

Statement from Church of England Bishops' Working Group for Promoting Unity in our Nation

Friday 6th February 2026

The Church of England has a presence in every community and exists for all who live in this country. In addition to being the Church of England we are a Church for England.

As followers of Jesus, bishops are committed to listening respectfully to all views and to joining with others in seeking the common good, and working for justice, peace, and reconciliation within our communities and nation.

This commitment flows from the mandate of Jesus who commanded us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Living out this commandment requires us to see the dignity of the human condition fully realised in how we treat one another – whether they be family, friend or stranger – recognising that each is a worthy recipient of God's love.

We know that many in our communities are concerned by both the perceptions and realities of the issues of migration. Churches can be spaces where different responses to immigration can be listened to with respect and empathy. In that spirit, we call for a mature debate on the different impacts of immigration (recognising that we cannot have unregulated borders). Alongside this we believe that our country must remain welcoming to those who are genuinely fleeing war or persecution. As a country we have seen our capacity to do this in recent years when we have welcomed those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, opening our hearts and homes to those in need. Accessible and legal routes for those seeking refuge from persecution or conflict must be a key part of any migration framework. Our best traditions are manifest in a society that is compassionate, broad and diverse.

In seeking to be a Church for England we are present and serve those in all parts of our country. We hear the voices of those in our communities who often feel unheard or overlooked. Many are struggling with the impact of reductions in local services combined with rising costs of living. We will do all we can to make sure these concerns are heard and addressed by those with power.

Alongside this we also hear expressions of concern from those who feel threatened by those who seek to blame migrants as the main cause for economic and other challenges. We have

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seen this spill over into racist abuse and violence and acknowledge the fear and unease expressed by those who have felt less safe in their own communities and workplaces over recent months.

We reject the use of Christian symbols by those who seek to use them to intimidate others. Sadly, in recent months, we have seen these symbols used by people who, far from working for unity in the nation, are seeking to sow division and misunderstanding. This leaves many in our society feeling anxious and afraid and is a long way from loving our neighbour in the way that Jesus taught. We rejoice that the flag of St George is the national flag of England and contains a cross as a sign of our 1 Christian heritage. This heritage should be celebrated. However, the flag cannot be owned by any one group or cause. Rather it is a symbol of unity, inclusion and our common life around which we all gather.

Our engagement with our neighbours of different faiths suggests that the vast majority accept this as our heritage and want to unite behind the flag as a symbol of national unity and inclusion, based on our Christian heritage and broader values of respect, compassion and care for all.

We call for a greater engagement with the true significance of the cross of Jesus Christ. There is little point claiming it as our heritage if we don't understand its meaning. Thousands of local churches across the country stand ready to explore this meaning with people of all backgrounds in the communities we continue to serve.

Only in this way, can we ensure that the use of Christian symbols in public demonstrations works for unity and not disunity.

As bishops, we pledge ourselves again to proclaim afresh the Christian faith and work for the common good of all who live in this land.

Working Group membership

Martyn Snow, Bishop of Leicester (chair)
Arun Arora, Bishop of Kirkstall
Lynne Cullens, Bishop of Barking
Toby Howarth, Bishop of Bradford & Acting Bishop of Leeds
Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon
Lusa Nsenga Ngoy, Bishop of Willesden
Michael Volland, Bishop of Birmingham

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Background to the Working Group

The Working Group was set up in late 2025 at the request of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and in response to rising concerns about polarisation within society. Its purpose is to resource local churches and national leaders as we seek to bridge the divides within society and work together for the common good.

In particular, the Group was set up in response to concerns about the incorporation of Christian imagery and story into far-right messaging and tropes. This raises significant questions for the Church of England in terms of identity (our role in national life), and our place within local communities (a Christian presence in every community), and what it means for the faith to be “proclaim[ed] afresh in each generation” (Declaration of Assent).

+ *Marty Leicester*

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