

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2006**

**INTRODUCTION**

Much of the committee's work this year involved monitoring issues that have arisen in society and from proposed Government legislation. We hope that we have brought a Christian influence to bear on these issues.

**RACIAL JUSTICE**

In last year's report we drew attention to the plight of Pastor Daly and his family who had fled Angola and were seeking asylum in Scotland. At the time of writing this report, there is still considerable concern regarding the Pastor and his family, as during a routine visit to a Glasgow Police Station they were, without warning, transferred to a centre in England pending a Home Office review. At the time of writing they have been returned to Glasgow but the review has once again been delayed. Pastor Daly and his family need to know that they will be allowed to stay in Glasgow for their own safety and continue their work amongst the asylum seekers.

We as a Denomination have worked very closely with Nelu Balaj who has been the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer over the last three years. This post is now coming under the auspices of ACTS and Nelu will continue as the Scottish officer for Racial Justice. We look forward to continuing to work with Nelu in his new post.

**SCOTTISH CHURCHES INDUSTRIAL MISSION**

We are grateful that the Rev. Gordon Currie represents us on the Board of this Mission. This Mission is a ministry by Ordained and Lay Chaplains who seek to bring a caring pastoral ministry to the workplace. This is very much an ecumenical organisation and the Mission covers the North of Scotland, Tayside, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION ON SOCIETY**

As Christians we are very supportive of the Government when it seeks to introduce legislation that is for the good of society as a whole and the Anti Social Behaviour Bill is one such piece of legislation. However, this Bill is in conflict with the Government's laxity which results in Ofcom, the Government appointed independent broadcasting regulator, allowing extremely anti-social behaviour to be screened during prime TV viewing.

We ask that if individuals feel strongly about this issue they should write to their MP and complain to Ofcom (Office of Communications) as it is only when a considerable number of complaints are received that those responsible for broadcasting will take notice. You can contact Ofcom through their website: [www.ofcom.org.uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk), by phone: 020 7981 3040 or write to: Ofcom, Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA. Comments and complaints may also be made direct to broadcasters and their contact details can be obtained through Ofcom.

## **EUTHANASIA**

We were deeply disturbed by Jeremy Purvis's consultation report entitled 'Dying with Dignity' which proposed the introduction of euthanasia as legally accepted practice in Scotland. Our response was to outline the Christian view of dealing with terminal illness in an article in the February/March issue of Stedfast. This issue of euthanasia will remain with us as it has been legalised in some countries in Europe and in the state of Oregon in the USA. We, as Christians, must be clear in our mind about this issue and be prepared to explain our position to others.

## **PROPOSED GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION**

Two pieces of Government legislation give us cause for concern:

First, the proposed legislation on '**Preventing Extremism Together - Places of Worship**' which essentially sought to identify places of worship where political extremists were advocating and planning terrorism. The legislation would give the Police special powers to investigate places of worship and even close them down. The special powers proposed would have given those who consider the Gospel radical and extreme the opportunity to complain and possibly muzzle the preaching of the Gospel. The opposition to this proposed legislation from all religious beliefs persuaded the Home Secretary to abandon this legislation.

The second piece of legislation that concerned us was the **Racial and Religious Hatred Bill**. This Bill suggests that it would be a criminal offence if words were perceived to be abusive or insulting. The House of Lords amendment altered this to state that the words must at least be threatening and this amendment has been retained in the bill which has now been passed. The Committee now support this legislation as we as Christians are against any form of racial or religious hatred but the bill no longer allows a claim of religious hatred over trivial matters.

Another piece of legislation which concerns us and has only come to our notice at the time of writing this report is the possibility that there are plans to increase the number of "super casinos" from one to at least four. We will closely monitor this situation and will make our opposition clear to this proposal by writing to Government Ministers.

## **DENOMINATIONAL APPEAL FOR THE MAXIE RICHARDS FOUNDATION**

It is now three years since we heard of the work of the Maxie Richards Foundation at the Perth Assembly in 2003. Since then this Committee has been intent in launching a Denominational Appeal that will inform the Denomination of the work of the Foundation and give us the opportunity to support it. To this end we are launching at this Assembly the Denominational Appeal for The Maxie Richards Foundation which will run for three years.

A special pack will be forwarded to each Congregation, containing information some of it on a DVD disk about the work of the Foundation. This will include information about the Foundations rehabilitation programs, accounts of how individuals succeeded in abandoning their drug abuse habits and future projects that the Foundation is planning. Throughout the duration of the appeal further information about the Foundation and its work will be circulated.

The Committee's intention in launching this appeal is that we as a Denomination become partners with Maxie Richards and the Foundation in their work of helping those whose lives have become impoverished by drug abuse.

The committee is grateful to the Rev. David Cartledge, Mrs Alice Cartledge and the General Secretary for preparing the material for this appeal.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS**

The following contributions were made in 2005:

Scottish Churches Community Trust	£ 1,000
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 1,200
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 1,000
Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer	£ 500
Society, Religion and Technology Project	£ 50
Mediawatch	£ 50
TOTAL	£ 3,800

### **CONCLUSION**

The Convener wishes to express his deep appreciation and thanks to each member of the Committee not only for their contribution to the work of the Committee but for making the meetings such an enjoyable event. In particular, the convener wishes to thank Dr. Iain Smith for deputising for him during his time in hospital. The Committee wish to commend the General Secretary Rev J O Fulton and Mrs Helena Jarvis for the immense contribution that they both make to the work of the Committee throughout the year.

In the name of the Committee

DONALD J. MACDONALD

Convener

IAIN S. SMITH

Vice Convener

JOHN O. FULTON

Secretary