

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2008**

INTRODUCTION

This session the Church and Society Committee have considered a wide range of issues but we have restricted this report to the following eight issues.

MAXIE RICHARDS FOUNDATION APPEAL - 2006 to 2009

The Maxie Richards Foundation Appeal was launched 2 years ago at the 2006 Assembly in Perth and the amount raised at the time of writing is just over £6,500. Maxie will be contributing to Stedfast describing some of the work with which the Foundation is currently involved. The appeal will run until the General Assembly of 2009.

We have noted that the politicians are moving towards adopting a drug-free rehabilitation policy in Scotland rather than a reliance on methadone. It now seems that Maxie Richard's approach to drug rehabilitation is beginning to be taken seriously and we hope she may be involved in any future discussions in this area.

We as a Committee would commend the Maxie Richards Foundation Appeal to congregations and ask that they continue to support the Denomination's Appeal for the Foundation.

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Since the last Assembly there has been a major change in Holyrood with a minority government led by the Scottish National Party. The Committee on behalf of the Church seeks to influence all the political parties in Holyrood on legislation which involve ethical issues and social justice. We as a Committee are always grateful for the wise counsel and practical advice we receive from the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer the Rev Dr Graham Blount. Dr Blount's report for 2007 is contained in Appendix 1.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION

The United Free Church is ably represented on the Scottish Churches Housing Action (SCHA) by the Rev Ronald Thomson and the Committee is extremely grateful for all the time and effort that he devotes to the work of the SCHA.

The SCHA has as its vision a Scotland free of homelessness and undertakes various programmes to help the homeless. One such programme is CHIP - Churches and Homelessness Initiative Programme which stimulates and supports voluntary action at the local level to help homeless people. A few years ago the SCHA undertook a 'By My Side Initiative' which resulted during 2007 in the establishment of a befriending project at the Glasgow Rent Deposit and Support Scheme. Housing Action also run a very practical scheme called the Starter Pack Project which supplies people with essential utensils when they move into their homes.

The Church Property and Housing Programme run by the SCHA encourages Churches to use redundant or underused property to develop affordable housing. One such project has now been completed in Leith where a new church has been built along with 22 houses at affordable rent.

GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION

This year the Committee has been extremely concerned with the Government's proposals to allow the creation of inter-species embryos. This proposal raises significant ethical issues for us as Christians and we have communicated our concern to both Houses of Parliament. A copy of the letter sent to MPs is contained in Appendix 2.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES RACIAL JUSTICE

It was with great joy that we learned on the 17th of January 2008 that Pastor Daly and his family have been allowed to stay in the UK. This is an answer to many prayers on behalf of this family who have been campaigning for the last seven years to be allowed to stay in this country.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Last year the Committee gave considerable time to the problem of man-made climate change and the action that might be taken with particular emphasis on how our production and use of energy should be shaped in the future (Appendix 1 to the report of the Committee to General Assembly 2007). This year we have continued to monitor the situation and to take opportunities as they are presented to make our views known.

In October a submission was made to the Westminster Government on its consultation on the 'Future of Nuclear Power'. Although this consultation took the form of a series of answers to specific questions the opportunity was taken to stress our view that decisions should be based on sound technical and economic evidence and should aim to avoid or minimise any harm to the poorer elements of society both in our own country and across the world.

During the year 'Climate Change' has assumed a heightened profile in the public mind and with this has come a realisation that the correct action both on a personal and governmental level is not easily determined. For example it has become evident that the use of bio-fuels by surface transport vehicles intended to reduce carbon emissions may at the same time have an adverse effect on food production and the environment leading to shortages and even famine.

We have endeavoured to advance understanding of the problem by a series of articles in *Stedfast* and by taking part in discussions with other parties and bodies where possible. The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office has been useful in this regard.

EUROPE and the CHURCHES

At the time of writing we know that the UK Government intend to ratify the European Union Reformed Treaty without a referendum. It is likely that the European Union Reformed Treaty will be applied by 2010 and the European Parliament may affect our lives in Scotland in a considerable way. The Churches in Europe have exerted a significant influence on legislation in the past through the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and in the future we may have to consider some form of association with the European Churches. We are grateful to the Church of Scotland who have been members of CEC from its inception and have made information regarding the EU together with the activities of CEC itself freely available to us through their representative at CEC, the Rev. Matthew Ross.

ACTS CHURCH and SOCIETY NETWORK

Our Denomination is very capably represented on the ACTS Church and Society Network by Dr. Iain Smith and the Committee is grateful to him for all that he undertakes in representing us on the Network. The ACTS Church and Society Network has considered a wide range of matters that are listed below and have been concerned about the issues that arise from these matters that the Christian Church needs to address.

- Asylum and Racial Justice
- Economical, Industrial and Rural Matters
- Education
- Ageing
- Scottish Politics
- International Affairs
- Environment
- Science and Technology
- Social Inclusion
- Criminal Justice
- Addictions
- Housing and Homelessness
- Domestic Abuse
- Health
- Human Rights

The Church and Society Network in their consideration of these matters evaluated the differing opinions that were expressed, often sought consultation from experts in the relevant field and from institutions who had researched these matters. Of prime importance to the Network were the social and moral implications for the Churches and particularly any action that the Churches could take as well as supporting the actions of like minded groups.

The observations, comments and the actions proposed by the Network were always conveyed to the relevant Committees of the Denominations represented on the ACTS Network. Further details can be found on the ACTS web site: www.acts-scotland.org

CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS

The following contributions were made in 2007.

Scottish Churches Community Trust	£ 1,000
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 1,400
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 1,100
Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer	£ 600
Society, Religion and Technology Project	£ 100
TOTAL	£ 4,200

CONCLUSION

The Convener wishes to express his gratitude to each member of the Committee for their hard work and their enthusiasm together with the skills and expertise that they bring to the Committee. The Committee is indebted for the enormous amount of work that the General Secretary, the Rev J O Fulton and Mrs Helena Jarvis undertake on behalf 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