

# Churches Update

## News from the Labour Party

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### Douglas Alexander: “We cannot be silent on Iraq”

**Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary speaks out about the persecution of religious minorities**

Douglas Alexander, Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary, has called on the government to do more to address the suffering of religious minorities. It is reported that nearly a quarter of Christians in Iraq were driven from their homes by Islamic State (ISIL).

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Douglas said that the latest outrages in Iraq were “...part of a growing pattern of persecution.” The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, has also referred to “...an evil pattern around the world,” in which people are being killed and persecuted simply because of their faith.

Douglas has written to the Foreign Secretary urging him to set out what steps the government will take—along with other countries—to address the growing threat to religious minorities inside Iraq.

Speaking to *Churches Update*, Douglas said: “*The Labour Party will continue to raise the issue of religious persecution and work to make sure it is on the public and political agenda. We need to help awaken people’s conscience to the plight of Christians around the world today who face persecution in more countries than ever before in our history. Christian*



*persecution must be named for the evil that it is, and challenged systematically by people of all faith or none.”*

Last year, again writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Douglas urged people to speak up for persecuted Christians around the world: “*We cannot, and we must not, stand by on the other side.*”

In July, Douglas set out his concerns at a packed open meeting in Parliament, jointly organised by *Christians on the Left* and the *All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Freedom*.

### Protecting religious freedom

**A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour’s Faith Envoy**

Earlier this month, leaders and representatives of major faiths joined together outside Westminster Abbey to remember those being persecuted in Iraq. It was a sombre and moving event, jointly organised by *Christian Aid*, *Islamic Relief* and *World Jewish Relief*. It was addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and by both Jewish and Muslim leaders.

As Christians, we must stand united with our brothers and sisters who are oppressed. Assyrian Christians have been calling for a safe haven for religious minorities in Northern Iraq. It was good to hear at the event heartfelt expressions of solidarity from Muslim and Jewish leaders too.

The church is being persecuted. It is reported that, of those Christians who have so far been forced to make the terrible choice between death and conversion, ninety per cent have chosen death.

It is the calling of Christians to follow Jesus’ example of unconditional love for others, irrespective of belief. We can feel utterly helpless about what is happening in the Middle East. Hatred of those of a different faith would not help. But we can press for international protection to be afforded to people who are today being confronted with an impossible choice.



## Labour MPs vote against bedroom tax

Labour MPs have voted for far-reaching exemptions to the “*bedroom tax*”, which has caused hardship for hundreds of thousands across the country.

MPs voted by 304 to 267 for a Bill, brought in by a backbench Lib Dem MP Andrew George, to limit the scope of the policy which penalises council and housing association tenants deemed to have more bedrooms than they need. The vote allows the Bill to move on for more detailed scrutiny at the committee stage. Most Lib Dem MPs (although not Andrew George) had previously supported the bedroom tax, but on this occasion they voted with Labour.

It is estimated that the bedroom tax costs low-income families an average of £700 a year. Two thirds of those hit by the bedroom tax have disabilities and 60,000 are carers. Ministers said the bedroom tax would lead to people moving to smaller properties. But in July a government report found just six per cent hit by the bedroom tax were moving and the policy had led to sixty per cent of people falling behind with their rent.

After the vote, Labour’s Shadow Minister for Welfare Reform, Chris Bryant, said: “*This is the beginning of*

### A message from Rachel Reeves

Labour’s Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary



*“Since 2013 David Cameron and Nick Clegg’s Bedroom Tax has cost low-income families an average of £700 a year. Two thirds of those hit by the Bedroom Tax have disabilities and 60,000 are carers.*

*“Sadly, the Lib Dems and Tories have voted again and again to impose their Bedroom Tax on the country. So if the government won’t ditch its hated Bedroom Tax, then the next Labour government will.”*

*the end of the bedroom tax. Whether we will manage to get it all the way through by the general election, I don’t know—but we’ll try our damndest, and we’ll certainly abolish it afterwards.”*

Critics of the bedroom tax argue that the policy was brought in without creating any new, smaller homes for the affected tenants to move to. Tenants who have been hit by it include couples who say they need separate rooms because one of them is disabled.

## News in brief

### National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast

The Labour Party’s Faith Envoy, Stephen Timms MP, chaired this year’s National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast. The theme was ‘*Global Christianity in the 21st Century*’ and the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Revd Justin Welby, spoke. Labour leader Ed Miliband and Prime minister David Cameron were among over seven hundred people who attended. Speaking afterwards, Stephen said: “*This morning highlights what I see to be true in communities across Britain: the Church has a huge role to play in the nation’s life. At a difficult time, with initiatives like foodbanks, it has led the way in caring for the poor and standing up for the marginalised.*” Ed Miliband said it was a “*pleasure*” to be at such an “*important and inspiring*” event.

### Sunday trading

Labour has opposed amendments tabled to the Deregulation Bill by backbench Conservative MP, Philip Davies. If passed, they would extend Sunday trading hours for large shops. Speaking about the importance of ‘*Keeping Sunday Special*’, and opposing the amendments, John Hannett, General Secretary of the shopworkers union USDAW, said: “[*it is*]...*not just for the 3 million people who work in shops, but for all of us. Sundays are very important for family and community life.*”

### Ed Miliband thanks Christian Aid supporters

Labour leader Ed Miliband has acknowledged the efforts of Christian Aid supporters. Speaking in a video message as part of Christian Aid Week, Ed thanked the charity’s volunteers, saying: “*...it is an incredible thing that you are doing. You are the social conscience of the country, you care about people around the world and you are showing it in action by the work you do for Christian Aid.*”

### Christians on the Left?

*Christians on the Left* has produced a video outlining its work and convictions. The video includes contributions from Stephen Timms MP; Andy Flannagan, Director of Christians on the Left; Matt Barlow, the CEO of Christians Against Poverty and David Lammy MP. To view the video, visit: <http://youtu.be/zLoqVf1DBfc>

### Memorial service for Paul Goggins

MPs from across the House of Commons attended a memorial service for the late Paul Goggins, MP for Wythenshawe and Sale East. The service was held in the church of St Margaret, in the shadow of Westminster Abbey. Prior to becoming an MP, Paul—who represented his constituency since 1997 until his death in January this year—was the National Director for Church Action on Poverty.

## Ed Miliband leads tributes to Jim Dobbin

MPs from across the House of Commons have paid tribute to Jim Dobbin, who has died aged 73. Jim, who was co-chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Pro-Life Group, had served as the MP for Heywood and Middleton since 1997.

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband said Jim's death was a *"sad day for Parliament"* and described him as a *"dedicated public servant."* He added: *"As a life-long, committed Catholic, Jim always took a lead in fostering links between the Church and the Labour Party, and his strong faith informed every aspect of his political and public life. This was recognised by Pope Benedict XVI when he made Jim a papal knight."*

*"I will miss Jim's good friendship and decency. On behalf of the Labour Party, I offer our sincere condolences to his wife, Pat, and their children. We will all miss him."*

The Commons Speaker, John Bercow, said: *"Jim was a deeply principled and independent-minded*



*parliamentarian, respected and well-liked by his colleagues."*

Before becoming an MP, Jim worked as a microbiologist for thirty-three years. He was elected as a councillor to the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale Council in 1983, where he became group leader in 1994.

## Conference diary 2014

### Sunday 21 September

► **9.30 a.m: Conference Church Service**  
*"Where policy meets lifestyle" featuring Ruth Valerio (A Rocha UK) with music by Andy Flannagan.*  
St Ann's Church, St Ann's Street, M2 7LF. In partnership with Tearfund.

► **10.30 a.m: Conference Reception**  
*With Labour leader, the Ed Miliband MP (Directly following the service).*  
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS.

### Monday 22 September

► **12.45 p.m: 'Reaching out: why Labour needs faith'**  
*Speakers from a number of faiths in discussion on why Labour needs to reach out to faith groups before the election.*  
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS. In partnership with Sikhs for Labour.

► **4:30 p.m: Annual Faiths Reception**  
*Baroness Doreen Lawrence will be attending*  
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS. In partnership with Faith in Leadership.

► **7.30 p.m: 'Is Restorative Justice the way forward for our prisons?'**

*With Sadiq Khan MP, Geoff Baxter (CEO, Prison Fellowship) and Carolyn Johnson, Cobden House Chambers.*

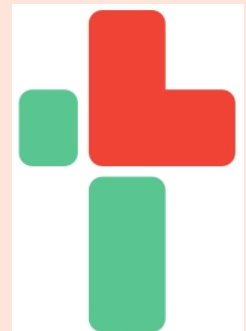
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS.

### Tuesday 23 September

► **8.00 a.m: "Everyday Violence"**  
*Annual Prayer Breakfast with David Lammy MP, and Helen Goodman MP.*  
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS. In partnership with International Justice Mission.

► **7.30 pm: "2020: A vision for the Common Good"**  
*With Rushanara Ali MP, Shadow Minister for Education, discussing what "the common good" means and what a good society should be like.*  
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS. In partnership with Church Action on Poverty.

For more information please visit:  
[www.christiansontheleft.org.uk/events](http://www.christiansontheleft.org.uk/events)





## Working to end modern slavery

**Diana Johnson MP on the Modern Slavery Bill which is making its way through Parliament**

It is estimated that nearly 30 million people around the world live in slavery or servitude. Several thousand are here in the UK. The conditions these people live in are unspeakable and the fact this is happening in 2014 is simply unacceptable.

It is over 200 years since the UK's Parliament backed William Wilberforce's Bill to abolish slavery. That Bill was momentous, but its high time Parliament looked again at what can be done to prevent slavery in the UK and around the world. That is why the Modern Slavery Bill is so important.

Of course it is not just Parliament which is looking at this Bill. A huge number of charities and faith groups have been working to improve the Bill, including the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Alliance and Christian Action Research and Education (CARE). The input of these groups is vital because they have frontline experience of working with victims, and what we really need is a Bill which delivers for victims.

It is through the work of these groups, and other charities such as UNICEF and Anti-Slavery International, that a series of shortcomings in the Government's Bill have been identified. No one wants this Bill to be a missed opportunity but at the moment it simply does not do enough to identify and support victims of trafficking. That is why Labour will be calling for amendments in four areas:

► We want child victims of trafficking to be given independent legal guardians. A horrifying sixty per cent of child victims taken into care go missing; most of them are presumed to have returned to their trafficker. These are incredibly vulnerable children, often in a foreign country, and they need someone to act in their best interests and ensure they are given protection and support.



► We need specific offences of child trafficking and child exploitation. The Government's proposals do not recognise the particular vulnerabilities that children face. If we recognise the rights of a child, then we should also recognise the principle that a child cannot consent to his or her own exploitation. Labour wants to put this in the Bill.

► We also want more support for adult victims of trafficking, and so we will be putting down amendments to establish a statutory network of support for all human trafficking victims.

► Finally, we want the Bill to promote good practice around the world. It is a sad fact that thousands of people are held in slavery while producing goods to be sold in the UK. We've seen small children forced to sew sequins on Primark's T-shirts, and men who have spent a lifetime enduring horrific violence while catching prawns for Tesco. We want to use this Bill to make all large UK companies report on what they are doing to end slavery in their supply chains.

*Diana is the Labour MP for Hull North.*

### We want to hear from you

More than ever, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in the churches. We realise that many will not commit to supporting any particular political party, and we respect that. But we are interested to hear what you have to say. There are a few things you can do to help us in this work:

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at [www.labour.org.uk/faith](http://www.labour.org.uk/faith).
- 2. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leaders if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so that others in your church can read about what Labour is doing.
- 3. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party, 1 Brewers Green, London, SW1H 0RH. Alternatively, email [stephen@stephentimms.org.uk](mailto:stephen@stephentimms.org.uk).

**To join the Labour Party visit [www.labour.org.uk/join](http://www.labour.org.uk/join) or telephone us on 0845 092 22 99**