

The bishops of the Church of England have issued a call for respect on all sides amid growing acrimony over the debate on Britain’s withdrawal from the EU.

A joint statement issued on behalf of the Church of England's College of Bishops calls for a new tone of listening and respect in debates and describes the use of language in some cases as "unacceptable".

It calls for the 2016 referendum to be honoured and for the rule of law and impartiality of the courts to be upheld.

It adds: "We should speak to others with respect. And we should also listen. We should do this especially with the poor, with the marginalised, and with those whose voices are often not heard in our national conversation.

"We should not denigrate, patronise or ignore the honest views of fellow citizens, but seek to respect their opinions, their participation in society, and their votes."

The full statement reads as follows:

"As Bishops of the Church of England, we make this statement conscious of the great challenges to our nations and to their leaders. In writing, we affirm our respect for the June 2016 Referendum, and our belief that the result should be honoured.

"In the last few days, the use of language, both in debates and outside Parliament, has been unacceptable.

"We should speak to others with respect. And we should also listen. We should do this especially with the poor, with the marginalised, and with those whose voices are often not heard in our national conversation. We should not denigrate, patronise or ignore the honest views of fellow citizens, but seek to respect their opinions, their participation in society, and their votes.

"The teachings of Jesus Christ call for us to be generous and humble servants; virtues which are for all leaders, whatever their faith.

"We call on politicians to adhere rigorously to the rule of law and on all to respect and uphold the impartiality of the courts and our judiciary.

"Our concern is also for the structure and the constitution of the United Kingdom. To use the words of Jesus, we must renew the structures that enable us to "love one another". Changes to our principles and values of government, if necessary, should be through careful planning and consultation."

It is easy to descend into division and abuse – climbing out and finding unity again takes far longer. Further entrenching our divisions, whether from uncertainty or from partisanship, is not worthy of our country nor the leadership we now need. We are a body that understands from our own experience the dangers of division. It is our view and most solemn warning that we must find better ways of acting.

Further information:

- The statement was drafted by a group of senior bishops on behalf of the Church of England's College of Bishops following its three-day residential meeting in Oxford last week.
- The Church of England is encouraging individuals, churches and other organisations to help make social media and the web more widely positive places for conversations to happen by signing the Digital Charter, a voluntary pledge.

Find out more and sign up to the Digital Charter

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/bishops-call-respect-all-sides-amid-brexit-debate>