



# Churches Update

Christmas 2021

## "CHRISTIANS WILL BE AT THE HEART OF RECOVERY"

**Labour leader, Keir Starmer, writes exclusively for Churches Update**

I want to wish you all a happy Christmas.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ we are reminded of the values of Christianity: generosity, kindness and hope. These values have shone through these last two years. At a time when people need solace and support, churches have been a beacon for this country and a source of great inspiration for us all.

I have seen first-hand the work churches have done. The Christian community has shown compassion and a commitment to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Up and down the country, churches scaled up food bank operations to meet the rising level of food poverty. You have opened your church halls and turned them into vaccine centres. You have gone the extra mile to support isolated neighbours, you have pastored your communities and you have helped a traumatised nation to grieve. So, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

As we look to the future, I know the Christian community will be at the heart of the recovery.



Rebuilding a fairer country to tackle the inequalities and injustices Covid has so brutally exposed. Combating the climate emergency through community action and campaigning. Leading the fight against global poverty.

Thank you for all the work you do by putting your faith into action. I hope this Christmas season you experience renewed joy and peace through the love of family, friends, and community.

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Keir attended the annual church service at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton (pictured above). He called Christians the "*moral compass*" of the Party and thanked Christians for their "*leadership*" during the pandemic. The church service, organised every year by *Christians on the Left*, also heard from Jonathan Reynolds MP, Chair, and Louise Davies, Director of *Christians on the Left*, Stephen Timms MP and from Natalie Williams, CEO of *Jubilee Plus*, who was the preacher.

# "FAMILIES FACING DIFFICULT CHRISTMAS"

**Research finds families struggling to cope following £20 per week cut to Universal Credit**

**A Christian charity has warned Ministers that many of its members are struggling financially because of the scrapping of the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift in October.**

In a recent survey, Christians Against Poverty (CAP), found that almost a third of respondents had already fallen behind with bills, with a quarter falling into even more debt.

Speaking to Premier Radio, CAP's Social Policy Manager, Rachel Gregory said *"...[the cut] is severely impacting people's standards of living in the most basic ways.*

*"People are in a position where food is very difficult to afford and things like bus travel to get the kids to school. Now looking ahead to Christmas there are thousands of families for whom presents and making Christmas a special time for their families is just impossible."*

The research by CAP followed the publication



of research by the Labour Party which found that over half a million claimants were now losing £229.50 a month because of the cut to Universal Credit and repaying previous debts.

Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, John Ashworth said: *"Families are facing a difficult Christmas because of this government's cuts to Universal Credit, tax hikes and a cost of living crisis."*

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## WELBY DISAPPOINTED BY TORY LEADERSHIP

**The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has said leaders must "put their hands up" and "acknowledge where things have gone wrong", as he spoke of his "disappointment" following a string of allegations about Covid rule-breaking gatherings held in Downing Street and elsewhere.**

The Archbishop told BBC Newscast: *"First of all, obviously, we must obey the rules. Obviously, we must all obey the rules."* He continued *"...on a human level, I'm just disappointed, really...I don't*

*really do much on judging people, but we must obey the rules."*

Asked if a culture of honesty should come from the top, Mr Welby added: *"That is clearly essential."*

The Archbishop's comments echoed those of Labour leader, Keir Starmer, who said: *"Boris Johnson has lost the trust of the British people. At this time we need leadership that the country can trust. Quite simply, he cannot provide this."*

# LABOUR MP JOINS CLERGY SUPPORT TRUST

**A Labour MP has been announced as one of five new Honorary Vice-Presidents of a national trust which provides support to Anglican clergy.**

Marsha De Cordova, who is MP for Battersea, was appointed Honorary Vice-President of the Clergy Support Trust.

The Trust is the largest and oldest charity focused on the well-being of Anglican clergy and their families across the UK and Ireland. It offers a variety of grants for clergy in need of financial assistance, or support with health and wellbeing, and has recently expanded its services to include counselling, free insomnia help, and debt relief.

Speaking about the appointment, Marsha said: *"I'm pleased to back a charity which is helping those who spend their lives serving others."*



Canon Simon Butler, Treasurer of The Clergy Support Trust, welcomed Marsha to her new role. In a statement after her appointment he said he looked forward to witnessing the value of her first-hand experience as a Christian in public life.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Government failing children on pornography**

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries has admitted that government online safety proposals fail to protect children from porn.

Speaking to a parliamentary committee scrutinising the Online Safety Bill, Ms Dorries confirmed that the plans as currently drafted *"...[do] not prevent children accessing commercial pornography, all as a result of algorithms."*

*"Young children who may explore pornography online find themselves bombarded with images on their phones as a result of algorithms,"* she said.

### **House of Lords debate Assisted Dying Bill**

The House of Lords has debated the case for assisted suicide following the introduction of a Private Members Bill by Baroness Meacher.

The Assisted Dying Bill will now proceed to committee stage where a group of peers will scrutinise it before it goes to Report Stage before the full House. The Bill - which troubled many faith groups - would need to win a majority at its Third Reading if it is to go before MPs.

Prior to the debate, former Labour MP, Andy Reed, chaired a panel discussion on behalf of Christian on the Left.

# ARE ASYLUM SEEKERS "GAMING THE SYSTEM"?

**Labour's Faith Envoy, Stephen Timms, fears the Church is being unfairly criticised**

Last month the Church of England was forced to defend itself against accusations made by Conservative MPs that it was helping asylum seekers "*game the system*" by converting to Christianity.

Questions were raised following the Liverpool terrorist attack. The suspect, Emad Al Swealmeen, had reportedly converted to Christianity from Islam.

I was taken aback by the criticism of the Church of England. The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, referred to a "*merry-go-round*" of failed asylum seekers changing religion and using other tactics to further their appeals. For its part, the Church of England says it has no evidence to suggest asylum seekers are converting to Christianity in order to launch appeals to stay in the country.

It is not the Church's job to assess asylum claims, or the wider security implications of granting leave. This is a job for the Home Office.



The Church should not have to apologise for reaching out to help some of the world's most vulnerable people. It is unsurprising that many refugees look to the churches - and other faith groups - for support. Life is hard for them, and Government assistance is scant. Often, only the churches have both the motivation and the capacity to help.

Ministers' criticism of the churches was unfair and unwarranted. Instead, they deserve praise for their invaluable work, and for showing that Britain still has the capacity to care for the dispossessed.

## 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. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party, 105 Victoria Street, Westminster, London SW1E 6QT. Alternatively, email [stephen@stephentimms.org.uk](mailto:stephen@stephentimms.org.uk).
- 3. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leader if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so others can read about what Labour is doing.