General elections are important. They are closely-fought and they can decide the direction of a country.

Inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, this briefing offers you four questions to ask parliamentary candidates ahead of the general election on 7 May 2015.

CAFOD and CSAN have come together to write this briefing because both at home and abroad we are confronted with poverty and injustice.

As Catholics, we believe that every individual is made in the image and the likeness of God, with inherent dignity and worth. Regardless of where they live, everyone has the right to a life free from poverty.

We are called to put our faith into action for positive change and to challenge those in power to work for the common good.

The general election offers a chance to speak out against injustice with a united voice and to ask these four questions to parliamentary candidates at a time when they want to hear what issues matter most to you.

How can I ask an election question?

› When candidates or canvassers come knocking on your door.
› In a letter directly to candidates or to a local newspaper.
› At a hustings meeting, where candidates debate policies and answer questions from the audience. Look out for information about them happening in your area in your local papers, on notice boards or through your local Churches Together network. For guidance on organising your own, visit electoralcommission.org.uk
› By calling your local radio station. They often hold call-ins around election time and ask for questions from the listeners.

Top tips

› Your local elections office will publish a list of the candidates standing for election in your area. To find your local office, visit aboutmyvote.co.uk
› Don’t be intimidated! MPs and parliamentary candidates are humans too, they can’t be experts on everything and you’re not expected to be.
› Follow up conversations with a thank you letter and re-emphasise your points.
› Take notes on what candidates say as you can hold them to account if they get elected.
Inequality and poverty at home

**In-work poverty**

Finding and keeping a job should mean that people are able to support themselves and their families. However, certain conditions of employment mean that this is not always the case.

At a CSAN event in November 2014, Cardinal Nichols said: “work is an expression of dignity. It provides contact with others; it helps health and spirit as well as living expenses; and its reward should be a just wage.”

We want everyone to be able to participate in the world of work, if their health and circumstances allow, where working conditions are fair and wages are just.

Yet five million people in the UK are paid less than the Living Wage and half of the families living in poverty have an adult in work.

**Q1: Question for candidates**

What will you do to make work pay?

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**Catherine, a single mother, works part-time and lives with her daughter Sally in a cramped flat. Her wages are not enough to cover her outgoings and she struggles to make ends meet despite careful budgeting.**

*In the winter months Catherine can only afford to heat their home two hours a day.*

*Catherine often skips meals as she cannot afford to feed both her and Sally. She says to Sally “I have already eaten”. She could only afford one shirt and one skirt for Sally’s uniform this year.*

St Francis Family Centre, Catholic Children’s Society (Westminster)

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**Housing and homelessness**

Over one in three working parents in England have to cut back on buying food to be able to pay for their home.

**Q2: Question for candidates**

What will you do to guarantee access to a genuinely affordable home?

Many people are struggling to keep a warm and comfortable home and others have no settled home at all. This is an issue of basic human dignity.

The Second Vatican Council stated: “there must be made available to all... everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing and shelter” (Gaudium et Spes #26).

For people to flourish they need stable, secure and affordable accommodation to call home.

For more information and to read more stories please visit [csan.org.uk/resources](http://csan.org.uk/resources)

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**Peter, 43, has lived in England for ten years. He was a self-employed mechanic’s hand but the hours were irregular and he did not earn enough to afford stable accommodation.**

*Peter has been unable to save for a deposit even to rent his own flat. Insecure and irregular employment has left him sleeping rough.*

*A homelessness charity found Peter a private flat but the high cost of utility bills meant he had no choice but to leave. Peter now lives in a room in a shared home.*

Housing Justice
Inequality and poverty globally

Challenging the causes

“The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it…” (Evangelium Gaudium #202).

Q3: Question for candidates

What will you do to speak out for the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world?

The UK needs to be ambitious in tackling global poverty and challenging the inequitable economic policies and practices that are benefiting powerful and wealthy people but further undermining those living in poverty.

Seven out of ten people live in countries where the gap between the rich and the poor is greater than it was 30 years ago.6

A shift in the way we think about the global economy is needed so that it can work for the common good.

We need to work towards an economy where the poor and vulnerable are given the opportunity to participate fully in economic life and where businesses are responsible, value driven and moving towards environmental sustainability.

For more information, please visit cafod.org.uk/commongood

Climate change

Climate change threatens lives and livelihoods everywhere. It hits the poorest first and hardest, despite the fact they have done the least to cause it. Poverty and the impact of climate change are inextricably linked. Out of love for our sisters and brothers worldwide, we are called to respond.

“Let us be protectors of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and the environment.” Pope Francis 2013

Q4: Question for candidates

What will you do to make tackling climate change a priority and to prevent it pushing people deeper into poverty overseas?

Both the World Bank and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world’s leading authority on the issue, have highlighted the devastating effect that climate change is already having on the world’s poorest people, and emphasised its potential to stop millions of people escaping poverty.

Temperature rises, likely to lead to more frequent extreme weather events and erratic rain patterns, could result in declining crop yields. With a 2-3°C temperature rise possible over the next 20 years, up to 200 million more people could be at risk of hunger.7

In order to stop the world’s temperature rising by irrevocably dangerous levels, we must act now to prevent climate change pushing people deeper into poverty and to support the transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy for all. This means the international community working together, with the UK playing a leading role.

The sooner we act, the lower the risks and the costs.

CAFOD partners around the world are already feeling the effects of climate change. Sinteyo Legei, Diocese of Isiolo, Kenya: “(The climate has) changed. During the worst drought, most nights we went to bed without eating anything.”

For more information, please visit cafod.org.uk/campaign
We’d be delighted to hear which election questions you asked, where and the response you received from candidates.

For questions on inequality and poverty at home please contact CSAN

csan.org.uk
facebook.com/CSANonline
@CSANwire
Email: election2015@csan.org.uk
Tel: 020 7633 4971

For questions on inequality and poverty globally please contact CAFOD

cafod.org.uk/campaign
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At a general election we are asked to think about the world we want to live in. As Catholics, we are called to speak up for the poorest and most vulnerable people at home and abroad. CAFOD and CSAN are asking supporters to reflect and act on some pressing challenges that we face both in the UK and around the world. We hope you will embrace this opportunity to reflect, act and pray during this important time and we wish you every grace and blessing.

Bishop John Arnold
Chair of Trustees for CAFOD

Bishop Terence Drainey
Chair of Trustees for CSAN

Footnotes:
2 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2014, November 2014
3 Real names have been changed to protect identity
4 Shelter, Housing costs forcing working parents to cut back on food, August 2014
5 Real names have been changed to protect identity
6 Oxfam, Even it up, October 2014
7 ODI, Zero poverty... think again, Impact of climate change on development efforts, March 2014

As registered charities, CAFOD and CSAN fully support and comply with charity law and regulations covering elections in the UK. Addressing the causes of poverty through advocacy in the UK and abroad is part of our charitable purpose(s). This resource is to assist supporters should they wish to engage local parliamentary candidates ahead of the 2015 General Election, not to influence voters for or against a particular political party, candidate or category of candidates.

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