

Christians in Public Leadership

How can we support their workplace life and ministry?

What we wanted to learn

The [Forward Partnership](#) and [St Peter's Saltley Trust](#) wanted to learn about the needs and experiences of Christian leaders who see their work as an important part of their calling to renew and transform society. What points of alignment and tension do they see between their Christian faith and their work? Who or what supports them - especially during times of challenge? How (far) does their church support them in their workplace calling?

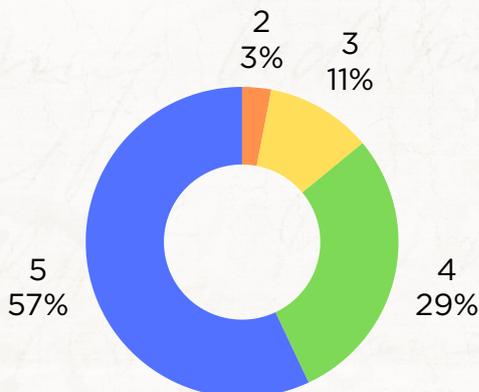
Who we heard from

35 Christians in leadership across the educational, financial, charitable, health, business, public and political sectors (but not local church leaders), largely in the West Midlands region. There were slightly more charitable or voluntary sector leaders than expected.

51% Described themselves as 'experienced or senior leaders', 9% 'new or emerging' leaders, 23% 'middle leaders' and 17% 'executive or system leaders'.

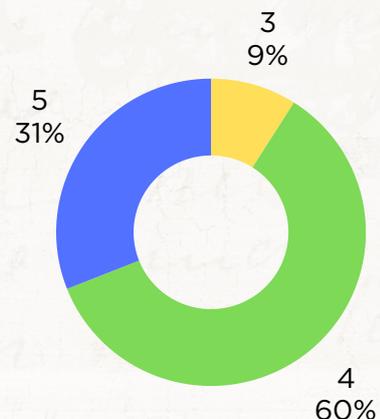
Christian Leaders' Sense of Calling as Positive Change Agents

Sense of Calling



How far do Christian leaders feel 'called' to their work role and see it as their main ministry? We asked them rate this on a scale of 1-5 where 1 = 'not at all how I see my work' and 5 = 'very much how I see my work'. **86%** scored themselves either 4 or 5.

Positive Change Agents?



How far do these Christian leaders feel they're able to be a positive change agent in society through their work? On a scale of 1-5 (1 = 'not at all able', 5 = 'very able'), 91% gave themselves either 4 or 5, suggesting they do feel they're able to make some difference. However, 60% gave themselves a '4', suggesting they experienced some limitations to their influence/impact. The kind of difference they make is explored overleaf.

What difference do Christian leaders see themselves making?



Good Fruit

Many could see some impact or fruitful outcomes from their work

'At leadership level I can inform policy and influence development to reflect Christian values. We can pray at the heart of the issues and very specifically'.

'I was able to do more in public sector but now in Financial Services - and with the focus on inclusive capitalism as well as financial wellbeing I am able to make a difference'

'I can do a lot but in the end can't force any impact'



Living out Calling

For many, work offered opportunities to/satisfaction of living out a calling, use God-given skills or participate in building the Kingdom of God.

'I have the privilege of doing it every day'

'Being out in the world amongst non-Christians, openly being a Christian, not being judgemental or harsh but being loving and supportive, listening, going the extra mile'.

'There are such enormous challenges in our world/society to face that it can be daunting... And I have a strong vocational sense that my place is to engage in change "grass roots up".'



Wider Influence

A smaller but significant number talked about their wider capacity for influence beyond their own organisation.

'I have used my experience - working at a senior level - to represent Christianity and faith with WM Mayor, ICB (health), BCC and with senior church leaders'.

'I'm engaged in multiple city-wide activities and believe that God has empowered us to bring change wherever we are'.

'Cross-sector influence in the statutory and voluntary sectors'.

Questions for Reflection...

For Christian public leaders:

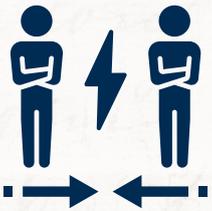
- To what extent do you feel 'called' to your work role and see it as your main ministry?
- To what extent do you feel able to be a positive change agent in society?
- Where do you see the 'fruit' of your work?

For local and denominational church leaders:

- How can you develop a conversation about vocation and calling which includes a call to public leadership beyond congregational life and local community involvement?
- How can preaching, teaching and worship include the calling to be positive change agents in society?
- How can the 'good fruit' of that calling be recognised and celebrated within congregational life - and beyond?

Dealing with Struggles and Faith-Work Tensions

We asked Christian public leaders whether there were specific areas of work that caused tension because of their faith. There was no single, over-riding theme to responses here, and 9/35 respondents said they experienced no particular areas of tension. Of those who identified sources of tension, 3 themes were more common...



Christian Faith vs Workplace Values

There were **two main areas of tension** here: 1) where **profit or expedient were prioritised over people**; and 2) perceived **ideological tensions between workplace values and Christian faith**. Strikingly, many of the comments here came from leaders in education.

‘Being asked to put finance before people’.

‘We work with schools, the Council and NHS and they are all wary about our charity promoting Christianity’.

‘When the motivations of University - mostly focused on income - are misaligned with my sense of what a university should be - education, growth, insight, inspiration’

‘When they want me to “bend the rules”’.



Shortcomings in the Church

Some Christian public leaders felt the main source of workplace tension derived from **the stances or actions of the Church** - rather than issues with their organisation’s ethos.

‘The reticence of church people to seize strategic opportunities in the public space; church leaders fear doing anything to scale; church leaders wedded to bringing unchurched people in rather than mobilising church people to be salt and light’.

‘Church insisting on being very vocal about being against gay marriage’.

‘Some of the political issues which have entered church life... innate criticism of my political stance as it is centre-right’



The nature of the work itself

Here, tensions were identified around 1) the **challenging nature of the job**; 2) the **personal toll** on the leader; 3) **work-life balance** or lack of personal or organisational **capacity**.

‘It takes discernment to know when to give more and when to draw a boundary’.

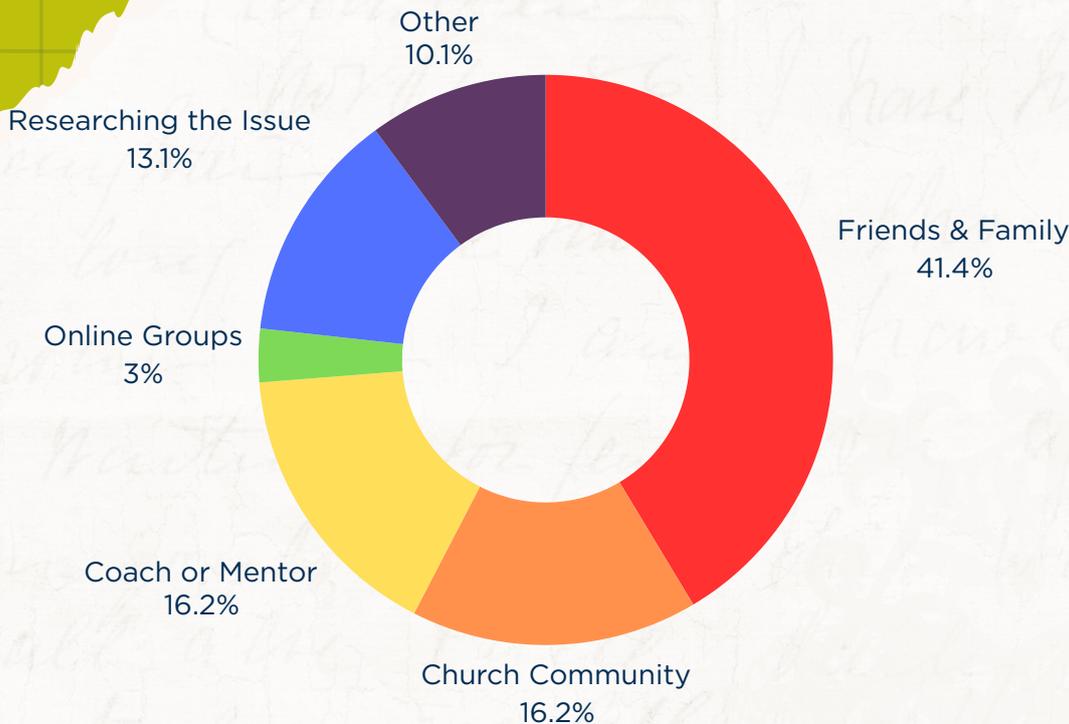
‘Time and energy’

‘Suicide, self-harm, different ways of living’

‘The tension between dependency on God and striving can be a personal tension’.

‘Sense of loneliness but probably not because of my faith but my position in the organisation’.

Where do you turn when you are struggling and need support?



Here, Christian public leaders could tick as many responses as they liked.

Two thirds of respondents ticked either one or two options; thirteen ticked three or more.

Where only one response was ticked, 'family and friends' was the overwhelming choice (10/12).

What would help you feel more supported?

There were no very strong patterns here.

The largest single group was those who were not sure, already felt supported, or said they didn't need anything else.

- 5 felt they would benefit from a peer or support group
- 4 expressed interest in having a coach or mentor
- 4 wanted training of some kind - one thought it would be good if their denomination invested as much in training workplace Christian leaders as they did in training clergy
- 2 wanted to hear more stories about Christians in the workplace - especially those who were 'trailblazers'
- 2 wanted the church to give more acknowledgement of the calling of those in workplace public leadership roles
- 2 thought greater financial security would help (one for themselves, one for their organisation)

Questions for Reflection...

For Christian public leaders:

- What if any tensions do you experience between your faith and your work role?
- Where do you turn when you need support?
- What would help you feel more supported?

For local and denominational church leaders:

- How could churches recognise and respond to the areas of tension and struggle identified here?

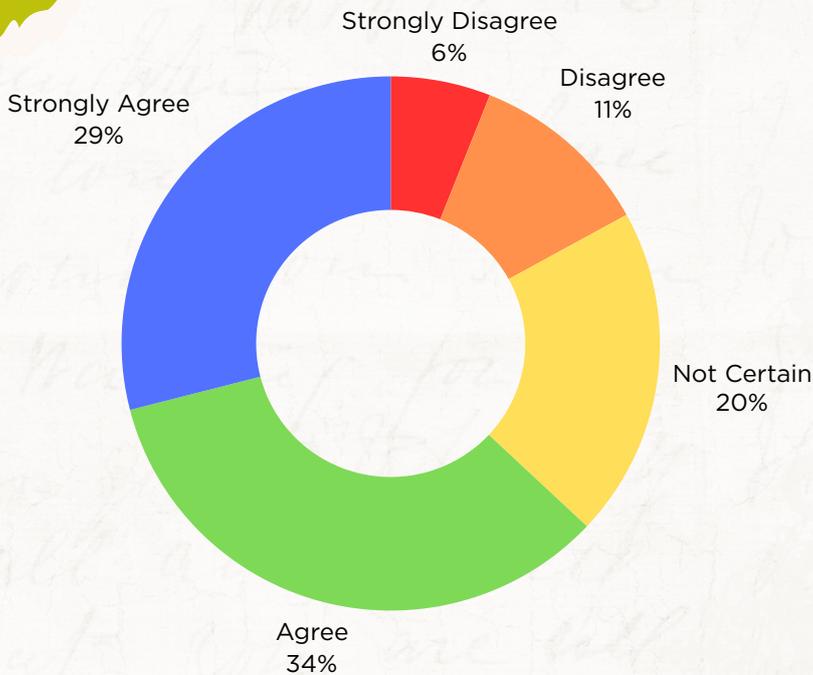
Christian Public Leaders and their Churches

I feel that my church supports me in my non-church ministry/leadership role

1 = 'Strongly Disagree', 5 = 'Strongly Agree'

30 out of 35 of our respondents said they attended church either in person or online at least monthly; the other 5 went 'less often'.

We asked them how far they felt their church supported them in their non-church ministry/leadership role. **Nearly two thirds answered 4 or 5, indicating support from their church.**



How local churches do (and don't) support Christian public leaders



A Spiritual Oasis

'Space to contemplate'
'Appreciation of stresses of role'
'Space and opportunity for reflection and peace'



Pastoral Care and Support

"Prayer for my work, strength and courage, and somewhere to share and pray for those I work with"
'Prayerful upholding, a sounding board'
'General wellbeing, and supportive older mentors'



Relationships and Connection

"Quality relationships and fellowship, so I have people who are alongside me and pray for me"
'My best support is in a wider context with two Christian friends - we use email to pray for each other weekly - this has been invaluable (a 5 star rating!)'



Culture, Teaching & Formation

'Those who feel called to serve God in the workplace (whatever form that takes) are frequently prayed for'
'Recognising that what I do is a calling'
'Frontline is a key part of church teaching'

For others, being part of a local church was in a more general sense their foundation for life. For one it was a place to share workplace expertise. For a few in charity/fairth sector roles, their local church was sometimes a source of practical support.

9 out of 35 respondents mentioned prayer in their answers - clearly this is important



Although formal teaching on faith and work was appreciated, prayer, pastoral support and a supportive congregational culture were more commonly mentioned.



Where Christian public leaders scored their church lower (1, 2 or 3 out of 5), the main reasons were...

- A largely retired congregation with little interest in the world of work
- A pastoral focus on family or local community issues, rather than work
- A narrow view of how faith is lived out at work, focused only on evangelism

Questions for Reflection...

For Christian public leaders:

- What's to be celebrated about your church's support for your public leadership role?
- If one of the support areas on p. 5 is missing for you, how might additional support be found?

For local and denominational church leaders:

- How could churches invest further in the kind of support that Christian public leaders are seeking - including coaching/mentoring, providing peer support groups, prayer, and more?

An Agenda for Supporting Christians in Public Leadership



Following the huge collective trauma experienced throughout 2020 and the subsequent and continuing challenges in the workplace, we recognise the Nehemiah call for Christians in leadership to contribute to the positive transformation of society and bring hope and restoration. This will involve giving attention to the building blocks above.

Our vision is to see the dispersed church respond to this call to lead in their workplaces:

- To be confident in their faith
- Thriving in their spiritual walk
- Equipped to face the challenge
- Supported and recognised by their local church
- To build a society that reflects 'fullness of life'

Our vision is also for Church and para-church organisations to be equipped to disciple and grow a generation of 'Nehemiahs' who bring hope and restoration to society through their workplace leadership.