

Dear Church Leaders

I am writing to request an opportunity to meet with you. I would like to discuss the future of Bristol and the church community's role in it.

The church has had, and continues to have, a hugely significant role in Bristol. This significance is found both in the times when it has stepped forward to shape society in the face of the pressing issues of the moment, and in those times it has not.

Right now, Bristol finds itself facing huge challenges. We have a growing population with growing needs and inequality. We have shrinking local government finances and an international context that is unstable and uncertain. If we are unable to meet these challenges, the consequences will compound themselves over the years as individuals, families and communities, our economy and democracy come under increasing pressure.

We will only be able to take these challenges on, if the city works as a city to both stand against these pressures and develop solutions.

But Bristol remains a fractured city. We are divided by geography, race, ethnicity, class, poverty and politics. This provides the context for the challenge (not accusation) I would like to discuss with you: that the Bristol church imbibes and recreates these divisions. At best this means we don't help the city. At worst it means we contribute to harming it.

As a Christian, I believe faith groups in general, and churches in particular, are uniquely placed to stitch together a network of relationships through which we could begin to build a truly inclusive and reconciled city. That's reconciliation across difference and through tackling drivers of difference. But this big call must start with our work with the smaller matter of the church itself. I believe our ability to evidence our own church communities reconciled across historical divides, is core to the church having the authority to challenge and support political and other leaders to deliver the same.

Best Wishes

Marvin Rees

Mayor of Bristol