

Ahead of Rosh Hashanah, the Archbishop visited Chief Rabbi Mirvis to talk about tackling antisemitism and to wish the Jewish community Shana Tova.

As British Jews prepare to celebrate the festival of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby yesterday visited the home of Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis to affirm their warm relationship and pledge to stand together to combat antisemitism.

During the 90-minute meeting, the Archbishop reflected on his predecessor Archbishop William Temple establishing the Council of Christians and Jews in 1942, with Chief Rabbi Joseph H Hertz, as a means of combatting the evils of antisemitism.

This solidarity continues to be important in light of the increase in anti-Jewish attacks on cemeteries, synagogues, individuals and the “unspeakably appalling trolling” on social media, the Archbishop said, adding that the controversies over the definition of antisemitism underline the responsibility of all leaders in public life to ensure the security and wellbeing of Jewish people.

Archbishop Justin told the Chief Rabbi he was pleased that the Parliamentary Labour Party had adopted the IHRA without any caveats, but that this is the beginning of a journey and there is more work to be done. He offered his own unequivocal support for the IHRA definition of antisemitism, without any qualifications, and noted that he and his team at Lambeth Palace has been working on this understanding.

Archbishop Justin and the Chief Rabbi reflected on the challenges of discussing points of disagreement within and beyond our respective communities, such as political issues in Israel. The Chief Rabbi offered the Jewish idea of disagreeing well “for the sake of heaven” – a disagreement that must always have at the forefront the love and wellbeing of those that disagree with us. In the Middle East, Archbishop Justin affirmed the security and wellbeing of all communities.

Following this meeting, Archbishop Justin acknowledges that Rosh Hashanah reminds of the virtues of self-reflection and indeed repentance. It is grounded in a shared conviction for Jews and Christians: that humanity is made in the image of God, and that each person is of special worth, even sacred.

For Christians, the principle that Jesus taught us of ‘loving our neighbour as ourselves’ underpins all that would guide us through these challenges.

May this Rosh Hashanah be a time of blessing for the Jewish community, and a time of reflection for all of us, that we may strive for the good of all.

Shanah Tovah!