We don't think religious worship should play any part in the formal business of the state.

We want to see parliamentary and local government meetings conducted in a manner equally welcoming to all attendees, whatever their personal beliefs.

Parliamentary prayers

Sittings in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords begin with Anglican prayers. MPs and peers stand for prayers facing the wall behind them – a practice thought to have developed due to the difficulty members would historically have faced of kneeling to pray while wearing a sword.

When the chamber is at its busiest, parliamentary prayers act as a bizarre and antiquated seat reservation system. Even MPs and peers who are slated to speak have no option but to attend prayers in order to reserve a seat.

Whilst they may be viewed by some as an important tradition, parliamentary prayers serve to assert the superiority of Christianity (and the Church of England in particular) at Westminster. **This 'tradition' is inimical to a modern, pluralistic, secular democracy.**

In the Scottish Parliament, Tuesday afternoon sessions begin with 'Time for Reflection', with faith and belief representatives invited to addresses members for up to four minutes. The Northern Ireland Assembly begins formal business with a period of two minutes of silent prayer or contemplation. The Welsh Assembly has adopted no such rituals.

Parliamentarians who wish to pray are free to do so. **But prayers should not form part of the official business of Parliament.**

Council prayers

Many local authorities in Britain also begin their meetings with prayer.

Local democracy should be equally welcoming to all sections of society, regardless of their religion or belief. Council meetings should be conducted without anyone feeling excluded, or compelled to either participate in prayers or absent themselves from part of the meeting.

Council prayers open the door to wholly unnecessary conflict and sectarian squabbles within local authorities. There is a history of local councillors being bullied and marginalised for challenging council prayers.

The absence of prayers from the formal business of meetings in no way impedes religious freedoms or denies anybody the right to pray. Conversely, organised worship in secular settings imposes worship on those who do not share the faith. A genuine commitment to freedom of religion or belief is incompatible with including acts of worship in the formal business of council meetings.

If local authorities wish to hold a moment of silent reflection at the beginning of a meeting, or if councillors wish to meet for prayers prior to the meeting, they are at liberty to do so.

- Council prayers – Frequently Asked Questions

  Read More

Take action!

1. Write to your MP

Please enter your postcode and urge your MP to support an alternative to parliamentary prayers, to make parliament more welcoming to people of all faiths and none.

Enter Postcode:

Find my MP

2. Share your story

Tell us why you support this campaign, and how you are personally affected by the issue. You can also let us know if you would like assistance with a particular issue - **for example, if you would like to challenge prayers at your own council.**

- Share your story

3. Join the National Secular Society

Become a member of the National Secular Society today! Together, we can separate religion and state for greater freedom and fairness.

- Join us!

Latest updates

Majority of public support removing Isle of Man bishop's vote

Posted: Fri, 15 Mar 2024 19:37

Most Manx residents back removing prayers and votes for clerics from parliament.

End prayers in House of Commons, NSS urges Speaker

Posted: Tue, 6 Feb 2024 13:57

Speaker should use his position to end symbolic Church of England privilege in Parliament, NSS says.

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