

**Church leaders' letter to the new Prime Minister:
a no-deal Brexit is gambling
with the basic needs of our poorest citizens**



JPIT Summary

An open letter [dated 24 July] to the new Prime Minister from leaders of 7 Christian denominations expresses concern that failing to agree a deal on Brexit will “hit those held back by poverty very hard indeed”.

The Church leaders say they have been “compelled” to write to the new Prime Minister because of his position that leaving the European Union without a deal is acceptable.

The letter states that “At a time when increasing numbers of families have difficulties putting enough food on the table, we believe it is irresponsible to consider a course of action that is expected to make that situation worse”.

The Church leaders say that “It is notable that assurances about our ability to cope with a no-deal Brexit, while frequent, are yet to be supported by substantial evidence” and ask the Government to publish evidence of the impact a no-deal Brexit on disadvantaged communities.

The letter also invites the Prime Minister to visit one of the many social actions projects run by churches to support millions of citizens who live in poverty.

The letter is signed by leaders from the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Unions of Great Britain, Scotland and Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Salvation Army, Quakers in Britain and the Scottish Episcopal Church, which together have approximately 700, 000 members.

Specific concerns over food supply, pricing as well as availability of medical supplies and energy are raised in the letter.

The letter warns that, in the event that a deal is not reached, “In essence, the Government will be relying on the hope that our former EU partners are willing to co-operate even without an agreement – a huge gamble to take with the basic needs of our poorest citizens and communities.”

The full text of the letter is here:

Dear Mr Johnson

As Churches, we have a particular care and concern for the people in our society who are locked in poverty. Around the country, local churches are helping families to cope with the rising tide of poverty. Projects range from simple coffee mornings run by a few volunteers, to large projects such as foodbanks, homeless support, employment advice and debt counselling.

With this in mind, we are compelled to write expressing our urgent concern about your position that leaving the European Union without a deal is acceptable. Advice and data from multiple reputable sources, including the UK Government, indicate that failing to agree a deal will hit those held back by poverty very hard indeed.

The UK imports 10,000 shipping containers of food from the EU each day. These containers are part of long and complex integrated supply chains. Even minor disruptions to this chain have in the past rapidly had serious consequences. A no-deal Brexit will cause a huge and potentially crippling disruption. Government and many other reputable sources highlight the immediate risk of shortages and price rises. Over the longer term they point to the costs of new and less fluid supply chains increasing food bills for families.

Last year our partner, Trussell Trust, which represents around half of the UK's foodbanks, gave out a record-breaking 1.6 million 3-day supplies of food. At a time when increasing numbers of families have difficulties putting enough food on the table, we believe it is irresponsible to consider a course of action that is expected to make that situation worse.

It is also unclear how a wide range of other vital products and services will continue to be delivered in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Government, industry and charity sources indicate potential problems with both energy and medical supplies.

The UK Government's no-deal planning documents highlight that many of the difficulties caused by a no-deal Brexit can only be tackled in collaboration with the EU. The Cabinet Office states that for many issues we must seek accommodations with the EU which are "not within the UK's gift to unilaterally control or mitigate". In essence, the Government will be relying on the hope that our former EU partners are willing to cooperate even without an agreement – a huge gamble to take with the basic needs of our poorest citizens and communities.

The impacts of a no-deal Brexit are at best highly uncertain, and at worst deeply worrying. Our view that it would put at risk the welfare and safety of the poorest communities in the UK is formed on the basis of the best available evidence, including our presence in local communities in every part of the UK. It is notable that assurances about our ability to cope with a no-deal Brexit, while frequent, are yet to be supported by substantial evidence.

Evidence-free dismissals of well-founded concerns are at this stage both dangerous and inappropriate. Your Government's willingness to embrace a no-deal Brexit places upon it a

responsibility to demonstrate that the most vulnerable in our communities, those locked in poverty, will not be harmed.

We ask that your Government urgently publishes its current evidence on the impact of a no-deal Brexit on disadvantaged communities. We would also be pleased to welcome you to one of our many projects to hear from those who a no-deal Brexit may most impact.

Rather than being absent from the debate, this evidence and these communities should be at the heart of our debates around Brexit.

We assure you of our prayers as you take up this challenging new role.

Yours sincerely

Revd Nigel Uden, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church
Mr Derek Estill, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church
Professor Clive Marsh, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference
Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference
Revd Dr Richard Frazer,
 Convenor of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland
Rev Lynn Green, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Great Britain
Rev Alan Donaldson, General Director, Baptist Union of Scotland
Parchedig/Reverend Judith Morris, Ysgrifennydd Cffredinol/General Secretary,
 Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru/Baptist Union of Wales
Most Revd Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness,
 Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church
Commissioner Anthony Cotterill, Territorial Commander, The Salvation Army
Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain
Elizabeth Slade, Chief Officer General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

You can sign up to support this letter

Additional Signatories (Total : 2,338 on 20/08/2019)

Response from the Prime Minister:



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

30 September 2019

THE PRIME MINISTER

Den Babwa,

Thank you all for your letter of 24 July on behalf of churches across the United Kingdom, concerning what withdrawing from the European Union might mean for the most disadvantaged in our society.

It remains the UK's preference to leave the EU with a deal, and the Government is negotiating with energy and determination to make this happen. However, we must recognise that, regardless of our desire and intention to leave with a deal, this will require movement from the EU and removal of the backstop from the old deal.

The Government is making good progress on Brexit preparations, but there is still more to do. I have taken steps to turbo-charge our work to ensure that there is as little disruption to everyday life as possible.

The Government has set aside £6.3 billion for Brexit preparations, ensuring that sufficient funds are available for new border and customs arrangements, freight capacity and securing food and medicine supply lines. The Government is ensuring that the country is ready to take full advantage of new trade deals agreed with international partners once we have left the EU.

The UK has excellent food security built from a range of sources, including strong domestic production and imports from around the world. Food providers are well versed with dealing with scenarios that can affect supply, and we have developed robust supply chains across multiple countries to furnish the country with food.

The Government has continued work to minimise any disruption to imports of essential goods after Brexit, including securing additional freight capacity to guarantee the supply of critical items. The Government has also engaged with 300,000 users of the UK's current customs system to clarify how customs arrangements will operate.

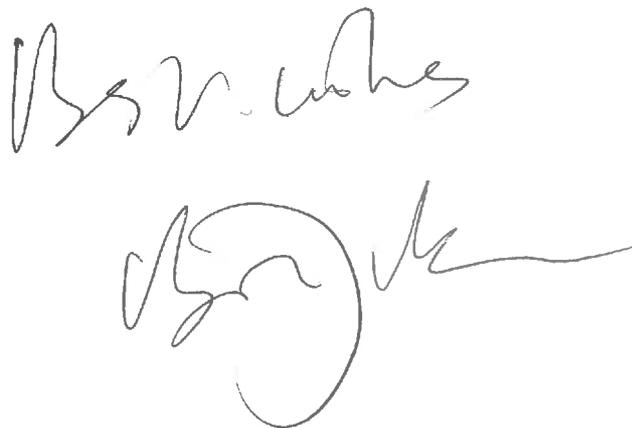
We are working across government to ensure that any potential impacts of Brexit on everyday life are mitigated as much as possible. The Government is continuing to consult and engage with manufacturers, food distributors and other supply-chain businesses regarding Brexit preparations, and will continue to incorporate expert advice when making policy decisions.

The Government has announced a Temporary Tariff Regime which will see zero tariffs in place on the majority of UK imports. Liberalisation is beneficial for consumers, with imports becoming cheaper through greater competition and the removal of tariff costs from pricing. Through these steps, we are taking the first steps towards not only stability, but preparing the UK for our future as a truly global nation, trading with markets across the globe for the good of UK citizens, businesses and communities.

We remain steadfast in our belief that Brexit will help us deliver a more prosperous future for our children, with the freedom and independence to make our own laws and invest where most needed. This Government is committed to providing support to those who need it most, and bringing about the change that people voted for in the referendum.

Thank you for all that your churches up and down the country are doing to contribute so positively to our local communities and national life.

Thank you, once again, for writing about this important topic.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'Barbara Glasson'. The bottom signature is also cursive and is more stylized, with a large circular flourish at the end.

The Reverend Dr Barbara Glasson

Comment to the individual co-signatories from the JPIT Team

4th October 2019

Dear Friends,

You will recall that Church leaders, and over 2000 further supporters including yourself, signed a letter to the Prime Minister on 24 July asking that he publish evidence of how those who are most vulnerable will be protected in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

It took over two months, but we have finally received a response from 10 Downing Street. You can read this [above].

This reply came only after over 100 of you also then wrote to your MPs, asking them to press the Prime Minister for a response. This is a great example of the impact of people power.

The Prime Minister's reply goes into some detail regarding plans and preparations being made for Brexit, specifically detailing supply chain concerns. However, the letter's only reference to those held back by poverty – the centre of our concerns – is in reference to the topic of our initial correspondence and a single line commitment to 'providing support for those who need it most'.

The Prime Minister's response does not help us to understand:

- Who will need support as a consequences of the changes a no-deal Brexit would provoke;
- What kind of support will be required;
- What the government plans to do in order to mitigate the potential risks of a no-deal Brexit to those locked in poverty.

The government chose not to address these concerns expressed in our initial correspondence. It is likely that parliament will try and seek this information over the coming weeks, as they pursue clarity over Brexit plans.

Our fear remains that the government has not been able to respond to these questions because they do not yet have sufficient answers.

If this is the case, the government is at risk of proposing a policy which fails to consider the welfare and safety of the poorest citizens and communities in the UK. It is hard to square this with their claims to 'provide support for those who need it most'.

JPIT Suggestions for following up action

What can we do next to continue raising these concerns?

- Please encourage your MP to continue asking for assessments to examine the risks of a no-deal Brexit on the poorest citizens and communities in the UK, and the steps

taken to mitigate these risks. You can ask that they continue to ask that the government urgently publishes its current evidence of the impact of a no-deal Brexit on disadvantaged communities. If you get in touch with your MP and receive a response or action, let us know by emailing enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk.

- Sign up to our newsletter here <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk> to keep up to date with our work in this area, or visit <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/brexit> to see some assembled resources to read, study and support prayer.

Data protection rules mean that this is the last time we [JPIT] will be in touch with you as a signatory of the original letter to the Prime Minister. Please do sign up to keep in touch with us about this and other issues.

*Transcribed with minor explanatory edits
Webmaster, St Peter's Episcopal Church Linlithgow
5 October 2019*