



Women who represent the Church of England in Parliament have spoken out about what it means to be a female leader as part of an initiative to inspire the next generation to follow in their footsteps.

In the 100th anniversary year of women's votes, the three sitting women bishops in the House of Lords, together with the Chaplain to the Speaker and the Second Church Estates Commissioner paid tribute to women from history who helped them on their vocational path, adding their own messages of encouragement.

The five trailblazing leaders, each the first woman to hold their current role, were speaking to promote specially-commissioned resources for Church of England Schools and youth groups to engage with UK Parliament Week 2018.

Using the free resources, children and young people will have the chance to play the part of MPs by making a law and running a mock-election, while learning about the importance of the 1918 Representation of People Act which paved the way for women to vote. They can also participate in worship, saying the prayers used in the Houses of Commons and Lords every day at the start of business.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner, Dame Caroline Spelman, the MP through whom the Church of England is accountable to parliament, said that she remained "both thankful for and inspired" by the women who had gone before her.

"When I speak with women I remind them that there are still many ongoing battles, such as achieving equal pay, tackling sexual exploitation and even something as basic as getting mothers' names onto marriage certificates," she said.

"I'm also shocked by the number of times I knock on doors to be greeted by a female voter who says she cannot see the point of voting! It leads me to the view that we need to teach political history to everyone in school.

"My faith, I hope, gives me a perspective on what really matters and the courage to pursue my vocation. We need a generation of young women to take up the baton and I hope this will inspire people reading this to engage with Parliament Week and find out more!"

The Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, the first woman bishop to enter the Lords, said that it was "never my intention to be bishop, let alone sit in the House of Lords."

She continued, "I am acutely aware that I have only been able to take these steps because of the courage, prayer, voices and action of so many people over the years.

"With the calling to be a bishop and a Lord Spiritual has come the responsibility and opportunity to speak out on a variety of issues and topics, in an endeavour to enable other people to flourish and fulfil their potential and become the people God has created them to be."

The Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, paid tribute to two Northumbrian social reformers, Emily Davison and Josephine Butler, saying: "It was their commitment not to stay silent that enabled the voices of women to be heard and ultimately the law to be changed.

"I was reminded of this when I took my seat in the House of Lords. On that day I also reflected on the responsibility I have as a Christian not to stay silent about the injustices in our society. Like the Christian faith of Josephine Butler and Emily Davison, my faith also compels me to work in whatever way I can for a better world in which everyone can flourish.

"This is a good opportunity for each of us to think about how we might listen more deeply to the people around us, particularly those whose voices are seldom heard."

The Bishop of London, Dame Sarah Mullally, reflected that her Christian calling was "not just to pray, but to act in the world."

She added, "I am very aware that the seat I occupy in St Paul's Cathedral is the one that suffragettes tried to blow up as part of their campaign for women's rights.

"The fact I sit in this seat 100 years after the vote was won for some women is an honour and a privilege I will try to use wisely."

Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Chaplain to the Speaker of the Commons, said that one of the beautiful parts of her role was to officiate in the chapel adjacent to the broom cupboard in which Emily Davison had hid the night before the 1911 census, so as to declare Parliament as her place of residence.

"The Suffragettes did not follow the path that society had laid out for these women. They were prepared to forge new paths and blazed a trail that could not be hidden.

"Emily Davison has been a real inspiration to me, as I have sought to blaze a trail thus creating a new path for others to follow. My prayers for parliament and all those who seek to lead locally and nationally are heartfelt.

"Politics is about decisions impacting on people's lives and woven in the story of the Christian faith is the story about a God who is interested in the lives of all people."

# Notes for editors

## Resources

- Churches and schools can apply for Parliament Week resources by filling in the application form at: [ukparliamentweek.org/partner-event-submission/](https://ukparliamentweek.org/partner-event-submission/)
- [A copy of the booklet may be downloaded here](#) (for journalists' reference only)

## Additional information

- Lords Spiritual – Bishops in the House of Lords: There are currently three bishops who are women who sit in the House of Lords (The Bishops of Gloucester, Newcastle and London, with a fourth, the Bishop of Bristol, who will be introduced in the autumn,
- Bishops are not affiliated to any political party and sit as independent members. As well as leading the House in prayer at the start of each sitting day, bishops take part in all the activities of the House, including speaking, asking questions, voting and examining legislation.
- Second Church Estates Commissioner: In the House of Commons, the Queen appoints a senior MP, usually from the governing party, to ensure that the established Church of England is accountable to Parliament. The role has existed since 1850. The current role holder, Rt Hon Dame Caroline Spelman MP, is the first woman to occupy the role.
- Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons: Since 2010 the Chaplain has been the Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin. There have been 79 Chaplains over the past three centuries. Rose is the first woman to occupy the role.

## Parliament week packs for schools, churches and other Christian groups contain:

- A booklet with a wide range of activities for use at events, together with prayers and reflections from Christian parliamentary figures (*see above*)
- A ballot box for mock elections,
- Bunting,
- Posters to help you promote events,
- UK Parliament Week pin badges,
- A UK Parliament Week placard for social media photos,
- A 'Votes for Women' sash, to get participants in the Vote 100 spirit.

