

# **A Common Desire to Help Others**

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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During the Inter Faith Week, the Speaker of the House of Commons created a display of parliamentary pride in the many different religions and festivals, sharing experiences alongside communities across the nation.

Sir Lindsay Hoyle's words: 'I am struck by the common desire to help others and contribute to society, a theme I see repeated across all faiths.' He encourages everyone to join others in conversation to learn more about the amazing people who are part of the thriving Parliamentary village.

After each election, members of parliament take the oath of allegiance and may choose a religious book or text on which to swear. The House of Commons welcomes representation from the full range of religions, faiths and cultures.

I have suggested that allegiance to the monarch need not be the condition of participation in parliamentary activity. We invited the IRA to use democratic politics, not violence, to argue for their aims; then we required them to say something they would not mean.

What does religion or faith mean to staff and members? Ruth Jones, Labour MP: 'I couldn't do my job without the help and support of other Christians but also those of other faiths.'

Gurjit Sahota, parliamentary security: 'As a British Sikh, my faith's values of truth, compassion, contentment, humility and love play a pivotal role in how I go about my daily life and work routine.' He adds: 'My experiences will remain with me for life and act as an incentive to encourage others to be involved in politics and to work at the mother of all Parliaments here at the House of Commons.'

Philip Brien, Library researcher: 'The Bible tells us at length about God's heart for justice, for helping those who are oppressed, and can't speak for themselves.'

Feryal Clark, Labour MP: 'I did not use a sacred text when I took the oath of allegiance in the House of Commons because Alevism does not have a text or book.' She explains Alevis belong to a minority faith in Turkey; she calls for fundamental human rights to be respected throughout the world.

Rehman Christi, Conservative MP: 'As the son of an Imam, and I believe the first son of an Imam to be a sitting MP, my faith has always been an important part of my life . . . I felt accepted and able to freely practise our own faith in a predominantly Christian area. Having been able to enjoy this fundamental freedom, I feel it is my duty to campaign for everyone around the world to enjoy that same right.'

One staff member said: 'I've been a pagan for about 20 years but never felt a strong connection to any particular deity or pantheon.' She described how strength came for her to be open with her colleagues about developments in her life.

Rowena Berliner, Judaism, Visitor services: 'I have been working on a timeline of Jewish history and connections with parliament. It has been really interesting to see how Parliament has affected the people and practise of the Jewish faith but how through adversity people have persevered to make change and to overcome prejudice to make a positive impact and contribute to Parliament and the country.'

After Remembrance Services, I have in my window four wooden representative symbols with poppies: the Islamic crescent, the Jewish star, the Christian cross and a simple Memorial stick for those without religion.

I hope it sounds alright coming from Worthing's representative in Westminster: let us try to find the common ground rather than create unnecessary barriers as we strive to serve others in creating a better world. Let us turn you me and them into 'we'.