

# Navigating Polarisation

A 6 SESSION GUIDE FOR CHURCHES

Adapted from Politically Divided Congregations: A Curriculum for Reconciliation and Transformation  
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## Introduction: The Church in a Divided Nation

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Polarisation describes more than the simple fact of disagreement, which is the lifeblood of democracy. It refers to the hardening of political difference into fixed identities, such that those who hold opposing views come to be regarded not merely as mistaken but as morally suspect or even as enemies. In this context, it becomes harder to find a common ground, and mistrust and mischaracterisations abound as people increasingly choose to spend time only with people like themselves.

This has a bearing on our social and political spheres of society, but also on our churches, which bring together people with different political viewpoints. If these differences harden into division, it can have a profound impact on the life and health of our congregations, and our witness to the world.

The first and perhaps most important point to establish is this: Christian faith cannot be identified with any single political party or ideology. Christians of equally serious faith and equally sincere conscience have, throughout the Church's history, found themselves on different sides of contested political questions. This is a symptom of the genuine complexity of applying theological and moral principles to matters of policy.

So, we should expect, even look for, diversity within our churches – in political persuasion just as in age, gender, and ethnicity. But, it is important for our political identities to not take precedence over the truth that we are all made in the image of God, and members of the Body of Christ – which, Jesus prayed, would be one as He and the Father are one so that the world might believe in Him (John 17:21).

This course is designed to help build deeper understanding across political difference and explore ways that, together, you can better serve your community.

Several principles for disagreeing well will be helpful for those taking part in the course:

First, to separate the person from the position. Every individual, whatever their political convictions, is made in the image of God and deserving of dignity. We can disagree with a view without having contempt for the person who expresses it.

Second, to seek genuine understanding before seeking to persuade. Good disagreement requires the intellectual and moral discipline of accurate representation — understanding the other well enough to state their position in terms they themselves would recognise.

Third, to remain at the table. A culture of instant exit — unfriending, disengaging, retreating to the like-minded — produces the echo chambers that accelerate polarisation, entrenching the obstacles to reconciliation.

Fourth, to hold convictions with appropriate humility. None of us can see the full picture, when it comes to our sociological, political, or spiritual reality. We need different perspectives to have a richer understanding. And, we have to confess that only God has perfect and complete knowledge.

## The UK Context: What the Evidence Shows

### KEY UK STATISTICS

- 85% of British adults believe the UK is divided, and 55% say differences in political views are so severe they are dangerous for society. ([IPSOS](#))
- Half (52%) of Britons think that people with opposing political views don't care about people like them. 65% believe that those with opposing views are unlikely to change their opinion, while 48% believe their views are politically extreme. ([IPSOS](#))
- 64% of people in the UK say culture wars are a serious problem for society and politics – up from 52% in 2023 and 44% in 2020 ([KCL and IPSOS](#))
- Half of the public feel that culture in the UK is changing too fast, compared with 35% in 2020, and 48% want the country to be “the way it used to be” – up from 28% in 2020 ([KCL and IPSOS](#))
- 76 per cent of people in the UK are either unwilling or hesitant to trust someone whose values, facts, problem-solving approaches, or cultural background differ from their own. And 35 per cent said they would rather leave a job or move departments than report to a manager with very different values ([Edelman Trust Barometer](#))
- In 2023, trust in politicians fell to a 40-year low – just 9 per cent say they trust them to tell the truth. And only 21 per cent trust journalists to do the same. ([IPSOS](#))

### Community Agreements

Before beginning, we recommend your group establishes shared agreements for how you will engage together. These form the container for everything that follows.

### SUGGESTED COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

1. We speak from our own experience using 'I' statements, rather than making claims on behalf of groups.
2. We listen to understand, not merely to respond.
3. We hold what is shared here in confidence, respecting one another's vulnerability.
4. We make space for discomfort, recognising that growth often comes through challenge.
5. We extend charitable interpretation: we assume the best of each other's intentions.
6. We are willing to be changed by what we hear.
7. We acknowledge that Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience may lead sincere Christians to different conclusions.
8. We commit to remaining in relationship even when we disagree.

## SESSION 1 ONE BODY, MANY MEMBERS

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 | **Duration:** 90 minutes

This session establishes the theological foundation for the entire curriculum. We explore what it means to be the Body of Christ: not a collection of like-minded individuals, but an interconnected community where diversity is a gift, not a problem to be managed.

### OPENING (30 MINUTES)

#### OPENING PRAYER

*Lord God, you have called us together as your Body, each member precious and necessary. Help us in this time to receive one another as we have been received by you — not despite our differences, but with them. Give us the courage to listen, the humility to learn, and the faith to believe that your love is large enough to hold us all. Through Christ, who is our peace. Amen.*

#### Opening Questions:

1. What are your hopes for this group? *Note that we are unlikely to resolve every contested political topic, but we are building a framework for ongoing engagement, reconciliation, and transformation.*
2. How would you describe your own church's current engagement with politics — and the Church of England's?

#### Community Agreements:

Discuss the suggested agreements, what people understand by them, and whether there are any others people wish to add.

### SCRIPTURE READING AND DISCUSSION (45 MINUTES)

#### 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

*<sup>12</sup>For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*<sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

*<sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many members, yet one body.*

*<sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup>whereas*

*our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honouor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>so that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.*

*<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

## TEACHING INPUT: 1 CORINTHIANS IN CONTEXT

Before discussing the passage, it helps to set it in its context. Corinth was a city of hedonistic pleasure and ostentatious wealth — but behind that wealth lay pervasive and severe poverty. Corinthian society was riddled with competitive individualism, and this spilled over into the life of the church.

In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, we learn that Paul's primary concern was to address the factions building in the church. Feuding groups, built around the personalities and teachings of rival leading figures from different house churches, argued over theology, proper Christian conduct, and worship.

The Greco-Roman world was highly stratified. Intellectual elites looked down upon working-class people as unsophisticated and of low character. The early Christian churches, by contrast, were marked by considerable socio-economic diversity — a radical departure from the social norms of the day.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul provides three timeless prescriptions for healing division. First, when one part of the body suffers, all suffer with it (v.26). Second, 'those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable' (v.22). Third, the 'parts should have equal concern for each other' (v.25). Paul calls us to demonstrate solidarity and love for our neighbour.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you hear Paul saying about the church — the body of Christ — in this passage? Consider: what parts of society would the ears or eyes represent? The hands and feet? Why might parts of the 'head' be inclined to say they do not need the 'hands or feet'?
2. What are some ways your own behaviour indicates you do not need other parts of the body?
3. What parts of society are under-represented or absent from your church? What parts are present but treated as less important? Consider political perspectives, race, class, education, age.
4. Why might you need people with different political or social values as part of the body of Christ in your church? What could you learn from them?

## CLOSING EXERCISE AND PRAYER (15 MINUTES)

Go around the room and have each person share one thing they found surprising about tonight — a perspective they heard, a new insight, or a different way of understanding themselves. Participants are always welcome to pass.

Close with the Serenity Prayer (attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr) or a prayer of your own:

## CLOSING PRAYER

*God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

## SESSION 2 UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL POLARISATION

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Scripture:** Acts 2:42–47 | **Duration:** 90 minutes

Before we can address political division, we need to understand it. This session explores how polarisation works, what drives it in the British context, and how it has affected the Church of England specifically.

### OPENING (10 MINUTES)

Begin with prayer. Then invite a brief check-in: since our last session, have you noticed any moments of political tension — in the news, in conversation, or in yourself?

### SCRIPTURE READING AND REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)

#### Acts 2:42–47

*<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

*<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.*

*<sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

*<sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you observe about the early church community described in Acts 2?
2. Very few, if any, churches today resemble this early community. Why do you think that is?

### TEACHING INPUT: FROM ISOLATION TO POLARISATION (25 MINUTES)

Political polarisation refers not simply to disagreement, but to disagreement that becomes closely tied to identity. In democratic societies, it is natural and healthy for people to hold differing views on policy, economics, and social questions. Polarisation develops when those differences begin to shape how we perceive one another as people — when disagreement leads us to question the character and motives of those who think differently. In such circumstances, conversation can become more difficult, and mutual trust can begin to erode.

Researchers increasingly describe this dynamic as “affective polarisation” — the growth of dislike and distrust toward people in the “other camp,” regardless of the specific issue at stake. It is less about what we think and more about how we feel about those who think differently. While Britain has historically experienced lower levels of partisan hostility than some countries, evidence

suggests affective polarisation has grown significantly over the past decade, particularly since the Brexit referendum and through the culture-war debates that followed.

The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer offers a stark illustration of this shift. It found that 76 per cent of people in the UK are either unwilling or hesitant to trust someone whose values, facts, problem-solving approaches, or cultural background differ from their own. More than a third of Britons (35 per cent) said they would rather leave a job or move departments than report to a manager with very different values. Just over a quarter admitted they would reduce their effort on a project led by a boss with opposing beliefs. These findings suggest that polarisation is no longer confined to Westminster or online debate; it shapes workplaces, relationships, and everyday interactions.

Research by More in Common in its *Shattered Britain* report similarly found widespread perceptions that the country is deeply divided. Large majorities of respondents describe Britain as fragmented along lines of class, immigration, and political identity. Importantly, many people feel that leaders do not understand or respect “people like them.” This perceived lack of recognition can fuel resentment and withdrawal, reinforcing cycles of mistrust.

Social media plays an important part in these trends. Platforms are designed to reward content that provokes strong emotional reactions — anger, fear, indignation — rather than slow, careful reasoning. Algorithms often feed users material that confirms existing beliefs, reinforcing echo chambers in which alternative perspectives rarely appear.

Another important driver of polarisation is social isolation. Disagreement is more likely to become hostility when people lack meaningful relationships across difference. According to the Office for National Statistics, between 5% and 7% of UK adults report feeling lonely “often or always,” with significantly higher rates among young adults aged 16–24 and older adults. Younger generations are also more likely to report lower levels of social trust and fewer close friendships than previous generations. If people do not have regular opportunities to meet, and befriend, people who are different from them, then they are more likely to believe representations of those groups either in the media or online.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Numerous factors contribute to our growing experience of isolation. As a group, discuss some factors you see contributing to this experience of isolation.
2. What are some ways you have experienced isolation?

### PERSONAL REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)

When we experience isolation, it is natural to seek out communities that act and believe as we do. When we feel isolated, connecting with communities that validate our beliefs and behaviour can leave us less interested in interacting with communities that do not. Our quest for connection further isolates us from people different from us. This can contribute to an “us vs. them” mentality, reinforcing our sense that what we believe and do is right and good and what others believe and do is wrong and bad.

**Reflect individually on the below questions.**

1. List some of the groups you consider “your people” or “your group.”

2. What do you value about this group or these groups?
3. What do you wish would be different about this group or these groups?
4. Social media offers an easy place for us to find groups of people who act and believe as we do. How do you see social media contributing to our isolation from people who act and believe differently from us? How have you experienced it contributing to an “us vs. them” mentality?
5. Social media has been described as creating echo chambers - “environments in which the same opinions are repeatedly voiced and promoted, so that people are not exposed to opposing views.” How have you experienced that personally? How would you describe the echo chamber created by your personal social media experience?

## **TEACHING INPUT: COGNITIVE PATTERNS CONTRIBUTING TO POLARISATION (20 MINUTES)**

We often think of polarisation as something other people cause, unaware of our own contribution. Human psychology offers insights into how our minds work in ways that may deepen division:

### **Meta-Perception**

This has to do with how we perceive what other people think about us. If we perceive that they don't like us, our defence mechanism is to not like them back. The problem is that we often think the other group dislikes us far more than they actually do. As a result, we think the other side is more monolithic and extreme than it is — in large part because the loudest, most strident voices appear to speak for the whole.

### **Motive Misattribution**

'Our side' acts out of love, while 'the other side' acts out of hate. Once you allow yourself to think that way, it becomes harder to engage with those who differ. This misattribution feeds polarisation on all sides: when our side makes a mistake, it's an anomaly; when the other side makes one, it's who they are.

### **Halo Effect**

This is the tendency for an impression created in one area to influence an opinion in another area. Often if we like something or someone, our brain assumes other related things or people are compatible. As a result, when we vote for and support a politician, our brains want to believe what that politician does is in line with our values. If we hear the politician being attacked, it can feel as though we are being attacked. If someone criticizes the politician, we can feel as though the person is saying something bad about us, even if we might otherwise agree with the critique.

### **Confirmation Bias**

We selectively seek, absorb, and remember information that confirms our current view of what is correct. The result is that we are highly resistant to accepting truth that counters our expectations. Most of us are in denial that we do this at all.

### **Sacred Values**

These are the non-negotiables in our lives. When politics hinges increasingly around our identity, we tend to treat more and more things as sacred and therefore non-negotiable. This erodes trust and builds walls between us.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Where have you personally felt the effects of political polarisation — in your family, friendships, neighbourhood, or church?
2. When you recognise your mind working in ways that contribute to polarisation, how can you interrupt that pattern?
3. Research suggests we often overestimate how extreme those who disagree with us actually are. Have you ever discovered that someone's view was more nuanced than you expected?
4. As you think about the ways we contribute to polarisation and the ways we have been hurt by it, what biblical passages or theological truths come to mind that can bring healing?

### **CLOSING EXERCISE AND PRAYER (10 MINUTES)**

Consider on a personal level what changes you want to make in how you engage with news or social media. If you are not on social media, observe how the news sources you engage with may be contributing to polarisation. Notice how often the framing of a news story reinforces division rather than understanding.

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

*God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

## SESSION 3 TELLING OUR STORIES

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:26–31 | **Duration:** 90 minutes

Stories are how we make meaning. This session uses guided storytelling to help participants hear one another across difference, drawing on the theological conviction that every person is made in the image of God.

### OPENING PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

#### OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, you have made us in your image — each of us a unique and irreplaceable story. Help us today to receive one another's stories as sacred. Give us ears to hear, hearts to receive, and the wisdom to know that understanding does not require agreement. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION (30 MINUTES)

#### Genesis 1:26–31

*<sup>26</sup>Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'*

*<sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

*<sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'*

*<sup>29</sup>God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so.*

*<sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

While biblical scholars present many different understandings of what it means to be created in the image of God (imago Dei), most agree it means we are called to reflect God's glory and character to the world, and that every person has equal worth and dignity.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some ways you see someone in the group reflecting God's glory and character to the world?
2. What are some ways your church reflects God's glory and character to the world?
3. Think about someone with whom you disagree politically. How do you see the image of God reflected in them? What are some ways you see that person reflecting God's character?
4. In our public discourse, we often forget there is a real person behind the ideas being debated. When have you prioritised being right over being in right relationship with someone?

### STORYTELLING EXERCISE (50 MINUTES)

One of the best ways to reconnect with the image of God in those with whom we disagree is to seek out the stories behind their beliefs. In this session we will spend time listening to the stories that are behind the political beliefs of people in the group. For the sake of this exercise, political views are far less important than the stories behind them.

Often when we listen to people with whom we disagree, we listen for the things with which we disagree. Instead, we can make an effort to set that aside and ask: what do I have to learn from this person's story?

#### STORY FRAMEWORK

**Spend ten minutes writing down answers to these questions, then share with the person sat next to you:**

1. Where did you grow up, and what shaped your earliest sense of the world? (community, family, faith background)
2. What experiences, people, or moments have most shaped how you see political or social questions today?
3. Have your political views ever shifted or changed? Describe when or how that happened.
4. How has your faith shaped — or been shaped by — these experiences?

**Come together as a group and have each person tell their partner's story, rather than their own.**

*As others share, pay attention to what you are learning about them. If there is something you don't understand, ask politely when they have finished sharing. The goal is to listen for understanding, not to debate.*

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What surprised you about what you heard?
2. What did you notice in yourself as you listened?

## CLOSING PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

### CLOSING PRAYER

*God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

## SESSION 4 THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:11–22 | **Duration:** 90 minutes

Reconciliation is not the same as peace-keeping. This session explores the costly, active, and Spirit-empowered work of building genuine community across division — and what reconciliation actually requires.

### OPENING PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

#### OPENING PRAYER

*Gracious God, you have reconciled us to yourself through Christ, and entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. Give us the courage to name what divides us, the honesty to acknowledge the harm we have caused and received, and the faith to believe that your peace is more powerful than our hostilities. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE READING AND DISCUSSION (20 MINUTES)

#### Ephesians 2:11–22

<sup>11</sup>So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—  
<sup>12</sup>remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. <sup>15</sup>He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,

<sup>16</sup>and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. <sup>17</sup>So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup>for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup>in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

### TEACHING INPUT: TENSIONS AMONG FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Ephesians 2:11–22 immediately follows a presentation of the 'good news' similar to many contemporary evangelistic presentations: discussion of the pre-Christian state of alienation from

God, followed by salvation through faith in God's grace through Jesus (vv.1–10). The verses that follow pick up the salvation theme and dive into a part of the gospel that is often overlooked.

It is easy for us to underestimate how challenging it was for first-century Jewish Christians to receive Gentile Christians as equals. Jewish people saw foreigners as contaminating influences, grouping Gentiles with tax collectors as among the most abject people in existence (Matthew 18:17). The animosity was immense.

Circumcision was the primary mark for defining Jewish males. A man who was “uncircumcised” was ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to enter the sanctuary to worship God. Calling someone “uncircumcised” was a derogatory way of calling them “dirty” while also mocking their inability to enter the presence of God. (Notice Paul is careful to specify that he is not the one calling them such a name.)

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What language do you observe in the Ephesians passage that emphasizes how Gentiles were viewed as “not us” by the Jewish followers of Jesus?
2. What are some derogatory names or labels you have been called?

### TEACHING INPUT: THE DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY (20 MINUTES)

The image of 'the dividing wall of hostility' (Ephesians 2:14) comes from the Temple in Jerusalem, where the Court of the Gentiles was separated from the main Temple by stairs and walls. Inscribed on one of the pillars was a notice: no one of another race was to enter within the fence — whoever was caught would have only themselves to thank for the death that followed.

Keep in mind that the Court of the Gentiles was where non-Jews interested in God went to worship. These walls were intended to physically prevent people who were eager to learn about God from being in the presence of God.

Verse 15 says Christ destroyed 'the dividing wall of hostility' by abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances. The Old Testament law was meant to draw people closer to God, but by the first century it had become something used to separate Jewish people from Gentiles and create a sense of superiority. By the time Paul wrote this letter (likely from prison), God had 'set aside' the law to allow all people access to salvation.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did Jesus' death on the cross do to 'the dividing wall of hostility'? If that wall has been broken down, what does it mean that we still experience division?
2. What walls do we build that separate us from people of other political beliefs or perspectives?
3. How do you see your party/party you identify with attacking the image of God in people from the other party? How do you see members of your party/party you identify with attacking the image of God in some of their policy preferences?

## PERSONAL EXERCISE: STEPS TOWARD RECONCILIATION (10 MINUTES)

Ephesians 2:16 says the cross put to death our hostilities toward one another. When considering our political differences, we can struggle to live this out. The Anglican theologian John Stott wrote of the church's failure in this area:

*Even in the church there is often alienation, disunity and discord. And Christians erect new barriers in place of the old which Christ has demolished — now racism, nationalism or tribalism, now personal animosities provoked by pride, prejudice, jealousy and the unforgiving spirit ... We need to get the failures of the church on our conscience, to feel the offence to Christ and the world which these failures are, to weep over the credibility gap between the church's talk and the church's walk, and to determine to do something about it.*

— John Stott

Reconciliation is central to the church's identity. Just as God has reconciled creation to Godself through Jesus Christ, true reconciliation among Christ's followers requires a process that includes truth-telling, repentance, and a deep commitment to seeking justice.

Spend three minutes in silent confession: what hostilities do you hold toward people with different political views? How do you struggle to 'put those hostilities to death' (v.16)? Then allow time for participants who wish to confess aloud. After each person speaks, the group may say together: 'Have mercy on us, O God.'

Between now and the next session: notice when hostility arises over political values in other areas of your life — your reaction to a news story, a social media post, or a conversation. Take a moment to reflect, and see it as an opportunity to practise what we are discussing together.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

## SESSION 5 ENGAGING WITH CHANGE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1–5 | **Duration:** 90 minutes

How should Christians engage with politics? This session explores the call to transformation rather than conformity, using Romans 12 as a lens for thinking about how faith shapes political engagement.

### OPENING PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

#### OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, you call us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. As we gather, renew us. Challenge our assumptions. Enlarge our vision. And give us the courage to discern together what is good and acceptable and perfect in your sight. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)

#### Romans 12:1–5

*<sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*<sup>3</sup>For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. One of the central themes in Romans is God's mercy through the cross. What does Romans 12:1–5 say about the impact of God's mercy on our lives?
2. What does it mean to offer our bodies as a 'living sacrifice'?
3. What might the renewal of our minds mean for how we approach politics and political disagreement?
4. What does not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought look like in practice — especially in relation to political debate?

### TEACHING INPUT: ENGAGING CHANGE FAITHFULLY (20 MINUTES)

We live in a period of rapid change. Different generations understand politics, race, gender, technology, and faith in ways that are vastly different from one another. The Church of England has had to navigate enormous change: the ordination of women, debates about human sexuality, safeguarding reform, structural decline, and the challenge of being a national church in an increasingly secular society.

Change generally elicits two types of reactions. For many, the natural response is resistance. Others greet change with excitement, adapting to it quickly. Both types of people have something important to contribute as the church faces change. Those who resist too quickly may miss genuine movement of the Spirit; those who adapt too quickly may discard what is good, and even essential.

Being open to transformation by the renewing of our minds can mean some of our most closely held values are questioned. That is uncomfortable. Romans 12:3 calls us to 'sober judgment' — not certainty, not pride, but honest, humble self-assessment. What if political disagreements were an opportunity not to win an argument but to renew our minds and draw closer to God?

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Think about changes in the world that have happened in your lifetime. Which are you grateful for? What changes have made you uncomfortable?
2. Have your responses to some changes shifted over time? How or why?
3. Openness to being transformed by the renewing of our minds can mean that some of our most closely held values might be questioned. How do you feel about that?
4. One of the most challenging parts of being open to change is recognising we might be wrong. What does Romans 12:3 have to say about that? How can being wrong be an opportunity to draw closer to God?

### INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION AND GROUP EXERCISE (30 MINUTES)

Politics is one area in our lives where we can be very resistant to change. When someone presents a new idea that challenges our previously held beliefs, the natural reaction — even for those who usually embrace change quickly — is often to reject it and hold more tightly to what we already believe. But what if political disagreements were an opportunity to renew our minds and draw closer to God?

#### Take five minutes to write down:

- Some things you genuinely respect about those with very different political views from yours.
- Some things you want to learn from or about people who hold very different worldviews from your own.

*Then share some of what you wrote with the group. Are you willing, before the next session, to have a conversation with someone whose political views differ from yours — listening curiously, not debating?*

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would happen if those of us in the church strove to see political disagreement and change as opportunities for transformation through the renewing of our minds?
2. What impact might that have on those outside the church?

## CLOSING PRAYER

*God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

## SESSION 6 PLANNING OUR NEXT STEPS

*From Study to Action in Your Parish*

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1–2 | **Duration:** 90 minutes

The final session moves from learning to commitment. Participants develop a parish action plan for continuing the work of reconciliation and transformation, identifying specific steps for their particular context.

### LOOKING BACK (15 MINUTES)

As this study concludes, take time to reflect together on the following questions:

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were some critical moments in the study for you personally? For the group?
2. What challenged you the most?
3. Do you see yourself having been changed by the course? If so, in what ways?
4. If you had a chance to talk with someone with whom you disagree politically, or someone outside your usual circle, share something you learned through the experience.

### NEXT STEPS: WITHIN OUR CHURCH (45 MINUTES)

Work as a group to develop an action plan. Take time with each area — these commitments are only meaningful if they are specific.

### PARISH ACTION PLAN

**Area 1: Continuing the Conversation**

How will we create ongoing space for honest, safe conversation about political and social difference in our congregation?

**Area 2: Deepening Relationships**

What specific steps can we take to build genuine relationships across political, social, or generational difference within our congregation and parish?

**Area 3: Outward Engagement**

What community need or justice issue can we commit to engage with together, across our internal differences?

**Area 4: Prayer and Worship**

How will we incorporate the themes of this curriculum into our regular worship life? What prayers, liturgies, or practices will we adopt?

**Area 5: Accountability**

How will we hold ourselves accountable? Who will we involve (PCC, incumbent, lay leaders)? When will we review our progress?

**PERSONAL COMMITMENTS (10 MINUTES)**

Invite each participant to write on a card:

- One thing I will do differently as a result of this curriculum
- One relationship I will invest in across difference
- One prayer I will commit to praying

Cards may be shared or kept private. Invite participants to return to these cards in one month as a way of holding themselves to account.

**CLOSING CELEBRATION**

End with a shared meal or refreshments if possible. Eating together is an important sign of our union with and in Christ. It is especially important in the context of this course, as Jesus often revealed the kingdom of God around the table, eating with disciples, friends, and even those considered outsiders.