

Chris Murphy and Margaret Greenwood at the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast

On Tuesday 5 July I attended the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast at Westminster Hall with our local MP, Margaret Greenwood. The event was organised by Bible Society and the aim was to raise the profile of the Christian faith in the public arena.

I arrived at the parliamentary estate at just before 7am and while I waited to pass through security I chatted to a vicar from Chelsea who hadn't had quite as far to travel. Once through security I made my way to Westminster Hall, which is the oldest part of the estate, and found my way to my table. There were over 700 people in attendance, and it was strange looking around the room to see faces which seemed so familiar, but in reality I didn't know at all. I spotted Sarah Mullally, the current Bishop of London; John Sentamu, the last Archbishop of York; and various MPs including Tim Farron and Fiona Bruce. I was seated next to the High Commissioner of Rwanda, Mr Johnston Busingye (who is Anglican), and the Ambassador of Romania, Mrs Daniela-Laura Popescu (who is Romanian Orthodox). As we were getting ready to start breakfast the Prime Minister walked past and, since the High Commissioner was quite keen to introduce himself–Rwanda has been in the news a bit recently–I found myself shaking hands with Boris Johnson before he bustled off to find his table!



The breakfast itself was very average but it was great to see Christians from a range of denominations and across the spectrum of Christian practice meeting with MPs, from every political party, and praying for the persecuted church, for religious freedom, for those in government, and for our local communities. The keynote address was given Rev'd Les Isaac OBE who set up the Street Pastors Initiative in 2003. He spoke about how sometimes unbelievers may not like Christian beliefs but that when Christians live out their faith in

humility, and with gentleness and respect, we can have a profound effect on our community and gain a certain credibility amongst those who may be suspicious of Christianity.

After breakfast Margaret Greenwood very kindly attended a breakout seminar with me. The seminar was led by Justin Brierley who presents the show *Unbelievable?* on Premier Christian radio. His aim in presenting the show is to create a space where people of different beliefs and backgrounds can talk about their skepticism of the Christian faith and share their doubts, whilst also considering the claims of Jesus. He has a YouTube channel and past shows have been recorded. Many of them are very interesting and include guests such as Richard Dawkins and Jordan Peterson. Justin was helping us to see that although our society is, in many ways, becoming more polarized, politically and ideologically, we, as Christians who have confidence in Jesus, can listen carefully and empathetically to others and their point of view. In the context of taking others seriously we can then commend Christ with gentleness and respect. Margaret and I had a good time discussing some of the questions Justin raised and I learned more about what an MP does from Monday to Friday. After the seminar Margaret's parliamentary assistant, Graeme Dolphin, gave me a tour of the estate. I visited the House of Lords, an empty committee room, and had a quick look out over the River Thames from the parliamentary balcony.

I had a thoroughly enjoyable morning and was struck by Margaret's commitment to our constituency and her generosity towards me in taking time out of her busy schedule to attend the breakfast and listen to Justin Brierley's presentation. If you are interested in finding out more, the breakfast was recorded and can be viewed on YouTube, it was also recorded by Premier Christian radio and will be broadcast at 5:30pm on Sunday 10 July.

Revd Chris Murphy

