

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2012**

INTRODUCTION

This session the Church and Society Committee have considered many matters and we have reported on the ones we consider to be of importance to the Church. The political matters that we have looked at are issues that we believe will affect Scottish Society and Christians in a significant way.

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

**The Scottish Government's Consultation on
The Registration of Civil Partnerships Same Sex Marriage.**

This proposed legislation is one of the most controversial that has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament since its inception. The controversy surrounding this legislation has been well aired in the media but we believe that to redefine marriage which has been with us since the dawn of humanity, in the way this legislation suggests would be a reckless and dangerous social experiment that may have untold repercussions on our society and family life. The response to the Government's Consultation is found in Appendix 1 and the Committee recognise the input by the Conveners and Vice Conveners of the Ministry and Administration & Finance Committees together with the Principal Clerks.

Representatives of the Committee were able to meet with the Civil Servant who is responsible for the Family Law Division within the Scottish Government. We raised the following points with him and he assured us that our reservations regarding the Bill would be communicated to the Minister responsible for the legislation.

- As a Denomination we have always opposed persecution or discrimination against any religious or secular group. Accordingly we accept the right of same sex couples to enter into partnerships recognised by the State.
- We questioned the need for this legislation as people can enter into a Civil Relationship which entitles them to the rights and responsibilities similar to those in marriage.
- We raised the implications of the use of the word "register" in the Consultation Document as Ministers in Scotland solemnise marriage, not register marriage. It was accepted that "conduct" would have been a better word to use in the Scottish setting.
- We communicated our view that this legislation would change marriage irretrievably and would also affect what would be taught about marriage in schools.
- The point was made that our Ministers would not solemnise such a ceremony either in religious or non religious premises.
- Concern was raised over the freedom of religious celebrants not to conduct same sex marriage or civil partnership ceremonies. The response was that the Government is taking advice to ensure that any future legislation would include protection for celebrants who would not conduct these ceremonies. It was also added that the Equality Act may have to be amended in Westminster to ensure this religious freedom.
- We indicated that our Ministers had the freedom to decide whether to solemnise a marriage or not.
- We were assured it was unlikely that the fact Ministers of our Denomination would not be conducting same sex marriage or civil partnership ceremonies would jeopardise the charitable status of the Denomination or of Congregations.

- As our position as a Denomination is not to conduct same sex marriage or civil partnership ceremonies we indicated that an individual Minister could not go against the practice agreed by the General Assembly.

At the time of writing this report the Government are still analysing the responses to their Consultation. It is likely that the Government will introduce this legislation to Parliament either this year or next. When this happens we would suggest that our members express their own views on this issue to their elected MSPs.

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

At the time of preparing this report Ms Margo MacDonald's new Bill is only in its first Consultation process. Our submission to the Consultation is found in Appendix 2. Should this legislation receive sufficient cross party support to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament the Churches in Scotland will have to respond as they did to Ms MacDonald's End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill in the previous Parliament.

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

We are heartened that the SNP Government has kept its word on this issue and is now prepared to make the Bill law in Scotland. We have been surprised not only at the lack of support from the other political parties but also at their inability to suggest a reasonable alternative. We hope that this is a first step in removing the scourge of the effects of excessive alcohol consumption in our Nation. Our submission to the Health and Sport Committee on this issue is found in Appendix 3.

Proposed Criminalisation of Purchase and Sale of Sex Bill

This Bill was introduced by Trish Godman in the last Parliament but was unsuccessful in completing its passage through the Scottish Parliament before the election. The Bill is being reintroduced into the present Parliament by Rhoda Grant a Labour MSP and she has been advised to reduce the scope of the original Bill so that it only addresses the issue of criminalisation of the purchase of Sex. This is so that the proposed Bill is simple, uncontroversial and will attract the support of SNP MSPs. When the Bill comes before Parliament for signatures of support from MSPs the Committee will circulate to the Congregations a letter which our members can send to their MSPs encouraging them to support this piece of legislation.

ACTS CHURCH and SOCIETY NETWORK

Among the many issues that the Action of Churches Together in Scotland Church and Society Network have considered this session has been the Scottish Government's publication: Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering Our Ambitions for Post – 16 Education. As education is of great importance to our young people and our society as a whole, we have considered this publication and our comments are found in Appendix 4.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION

This year is an important year for the Scottish Churches Housing Action (SCHA) as it is assessing whether the undertaking given by the Scottish Executive ten years ago of abolishing homelessness in Scotland has been achieved. The Chief Executive of SCHA examines the Scottish Government's achievements in the paper which can be found in Appendix 5.

DENOMINATIONAL APPEAL FOR THE SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION

Part of the Committee's intention in launching this Denominational Appeal at last year's General Assembly was not only to help the SCHA financially in these times of financial challenges but to raise awareness of the plight of the homeless and the important work that SCHA undertakes on behalf of the Churches in Scotland. This is very important work and we commend the SCHA for all that it does for the homeless in Scotland and its vision of a Scotland free of homelessness. We would ask the Church as a whole to continue to remember the homeless and the work of the SCHA in their prayers.

The Appeal comes to an end with the closing of this General Assembly. However the sum raised through the generous giving of our congregations to date is £1,683. Any future donations received at Church Office will continue to be passed on.

CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND

The Christian Aid organisation in Scotland is interested in various schemes locally in Scotland as well as overseas. Appendix 6 contains the report from Val Brown their Volunteer and Community Action Manager together with the details of their web site.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer; Chloe Clements has been on maternity leave following the birth of her daughter Isobel in December of last year. During Chloe's maternity leave her post has been very ably filled by David Bradwell from the Church of Scotland Church and Society Committee. Shortly before Chloe went on leave the SCPO moved from its office in the Royal Mile to Hanover Street which is in the same office as the SCHA. David's report on the work of the SCPO is found in Appendix 7.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES RACIAL JUSTICE GROUP

In December of last year we lost our representative on the Racial Justice Group when the Rev Peter de Villiers returned to South Africa. We are grateful for all the work that he carried out for us while he served on the Committee. The report of the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group is found in Appendix 8

CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS

The following contributions were made in 2011

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 2,000
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 1,750
Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer	£ 1,350
Work Place Chaplaincy in Scotland	£ 750
TOTAL	£ 5,850

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 to the Rev J O Fulton, General Secretary and Mrs Helena Jarvis for the enormous amount of work that they undertake on behalf of the Committee throughout the year.

In the name of the Committee

DONALD J. MACDONALD	Convener
ANDREW SCOTT	Vice-Convener
JOHN O. FULTON	Secretary

Appendix 1

News Release

Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on The Registration of Civil Partnerships Same Sex Marriage.

As the Church and Society Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland we would express our concern over the proposed legislation and its effects on Marriage in Scotland and our religious freedom.

We believe the proposed legislation would change marriage irretrievably. Marriage has been universally embraced by societies and cultures from the beginning of the human race as the union between a man and a woman which has proved to be beneficial both to the individuals in the union and to society as a whole. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights has affirmed that marriage is between a man and a woman. The Scottish Government's proposals would fundamentally change our understanding of marriage in our Scottish society as an institution with defined functions and social purposes to merely being an individual's right or entitlement. Once this precedent was established, marriage would then be subject to reappraisal, review and further change as minority groups seek "equality" for their own views and positions.

The United Free Church of Scotland has consistently opposed persecution or discrimination against any religious or secular group. We strongly disapprove and condemn unfair treatment or violence directed against anyone on account of their sexual orientation. Accordingly we accept the right of same sex couples to enter into partnerships recognised by the state. However the extension of that right to include marriage imposes changes on the rest of society. The Committee does not regard same sex marriage as an equality issue as the existing Civil Partnership legislation bestows on same sex couples all the existing rights extended to married couples.

The consultation document confuses the significant differences between solemnisation and registration practiced in Scotland with the system in England and Wales. Any suggestion that celebrants will be required to solemnise or offer the use of Church facilities for the solemnising of same sex marriages or risk falling foul of equality legislation

would be regarded as an attack on our religious liberty. At present no celebrant is required to solemnise any marriage but acts according to his or her conscience.

The Committee considers that this legislation which will redefine marriage is a reckless and dangerous social experiment that may have untold repercussions on our society and family life. We do not accept that the Government has the right to redefine such an important institution in society as marriage.

The Committee along with other mainstream Churches in Scotland call on the Scottish Government to depart from the proposals in its Consultation document on the Registration of Civil Partnership and Same Sex Marriage.

Appendix 2

Response to the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

Dear Ms MacDonald,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity of responding to your Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill.

In the foreword you state that: "There was a wide-ranging and also very specific consultation on the last Bill. Many of the moral and philosophical points that emerged during debate are unchanged. I do not intend to consult further on these general issues,..." We do not accept that there is no need to consult further on these issues as for us the ethical issues remain unchanged as does the basis of our objection to your new Bill. One of the fundamental tenets of the Christian Faith is that we are made in the image of God¹ making our lives dignified, uniquely precious and a gift from God. We are part of the human community, joined to each other and we understand that our actions affect other people; so when we act autonomously we must do so with great care and responsibility. The Christian and Hebrew Scriptures teach us the sanctity of life by commanding us on two occasions: "You shall not murder."^{2,3} The only exceptions that the Law allows to these commandments is fighting for our country, defending ourselves and others from life threatening attacks.

So we affirm the absolute sanctity of all human life and its creation by God as a gift which is in our care. As creatures made in the image and likeness of God we recognize our responsibility for ourselves and to enhance the lives of our fellow human beings, especially in circumstances of suffering, through the exercise of love which is ultimately of God.

We believe that all the resources now available through modern palliative care together with the love, care and support of family, friends and professional carers allows people to die with dignity if they are prepared to accept such care and is sufficient to negate the need to legalise assisted suicide in your Bill.

We are deeply concerned that your proposed legislation may set a dangerous precedent. Legalising assisted suicide indicates that it has become a routine procedure to end life which has the approval of both state and society. Although you state in the foreword of the consultation that "The proposed Bill would enable not compel." We are of the opinion that this statement is flawed as the Bill would allow loop holes in the Law which could result in abuse. Legalisation of assisted suicide could turn it into an ordinary and established part of medical and clinical practice. There are two observations that support our concerns. One comes from the figures that you quote from Oregon where assisted suicide is practised and Holland where euthanasia is practised. In the report from Oregon that you quote there is a graph which shows that in 1998 there were 16 deaths from assisted suicide but in 2011 there were 71 deaths from assisted suicide; a four fold increase over 14 years⁴. The Churches on the continent have observed from the Dutch figures that in 2006 there were 1900 deaths due to euthanasia whereas in 2010, four years later, the number of deaths due to euthanasia had increased to 3100, a rise of 63%⁵. These figures give us cause for great concern as they do not indicate that your proposed Bill of Assisted Suicide can be safely regulated by Government legislation.

Your proposed Bill is problematic for us. It is not only incompatible with our belief in humans being fashioned in the image of God therefore they should be treated with the utmost dignity and respect but there is also a common moral position held by many in our society, some who are not religious, that it is wrong to take an innocent life and that we have a duty to protect life particularly when it is vulnerable and frail. We, therefore, oppose the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill for the reasons given above.

References

1. Genesis chapter 1 verse 26
2. Exodus Chapter 20 verse 13
3. Deuteronomy chapter verse 17
4. <http://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Pages/ar-index.aspx>
5. http://www.atimetolive.eu/?page_id=165

Appendix 3

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

**United Free Church of Scotland
Church and Society Committee**

**Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation
on the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill**

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to the above consultation and this response is on behalf of the members of The United Free Church of Scotland.

We accept that Scotland has a serious problem with alcohol and the statistics show that the misuse of alcohol in the UK is highest in Scotland. The effect of excessive drinking is enormous, particularly on crime, health costs and the cost of policing with this being directly related to its easy availability and affordability compared to thirty years ago. We believe that the only way to tackle this enormous problem is by fiscal means and that the Scottish Government has a duty and a responsibility to take measures for the common good of our society.

As a Denomination we support the concept of minimum pricing and commend the Scottish Government for its determination to tackle this problem which is a terrible blight on our society. However, we are not convinced that on its own the proposals outlined in the present form of the Bill will be as effective as the Government hope. We would suggest the following additional measures:

- Improve the delivery of alcohol misuse education in schools
- Increase the provision of leisure and recreational choices particularly for young people in areas of increased social deprivation
- Restriction of advertising and promotional materials within licensed premises
- Tougher drink driving laws with a reduction in the drink drive limit from 80 to 40 mg per 100 ml of blood. There are some countries who do not allow driving after alcohol is consumed and this were applied in Scotland the drink drive limit could be set to 5mg per 100ml
- Until the Scottish Parliament has the power to raise taxes there should be a levy on the sale of alcohol in licensed premises to offset the effect of alcohol misuse on the provision of police and health services
- There is a need, once this Bill is on the statute book, for this Bill to be scrutinised and revisited on a regular basis as the initial fiscal measures may not have the desired effect

Appendix 4

Education

In the past Scottish Education was envied by many nations in the world and we hope that the plans the Scottish Government has for our Education system will ensure that it not only meets the needs of students as they seek employment in our economy but that it would develop all their human capacities.

We welcome the Scottish Government's pre-legislative paper: Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering Our Ambitions for Post-16 Education ¹. We commend the Scottish Government for their decision to maintain Scotland's long held tradition of providing free education by not refusing to introduce tuition Fees.

The Committee recognises that monetary savings have to be made to increase efficiency in Further Education Colleges (FEC) to reduce unnecessary duplication. We suggest that these savings are made cautiously to ensure that there are still a wide and varied number of courses available in FECs.

We commend the Scottish Government's plans to provide places for all 16-19 year olds and the possibility that this may also be extended to 20-24 year olds. It is hoped that these places will be available to all students irrespective of background and we are encouraged that at present 29% of College teaching is for young people from Scotland's most deprived areas.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge that the pressure today is to focus on the immediate demands of economy and for learners to fit into specific economical roles. However, is not the capacity to prepare learners with the breadth of understanding, the skills of analysis and the ability to respond to an unpredictable future, an equally important aim for Further and Higher education? We believe that education should also develop the individual and we would encourage the Scottish Government to embrace the vision for Scottish Education adopted by ACTS in their paper – A Christian Vision for Scottish Education ² : “The purpose of education is to develop the full potential of each person - for our own good and for the good of others. Education should develop all our human capacities - moral, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual. It should help us to make meaning out of life and to acquire a sense of purpose in and for life. It should enable us to choose our priorities for life, to develop values and to grow in virtue, and to develop loving relationships with God, with self and with other people.” This is the vision we have for our young people in Scotland

References

1. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/doc/357943/0120971.pdf>
2. <http://www.acts-scotland.org/downloads/publications/2009/ChristianVisionBooklet.pdf>

Appendix 5

HOMELESSNESS IN SCOTLAND

Homelessness: achieving the 2012 pledge

An analysis of the impact of the Scottish Government's target on homelessness in Scotland

1 Introduction

Scottish Churches Housing Action is marking the start of 2012 with a report on the national target on homelessness: *all unintentionally homeless households have a right to settled accommodation by the end of 2012.*

We have asked:

Have these targets made any difference to homeless people themselves?

Has the culture or the experience of homelessness changed in the last decade?

Where do we go from here?

2 Conclusions

The setting of the 2012 homelessness target by the then Scottish Executive in 2002 was a bold move which has raised the homelessness issue to higher priority and forced local authorities and other relevant organisations to work harder than would otherwise have been the case.

Scotland, having made significant progress, must not simply rest there.

In the view of Scottish Churches Housing Action, moving forward from the 2012 homelessness target will mean:

- 1 The provision of more affordable housing than envisaged by current plans**
- 2 Ensuring an adequate volume and variety of forms of support provision**
- 3 Handling the impact on homelessness of the current welfare benefits cuts**
- 4 Recognising the massive role played by churches in helping homeless people, and continuing to support it**
- 5 Focusing on national outcomes rather than targets.**

3 How does this relate to being a Christian in Scotland today?

This work was funded by Scottish Churches Housing Action and our member churches alone – no-one asked us to do it, and no-one has paid us to do it. We believe it to be important because of the Bible imperative towards inclusion. Homeless people are everyone's neighbour. The new Parliament in 1999 showed an enthusiasm for tackling this injustice, which we believe should not be lost.

4 Policy context

Key points: political control at Holyrood and Westminster; economic uncertainty; changes in approach to homelessness over 10 years; public attitudes to homeless people; consensus in 2002; Christie Commission; threats likely to increase homelessness in immediate future.

5 Practitioners' views

Interviews with representatives of eight local authorities, covering:

- The local homelessness strategy and the processes by which it was developed
- Progress towards the 2012 target
- The partners involved in the strategy
- The prospects beyond the 2012 target
- Assessment of costs and benefits.

Seven out of eight expect to meet the target. Anxieties expressed include: lack of sufficient affordable homes; impact of welfare reform; patchy provision of support; uncertainties over future strategy.

Interviews with five national or large church-based homelessness charities. Views canvassed on impact of 2012 target; funding mechanisms.

Comments gathered at seminar, 30 September 2011; accounts of local activity by churches to help homeless people.

6 Commentary

There is a genuine danger that meeting the target is seen as simply a paper exercise.

The move away from hostels and bed and breakfast in the provision of temporary housing. is under threat by current challenges.

There is a need for balance between a clear national direction on strategy, and local autonomy.

Housing options hubs are encouraging.

The biggest challenge to the whole sector is providing sufficient appropriate affordable housing.

There is common ground between Government, local authorities and other interested parties that tackling homelessness is about more than bricks and mortar. Furniture/starter packs particularly valued, also befriending/mentoring. But much support is based on uncertain funding.

An impact of the recession is the danger that progress made since 2002 is reversed.

Welfare Reform Bill/new Housing Benefit rules offer a major threat to improvements.

Ongoing funding is the biggest challenge facing all the voluntary projects we spoke to.

7 The future

Homelessness will go on beyond 2012. The underlying causes of homelessness are issues such as poverty and an inadequate supply of affordable housing. The churches can play a vital role in this area and are keen to partner with statutory and other voluntary organisations at local and national levels.

Appendix 6

Christian Aid Report

Christian Aid's partnership with the Churches is crucial to our work, and we value the commitment of our organisers, reps and supporters across the country. We continue to ensure that we get around the country engaging Churches and communities with various areas of our work. We have partnered with Eco-congregations and in conjunction with them we have delivered 5 road shows focused on climate change, and these will continue as the year progresses. Our Christian Aid Week road shows are currently underway and we have been focusing on Sierra Leone and our Tax campaign in these events which are being held in Clydebank, Dundee and Portobello. We have piloted our contextual Bible Studies in Glasgow and these have been very successful, so we are planning on running more in other locations over the course of the year.

As supporters plan for Christian Aid Week locally, we are supporting fundraising events around the Country including book sales and bridge walks. Our advocacy work remains strong with our Climate and Tax Justice campaigns remaining the focus, and we are working with supporters, businesses and the Scottish Government on both of these areas. We are engaging people with these issues through our Guardian Film screenings at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow, as well as organising local events around the country with MPs and MSPs. Our media officer, Jen Clark, is recently back from visiting Brazil with Ricky Ross and is working to ensure we get good media coverage about that trip and the work of our partners in Brazil. The Annual Report for the Scotland team can be found here <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/scotland/christian-aid-in-scotland/annual-review.aspx>

We would encourage Churches to use the Christian Aid Week resources, which can be found on our website www.christianaid.org.uk. If you would like a Christian Aid event to be held in your area – a road show, a contextual Bible study, a youth group session, or a campaign event, please do be in touch with us and we will be delighted to come out and facilitate something for you.

The Glasgow Office move is now completed and we are delighted that this move has saved us a considerable amount of money, while also providing us with larger premises. We would ask that you note our new address – Sycamore House, 290 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JR.

Val Brown
Volunteer and Community Action manager
Christian Aid Scotland
Email: VBrown@christian-aid.org

Appendix 7

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office Annual Report 2011-2012

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) works to build bridges between Churches and Parliament and Government. SCPO is associated with twelve Scottish denominations and more information about how the office works can be found on the website www.actsparl.org.

SCPO produces regular bulletins on Holyrood and Westminster topics of interest to the Churches as well as publishing occasional briefing papers to look at topics in more depth to provide monthly Parliamentary Updates and briefings on areas of particular concern to Churches. Briefings produced in 2011-12 were:

- Topics for the Scottish Election 2011
- Scottish Election 2011 Manifesto Briefing
- Scottish Government and Parliament Appointments Session 4
- Scottish Government Programme for Government and Legislative Programme 2011-12
- Scottish Government Consultation on Same Sex Marriage and Religious Ceremonies for Civil Partnerships
- Scotland's Independence Referendum: Proposals for a Process

The briefings, an annual report covering the calendar year 2011 and a sign up form for people interested in receiving regular information is available on the website www.actsparl.org or by emailing info@actsparl.org

Scottish Parliament Elections 2011

Prior to the 2011 Scottish Parliament Elections, SCPO and the ACTS Church and Society Network produced materials to assist congregations seeking to run local hustling election meetings. In recent years many churches have begun to host election meetings where all members of the community can be invited to a neutral place to debate political issues in an open manner.

SCPO also worked in partnership with the Evangelical Alliance, CARE for Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church and Christians Count to develop a shared one-stop Christian election resources website called "Churches Vote: Scottish Elections 2011". This resource was much used during the election campaign and was launched with an ecumenical statement on political responsibility.

A Referendum on Scottish Independence

Following the SNP's landslide victory in 2011 the Scottish Government have said that they will seek to hold an independence referendum in the autumn of 2014. Since the beginning of 2012 there has been considerable debate between the UK and Scottish Governments, and in both parliaments, about a range of issues relating to the process of the poll, though it is noticeable that the real campaign on substantive issues has not yet begun.

SCPO does not anticipate that any of its associated denominations would take a view on the question of independence. The role of the Churches should be to encourage an honest debate, help raise awareness about the issues and the importance of political

engagement and to help provide the vision for what the future of Scotland might be, whatever the constitutional outcome.

One way in which local churches might help is to hold community referendum meetings as they do for election hustings. If any church is interested in this idea they are invited to contact SCPO - email info@actsparl.org

Poverty

In the autumn of 2011 SCPO trialled a new joint project with the Priority Areas Committee of the Church of Scotland with the aim of getting issues raised with MSPs that are of greatest concern to those who live in poverty. Using the outcomes and recommendations of the Poverty Truth Commission, SCPO engaged with MSPs on the Budget and Spending Review on support for kinship carers and questioning whether a 5-year Council Tax freeze helps poorest people, at a time when local authorities are cutting services which the least well-off rely on more than the affluent.

Sectarianism

After last year's Holyrood elections the Scottish Government introduced a Bill designed to tackle sectarian attitudes and behaviours. During the passage of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2011 SCPO facilitated the engagement of Faith in Community Scotland and the Church of Scotland with the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee and the Parliamentary Officer, Chloe Clemmons, gave oral evidence to the Committee. During the passage of the Act MSPs from all parties and the Government recognised the valuable role that churches play in building community values and reducing tension, and that to eradicate sectarianism churches are part of the solution, not the problem.

Assisted Suicide

Proposals for changing the law with regard to assisted suicide have once again been raised in the Scottish Parliament. The proposals have come from independent MSP Margo MacDonald. As a Member's Bill rather than Government proposal it will need to receive cross party support; at the time of writing the process has only just begun and so it is too soon to know how far this may go. SCPO will monitor progress and keep all the denominations informed, as well as being in a position to offer advice on appropriate ways to engage with MSPs on this issue.

Monitoring and Relationships

A significant part of SCPO's time is spent monitoring Parliamentary activity on those key ethical issues of interest to the Churches and in meeting with MSPs, MPs, civil servants, national and local church representatives and with policy and campaign staff from other charities with similar aims. Further information is available on the website, in the annual report. SCPO staff are also willing to travel to speak to church groups and are always delighted to receive invitations to meet with church members interested in the interface of faith and politics.

David Bradwell
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer
8 March 2012

Appendix 8

Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group

Introduction

Recently the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group re-affirmed the Vision of the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group (adopted 2008):

'Racial Justice is an essential element within the mission of the church. The work of the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group seeks to:

- *challenge racially motivated prejudice in our churches and society*
- *build relationships between traditional churches and fellowships of ethnic minority Christians*
- *promote community harmony, and empower vulnerable and marginalised people in Scotland.'*

This vision is taken forward by the following actions.

Challenge racially motivated prejudice

1. Provide opportunities for people in our churches to meet others from a different ethnic community
2. Collect and share stories of real people who live in diverse communities across Scotland – not just big cities.

Build Relationships between traditional churches and ethnic minority Christians.

1. Continue to view Racial Justice Sunday as a key opportunity for building relationships
2. Offer resources for congregations sharing buildings
3. Offer speakers from traditional churches to speak at MECTIS congregations/events and MECTIS representatives to speak at traditional church congregations/events
4. Encourage local Churches Together Groups to meet ethnic minority congregations in their communities and explore ways of working together

Promote community harmony - empower vulnerable and marginalised people

1. Promote the concept of the positive value of diversity, multi-culturalism and inclusion in the society.
2. Continue to raise awareness of Scotland's traveller community
3. Continue to engage with the Scottish Government on the equality and diversity agenda, including raising awareness of different ethnicities within the Christian community
4. Raise Awareness of current Asylum issues