in a state of despair, anxiety and exhaustion. A growing shrillness and intolerance in public and political discourse has amplified these feelings.

Many are yearning to rediscover a deep sense of vision, purpose and reconnection with each other and with foundational values that express an inclusive, compassionate and more just future for all who share the common wealth of these islands.

We are reminded of a not dissimilar period 80 years ago when Britain had to physically and morally renew itself following the destruction of the Second World War. The then Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, took it upon himself as a national religious leader to reimagine what a restored and confident British society would look like. He coined the phrase ‘welfare state’ because for him it was clear that the primary duty of any state was to enable the well-being and flourishing of all its citizens.

Temple’s starting point for policy was the theological and philosophical principle, shared in some form by all major faith and belief traditions, that every human person possesses an inherent value and dignity. He argued that this principle should frame a vision of society founded on the precepts of reciprocity and responsibility. In this vision, all citizens, in partnership with the State, understand that their well-being and ability to reach their full potential rely on the rights of others to enjoy the same.

In his 1942 manifesto entitled *Christianity and Social Order*, he proposed six broad policy ideas, the basic building blocks that the state could provide for individual welfare and social flourishing – including free access to lifelong education, decent housing and basic rights to representation in the workplace.

After Temple’s death in 1944, these ideas were incorporated by his humanist friend and close associate William Beveridge into the Beveridge Report which became the basis of the universal and comprehensive welfare state brought into legislative being by the 1945 postwar Labour government.

We argue, as representatives of religious and belief communities living in Britain, that the necessary boldness and depth of policy ideas and commitments required for long-term planning need to reconnect with the deep resources of values, imagination and commitment that faith and belief brings.

The religion and belief landscape in Britain is now dynamic, diverse and hugely variegated. Minority faith communities are growing in number and confidence and are increasingly publicly visible. Whilst institutional Christian practice is in some areas giving way to more eclectic and personalised forms of spirituality and belief, for many of the growing numbers who identify as non-religious or humanists, interest in belief and ethics has never been so engaged.

Many of our fellow citizens, of all faiths and none, are looking to live more ethically engaged and authentic lives in the context of the poly-crises now facing us. They are seeking opportunities for joining forces with others as they search for new ways of belonging. To make a difference within a national framework which does not allow for discrimination of people based on their chosen religion or belief but recognises that religion and belief are valuable resources of motivation and participation, integral to the tasks of repairing and re-humanising our society.

Our Shared Values

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that faith & belief communities have a vital role in building social capital. In the present cost of living crisis, too, faith and belief communities have proven vital contributors. There is a real opportunity to sustain and strengthen this contribution if we, those from diverse faith and belief communities, develop a meaningful and two-way partnership with central and local government based on shared values.

Faith and belief communities can contribute to a holistic society rooted in compassion, integrity, stewardship, community and peace-making. These values, based on sources and scriptures and balancing more traditional with less traditional frameworks, enable faith and belief communities to offer ethical, value-rooted guidance for policy development.

We aspire to bring the following values to our relationships:

Compassion	Respecting the dignity of the individual, caring for those who have less, serving others, especially the vulnerable and marginalised, caring for the stranger in our midst, and supporting systems that strengthen mental health, and social care.
Integrity	Pursuing justice through reforms in social and economic structures that address systemic injustices and inequalities, and acting with transparency, expressed through honesty, accountability, and ethical conduct in public service.
Stewardship	Demonstrating a responsibility to protect and care for all, sustaining the Earth for future generations and looking after our human and financial resources.
Community	Promoting interconnectedness and equality among all people, using interfaith and belief initiatives and community-building efforts to bridge divides and foster solidarity.
Peace and Reconciliation	Embracing peace-making and conflict resolution, especially in addressing the impact of global conflicts on local communities, to ensure a peaceful society.

Unlocking the Contribution of Faith & Belief Communities to Policy Making

The knowledge and practice embodied in our religious and belief communities are integral to proactively creating the strong and resilient relationships required for the immense challenges that lie ahead. We therefore seek, and indeed claim the right, to bring our ideas and insights, along with others, to the policy-making table. We urge an incoming government to consider the broad recommendations below which, in turn, will unlock the co-creation of policy and collaboration in its implementation between faith and belief communities and government that we so badly need.

Representation

- Ensure faith and belief communities are included in policymaking fora by consulting widely with these communities in respective policy areas.
- Seek the equal and meaningful involvement of women from different faith and belief communities across policy development.
- Create opportunities for young people from faith and belief communities to feed into policies which have youth impact, harnessing organisations that engage young people of faith and belief.
- Ensure the inclusion of people from minority faith & belief communities in state institutions reflects their place in our diverse society.

Protection

- Apply the Universal Standard of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for everyone in the UK, and appoint a Special Envoy responsible for upholding FoRB.
- Work with the Committee for Standards in Public Life to introduce a new oath for holders of public office that prohibits the deliberate stirring up of divisions among communities.
- Review legislation on hate crime motivated by hostility to people based on their religion or belief, including the 'Online Hate Crime Hub', to ensure such incidents are flagged and prosecuted.
- Support the use of restorative approaches to repair the harm done to communities through faith-based hate.

Trust in Institutions

- Resource the faith and belief sector to participate as a force for good, through specific funds (akin to the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities).
- Promote the importance of faith and belief sensitivity in the workplace, including through training for all public servants.
- Strengthen the statutory obligation relating to the teaching of RE and Religion & Worldviews in schools and colleges.
- Continue to promote agreements that facilitate supportive partnerships between local authorities and faith and belief groups in communities.

Hope for the Future

We believe that the current context of challenge to relations between people of different faiths and beliefs, social cohesion, and public services also represents an opportunity for reimagination and a rediscovery of our common humanity. By pulling together we can stem rising hate against minority faith and belief identities that continues to blight our nation; we can co-create innovative responses to the underlying conditions that sustain inequality; and we can rebuild the trust in our institutions that is needed for us all to flourish. We want to work with the incoming government to realise this vision.

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