



The Diocese of Southwark

The Bishop of Southwark

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun

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Pastoral letter to be read in all churches at the principal service of Sunday 19th June 2016

My brothers and sisters in Christ

On Thursday 16th June a Member of Parliament was killed on the streets of her constituency in West Yorkshire. Not only is this a tragedy for Jo Cox's young family but it has united people of good will throughout the nation in sorrow. I commend Jo Cox, her family, friends and constituents to your prayers as well as all who serve in public office and positions of trust and responsibility in our nation.

On Thursday 23rd June, those registered to vote in the referendum on our membership of the European Union will have the opportunity to take part in an historic decision. To do so is a civic duty, an act of commitment to the work of democracy as it has developed over many generations in this country. The right to vote has been hard won and not everyone in the world today has this right.

As Christians we are called to be Christ-centred, which means being outward focussed. This means taking our civic responsibilities seriously and playing our part in building community. It means we should exercise our duty to vote. I would not presume to dictate how you should vote, but I would ask you to consider: how do we want to forge our identity and live with each other? What sort of place should our nation be and how do we wish to foster interdependency and work together for peace and justice between nations?

Lastly, I would plead for one other thing: mutual respect. There are reasonable arguments and people of good will on both sides in this referendum. Either view can be held in good conscience. But the tone of the debate has often failed to reflect this. Whichever way the issue is decided, we must seek unity to follow together the path that the majority chooses. My prayer is that we would strive to speak well of one another, both during the campaign and after. Whatever happens, we will continue to tell the story of our faith in Christ Jesus in whom we are all one, all children of God.

Whichever decision you prayerfully reach, to leave or to remain, I do urge you to go out and vote.

+Christopher
Bishop of Southwark
This 19th day of June in the year of Our Lord 2016