

Further to the letter 'Abortion Pledges,' (Times - 28/11/19) we are grateful to the signatories for raising concerns in connection with this important and emotive subject.

The Church of England's stated position combines principled opposition with a recognition that there can be strictly limited conditions under which abortion may be morally preferable to any available alternative. This is based on our view that the foetus is a human life with the potential to develop relationships, think, pray, choose and love. Those facing unwanted pregnancies realise the gravity of the decision they face: all abortions are tragedies, since they entail judging one individual's welfare against that of another (even if one is, as yet, unborn). Every possible support, especially by church members, needs to be given to those who are pregnant in difficult circumstances and care, support and compassion must be shown to all, whether or not they continue with their pregnancy.

As a general rule we would not comment on specifics of party manifestos in the midst of a General Election campaign, but as bishops and as Members of the House of Lords we are fully committed to engagement on this with parties, MPs and Peers when Parliament returns. The issue has in the past been a matter of individual conscience for MPs and Peers where the party whip is not usually applied, and we believe firmly that it should remain so. We can provide assurance that we will also vigorously challenge any attempt to extend abortion provision beyond the current 24 week limit.

The signatories of this letter and anyone else with concerns are encouraged to raise them with candidates in constituencies before December 12th, as part of our responsible engagement as Christians with the political process.

Our prayers are for all those who might be affected by these decisions, and those who carry the heavy responsibility of framing legislation that is in the service of the most vulnerable in society.

The Rt Revd Christine Hardman

Lord Bishop of Newcastle

The Rt Revd James Newcome

Lord Bishop of Carlisle & House of Bishops' lead on Health and Social Care.

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