

REFUGEES: ENGAGING POLITICIANS

As Catholics, we are called to welcome the stranger and to recognise our shared humanity across all borders. The movement of people, whether fleeing conflict, persecution, or seeking a better life, is not just a political issue but a deeply human and moral one.

In the letter to the Hebrews 13:2, it states:

**“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it”**

With local and national elections approaching, this is an important moment to speak to those who represent us. Democracy works best when people take part and when politicians clearly hear what matters to their communities. You don't need to be an expert. You simply need to talk about what you value and ask how the representatives intend to act if elected.

There is often a strong, sometimes heated, debate around migration, and recent sweeping changes have brought these discussions to the forefront. The stories that politicians and the media tell about migrants and refugees can shape how people view those on the move, and the issue can quickly become polarised.

When Christians speak courageously and respectfully about their beliefs in the importance of treating everyone with dignity, grounded in gospel values, they can help shape decision-making and community responses.

Those with direct experience of the immigration system bring a powerful voice, revealing the realities of living under hostile government policy. This isn't about endorsing a party or candidate, but about making your voice heard.

One of the most effective ways to do this is to show your vote is thoughtful and shaped by issues that matter to you. You can say, “I want to support someone who will...”, making it clear that these concerns influence your decision. This is not just political engagement, it is our vocation: to welcome the stranger, to stand with those seeking safety, and to act with courage and generosity.

May those forced to leave their homes find safety and welcome, may our communities grow in understanding and may we recognise one another as neighbours. Amen.



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Why does this matter now?

Refugees and migrants face significant challenges when trying to build stable lives in the UK. While waiting for asylum decisions, many are forced to live in poverty in poor-quality accommodation, with limited access to healthcare, education and support. Even after being granted status, barriers to housing and employment mean many remain at risk of homelessness and hardship.

Those on temporary work visas can also face exploitation, particularly in low-paid sectors, as their right to remain in the UK is often tied to their employer, making it difficult to leave unsafe or unfair working conditions.

Recent changes to asylum and immigration policy risk worsening these challenges. Proposals to extend the route to settlement and require repeated reapplications for protection will leave many people in prolonged uncertainty, increasing the risk of poverty, instability, and exclusion.

Local elections often have low turnout, which means that relatively few voices can shape decisions. Knowing which political representatives are responsible for making which decisions can help you raise important questions and demonstrate that Catholics care about how refugees and migrants are treated.

Your local councillor

Responsible for decisions that shape how communities support and include new arrivals. Including housing, local services, community cohesion and working with local organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers. Councillors often influence how welcoming and inclusive a local area feels in practice.




Your MP in the UK Parliament

Responsible for national decisions on immigration and asylum policy. This includes laws, border policy, asylum processes, and the treatment of people seeking refuge within the system. MPs also influence the tone of national debate and the UK's response to global displacement.



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Engaging candidates and bringing change in your area

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find your representative: You can do this through your local council website or the UK Parliament website.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make contact: Attend a local event or “hustings”. Send a short email to invite candidates to parish events or local community activities. <i>(Find out about local hustings by checking community noticeboards, local library listings, council websites, social media groups and local newspapers or residents associations.)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go prepared and keep it simple: Bring two or three questions at most. You may find it helpful to go with one or two other people and to focus on the issues that matter most to your community.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the meeting: Be respectful and calm. Speak from your values and own experience. Remember, politicians are also people who respond to relationships and to what they hear from their constituents.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Send a short thank-you email and repeat your key question or request so it remains clear and can be acted upon.

What might you discuss with a local candidate or representative?

- You could ask how they will ensure people seeking safety are treated with dignity, especially in poor-quality temporary accommodation.
- You might ask how they will support community groups, including churches, in welcoming new arrivals and addressing isolation and mental health challenges.
- You could ask how they will help those granted refugee status access to housing, education and support, including assistance in overcoming financial, language, and digital barriers.

What might you discuss with a national candidate or representative?

- You could ask about their approach to the asylum system and how they will ensure people are treated with compassion and dignity, regardless of how they arrived in the UK.
- You might also ask how the UK is responding to global displacement and supporting those in need of protection by ensuring timely access to asylum.
- You could also raise how they will address the exploitation of migrant workers, particularly in care and agriculture, due to the restrictive nature of their visas.
- You might also be interested in how they ensure the voices of those impacted by immigration and immigration systems influence their policymaking.

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Organising a parish or group meeting

If you would like to take this further, you could invite a local candidate to speak at your parish or attend a community activity. Keeping the gathering small, welcoming, and well organised helps to create a constructive atmosphere.

It can be helpful to prepare a few shared questions in advance and to involve different groups within the parish, such as social justice, youth, or local schools and charities. Working together strengthens the message and shows that these concerns are shared.

It is important to remember that this is not about debate; it is about dialogue. The aim is to build relationships and encourage thoughtful engagement.



Simple actions you can take as a parishioner:

- Pray for our leaders and shared home
- Attend a local meeting or hustings/surgery
- Talk to others in your parish
- Reach out to ecumenical/interfaith circles
- Work with groups like CAFOD or SVP
- Vote with care and conscience
- Build connections across cultures
- Join a local community action
- Support or volunteer with local groups
- Raise awareness in your Church bulletins
- Attend a councillor/MP clinic or open office
- Discuss what matters to your community
- Stay informed, question misinformation
- Listen and highlight lived experiences
- Explore what 'welcome' is in your Parish

Invite a local candidate to your parish for:

- Parish open forum or listening session
- Conversation with Confirmation candidates
- Parish Justice and Peace group meeting
- Discussion on belonging and identity
- After Mass tea/coffee gathering
- Listening session on community experience
- Meeting with the Parish youth group
- Celebrating culture afternoon
- Join an outreach project
- Invite organisation to present to the parish
- Community meal or shared table
- Roundtable with volunteers/organisations

(Remember to know what your 'asks' and 'hopes' are and be patient and respectful)

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Speaking with confidence and hope

When speaking with politicians, it is important to go beyond slogans and speak from values. Conversations about refugees and migration can quickly become abstract or fractured, but grounding them in real human experiences helps to keep the focus on people rather than labels. Going beyond the statistics and remembering this is about real people.

Faith calls us to speak not only with facts, but with compassion, respect, and hope. In a climate where these issues can be divisive, calm and thoughtful voices are especially important. Building understanding takes time, so do not be discouraged if change feels slow. What matters is speaking honestly, listening well and remaining committed to what is right.

Spotting misinformation (and responding calmly)

You may hear claims that people seeking refuge are a burden, that the system is widely abused, or that most people oppose offering support. These claims are often oversimplified or misleading.

The reasons people leave their homes are complex, with many fleeing conflict, persecution, or unsafe conditions. Public opinion is also more mixed than it can appear, with many people wanting a balanced approach that recognises both the need to offer protection and the pressures on local systems.

A simple, calm response might be to say that, from what you have seen, people tend to support practical solutions that provide protection while responsibly managing the system and supporting local communities.

[Love the Stranger](#) published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, offers a Catholic response to refugees and migrants, endorsed by organisations including the Holy See, COMECE, CAFOD and CSAN; alongside this is the [Love the Stranger: Youth Version](#), developed by CSAN and Caritas Brentwood, helps young people understand Church teaching and take an active role in their schools, parishes, and communities.

[WhoCanIVoteFor](#) is a simple online tool that allows UK voters to find out which candidates are standing in upcoming elections by entering their postcode. Created by the non-partisan organisation Democracy Club, it aims to make election information more accessible and transparent by bringing together reliable data on candidates and elections in one place, helping millions of voters stay informed each year.

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<https://www.csan.org.uk/news/local-elections-2026/>

Here you can find a selection of organisations that offer practical ways to get involved, support others, and engage with the issues that matter in your community.

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- **Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS):** Accompanies and supports refugees and people seeking asylum, especially those in detention or facing destitution – <https://www.jrsuk.net/>
 - **St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP):** Offers practical, local support to people in need, including refugees and migrant families – <https://svp.org.uk/>
 - **St John of God Hospitaller Services (SJOG):** Provides support for vulnerable groups, including refugees, through housing and community services – <https://sjog.uk/>
 - **Medaille Trust:** Supports victims of modern slavery and trafficking, many of whom are migrants and refugees – <https://medaille-trust.org.uk/>
 - **RAMA (Refugee, Asylum & Migration Alliance):** Christian network supporting churches to respond to the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum – <https://rama.org.uk/>
 - **Welcome Churches:** Helps churches become places of welcome, friendship, and support for refugees – <https://welcomechurches.org/>
 - **Refugees at Home:** Connects people with spare rooms to refugees and asylum seekers in need of safe accommodation – <https://refugeesathome.org/>
 - **NACCOM:** Network supporting organisations that provide accommodation for destitute asylum seekers – <https://nacom.org.uk/>
 - **Reset UK:** Supports community sponsorship schemes helping local groups welcome refugee families – <https://www.resetuk.org/>
 - **Safe Passage:** Works to create safe and legal routes for refugees, especially children and young people – <https://www.safepassage.org.uk/>
 - **Refugee Council:** Provides support, advice, and advocacy for refugees and people seeking asylum – <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>
 - **Care4Calais:** Volunteer-led organisation providing aid and support to refugees in the UK and northern France – <https://care4calais.org/>
 - **Citizens UK:** Community organising network campaigning for a more humane and welcoming approach to refugees and migrants – <https://www.citizensuk.org/>