

# Faith and politics do mix

**TWO of the topics you are not supposed to talk about on social occasions are politics and religion.**

For me, my active work for my community through my support and involvement with my local constituency party has always been an extension of my commitment to Christ, working through politics for change to a better and more equal society. But often I felt I was a lone voice crying in the wilderness!

What I did not know until retirement gave me time to attend the party conference in autumn, was that all three major parties have associated organisations within them for Christians who support that party.

I was able to join, and am now secretary of my party's Christian forum. It is a way of uniting with other Christians to bring Christian values and love to all who work in national politics.

For instance, we consider the motions that will be put before our party conference.

## the big issue



**In the latest in our series on moral, social and spiritual issues, Faith Ponsonby, from St James's Church, Emsworth, picks her way through the minefield of party politics**

Among this year's proposals were motions on 'crime and punishment' and 'world trade'.

We have submitted amendments calling for better after-care and rehabilitation for prisoners, and better legislation to protect children and workers in the third world.

Before conference officially opens on the Sunday, we hold an ecumenical service in a local church.

At my first conference, I was delighted to see one of our MPs playing the organ, two others reading the lessons, and a fourth preaching, with other MPs also there in the congregation.

Every weekday morning of conference, we hold a half-hour

service of worship, praise and prayer particularly for all those speaking during the day. Our theme for both the service and our morning worship this year was 'restorative justice'.

We had a stall in the conference exhibition, and also held a fringe meeting one evening.

This year, jointly with Care and the Shaftesbury Society, we will be debating the issue of personal debt in our society. A newsletter also goes out to all our members quarterly.

We are now trying to make our Christian forum more relevant for those party activists who do not attend federal conference. We hope to enable Christians who are also active in

our party to come together in prayer and support for one another, praying especially for our local councillors, public servants and council officers.

We also join in a cross-party organisation called Christians in Politics, which - among other things - is organising Alpha courses in the Houses of Parliament.

Belonging to our Christian forum has given me much personal uplift in the last three years, and the feeling that we are working together to bring God's kingdom a little nearer.

If you want to know more about your own party's organisation, do contact your party headquarters by mail, or by looking on their website.

And watch out during the current autumn conference season for speakers showing that not all politicians are corrupt!

● *Do you have a burning social, moral or spiritual issue that you would like our Big Issue columnists to explore?*

Contact Neil Pugmire on 023-9282 5731 or [communications@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:communications@portsmouth.anglican.org) with your suggestions.

### REVIEW

**BE STILL... WAYS INTO PRAYER**  
by Stefan Smart



STEFAN Smart is a housegroup leader with Southampton Community Church and took part in this year's Portsmouth diocesan spirituality foundation course.

This little book is more of a pamphlet. Deceptively simply, clearly and with humble wisdom, it lives up to its subtitle - 'Ways into Prayer'. In a few pages we are introduced very practically to some of the classical ways of Christian prayer - becoming still, listening to God, imaginative contemplation, contemplative and intercessory prayer.

It's a pity Stefan repeats the old chestnut that contemplation "is the highest form of prayer" (it is *one* form of prayer); and the preponderance of pre-Raphaelites on the full-page colour illustrations might seem a little sugary to some. But not the text: this is pure gold - an excellent 'way in' to prayer for all of us.

Please get these for your church bookstall! It's worth buying in quantities, encouraging Christians to refresh prayer lives, and being available in church for visitors to pick up and maybe engage with.

THE REV PETER LIPPIETT  
Diocesan spirituality adviser



"Accdrnig to rscheearch at an Elingsh uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, as lnog as the frist and lsat ltteer is at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it whituot a porblem. Tihis is bcuseae we do not raed ervey lteter by istlef but the wrod as a wohle."

That may be true but talking to us could help you communicate more effectively

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