

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2013**

INTRODUCTION

The Church and Society Committee continue their watching brief particularly on the legislation that is going through the Parliament in Edinburgh. There are projects being initiated in Scotland which are the result of Christians being prepared to help their neighbour and details of these projects are contained within this report,

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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

This proposed legislation continues to be a significant part of Committee's work throughout the year. The response to the Government's Second 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.

The Second Consultation proposes the following protection to religious bodies and Celebrants who are opposed to same sex marriage:

- Religious and belief bodies who wish to solemnise same sex marriage or register civil partnerships will have to opt in.
- Religious and belief celebrants will only be able to solemnise same sex marriage or register civil partnerships if their body has decided to opt in
- If a religious or belief body decides to opt in, there will be no obligation on individual celebrants to solemnise same sex marriage or register civil partnerships.
- The draft Bill makes it clear that there is no obligation on religious and belief bodies and celebrants to opt in to solemnise same sex marriage and register civil partnerships.
- There are existing protections in Schedule 23 of the Equality Act 2010 which would apply to religious bodies and celebrants who do not wish to take part in same sex ceremonies.
- The Government entirely accepts that it is possible to be opposed same sex marriage without being homophobic.
- The Government further accepts that freedom of speech means that it should remain fully possible to argue against same sex marriage.

Representatives of the Committee were able to meet with the Civil Servant who is responsible for the Family Law Division within the Scottish Government before we submitted our response to the Second Consultation. We raised the following points with him and he assured us that he would take our concerns back to those who are directly responsible for this legislation and consult with them:

1. *We raised the question about the position of teachers, hospital chaplains and military chaplains who took up their positions when marriage was defined differently and how they would be affected by the proposed legislation.*

The response was that:

- There was no new legislation planned with regard to teachers and any problems that they had with regard to teaching about same sex marriage would have to be resolved in discussions with the education department that employed them.

- Hospital Chaplains could only conduct the forms of marriage agreed by the Church they belong to. So they would not be required to conduct same sex marriage if that was not acceptable to their Church.
 - For Military Chaplains it depends where they are based. In Scotland the Scottish legislation would apply. Elsewhere in the UK or abroad the UK Bill applies.
2. *We spoke of concerns that a Christian group might not be able to have a let at a school because of their particular religious views.*
 - The response was that Councils should be free to let premises to such groups and the refusal to do so would amount to religious discrimination.
 3. *Would most Churches and other faith and belief groups need to reapply to be a prescribed body for opposite sex marriages under the legislation?*
 - The response was that Churches and Faith groups will probably need to reapply.
 4. *The Civil Servant explained that Scotland has been hit hard by sham marriages as a result of organised trafficking and the UK Border Agency is concerned that more rigorous checks are in place. He indicated that there is a need for some form of objective test before Churches etc can be authorised.*
 - It was made clear that we would welcome the tests and would be happy to comply with any new requirements to prevent sham marriages including further training for celebrants.
 - We also welcome the fact that celebrants and their organisation cannot conduct ceremonies for profit or gain.
 5. *We raised the question about the suitability of the term 'belief' when it included humanists etc.*
 - He pointed out that this term was for groups which are not a religion but do have certain beliefs e.g. humanists.
 - The government is open to changes to the terms and would welcome suggestions - 'non religious belief' might be one possibility.
 6. *We indicated that historically the United Free Church has taken the view that every religious body should be treated in the same way under the law. Yet in the proposed legislation the Church of Scotland is treated differently with ministers automatically prescribed while every other Church and belief body will need to apply and meet certain tests before they can be prescribed.*
 - This reflects the previous 1977 Act but we do not understand why they should not be in the same position as everyone else. This is an area where logic does not prevail and is a remnant of the past. However the Scottish Government does not have the appetite to change this.
 7. *We asked about changes to the Equality Act.*
 - He replied that there is draft amendment in the consultation which is fairly simple and continues to safeguard the position of ministers etc.
 8. *We asked about the statement in the second Consultation: 'The Government will not ban people who are against same sex marriage from fostering children' We asked if there is any similar provision with regard to adoption?*

- The reference to fostering was raised in some legal advice by bodies opposed to same sex marriage. On the question of adoption, he was willing to take this away and consult on it.

At the end of the meeting it was indicated to us that when the legislation is being examined by the parliamentary committee, there will be an opportunity for written and oral submissions. This will occur before the legislation is introduced to the Scottish Parliament.

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

At the time of preparing this report Ms Margo MacDonald's new Bill has received sufficient support to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament. When this proposed legislation is introduced to the Scottish Parliament the Churches in Scotland will have the opportunity to respond as they did to the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill in the previous Parliament.

Proposed Criminalisation of Purchase and Sale of Sex Bill

This Bill has completed its initial consultation stage and you can read our responses in Appendices 2 and 3. Rhoda Grant now needs the support of 18 MSPs before the legislation can proceed to the committee stage in the Scottish Parliament.

ACTS CHURCH and SOCIETY NETWORK

Action of Churches Together in Scotland is about churches acting together in all matters except those in which difference of conviction compel them to act separately. The Church and Society Network of ACTS brings about participant learning from other members through the receiving of new reports, updating of ongoing programmes, and the exploring of differences. The Church and Society Committee continues to prioritize the issues from the meetings of the Network and focus on those issues that resources allow and importance dictates.

Christians Against Poverty

One of the issues that was of interest to us was Christians Against Poverty (CAP). This is a Christian Organisation which provides a money course that Churches can use to provide help with people's money problems and in particular their debt problems. The Committee circulated to all the Congregations in the denomination a booklet prepared by CAP entitled: budget. save. spend. This booklet gives details of CAP's money course.

We feel that this is a unique opportunity for our Church's to provide help in their communities in these times of financial hardship for many. Below are the relevant contact details:

CAP Money: Course, Jubilee Mill, North Street, Bradford. BD1 4EW

Tel: 01274 760567

Scottish Offices:

CAP Edinburgh Office: -

Holy Trinity Church, Westerhailes, Edinburgh, Tel: 0800 328 0006.

Morningside Baptist Church, Morningside Rd, EH10 4DB. Tel:0131 447 2329

The Glasgow Office is based in Findlay Church, 50 Clarendon Place, Glasgow, G20 7PZ Tel:0141 333 0055.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION

The Scottish Churches Housing Action's (SCHA) vision of making Scotland a nation

free of homelessness by 2012 has not been fully realised. The Scottish Government has fractionally increased their support to the SCHA for this year and they are grateful for our Denominational Appeal for the SCHA last year.

The SCHA have launched two projects. The Julius project which seeks to befriend homeless people. The other project is Whitebeam Homes which is being piloted in Arran. The details of these projects are found in Alastair Cameron's report in Appendix 4.

CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND

The Christian Aid has campaigned for change in many areas but two are of great interest to us. The first is Tax evasion by the big multinational companies. Last year Christian Aid Scotland took a red double decker bus around Scotland to campaign for tax justice. The other area is that they have launched the IF campaign which is the biggest ever campaign to end hunger in our world. More details of the ongoing work of Christian Aid are found in Appendix 5.

THE BANKING CRISIS AND THE CHURCH

The banking crisis of 2008 is often held responsible for our present economic woes. The paper in Appendix 6 examines this in detail but also suggests that all of us have responsibilities for the banking crisis.

WHY DOES THERE SEEM TO BE A CONFLICT BETWEEN SCIENCE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?

In our Western society the new atheist movement often presents science and faith as being in conflict. The paper in Appendix 7 shows that the opposite is in fact the case i.e. there is no conflict between faith, modern astronomy and cosmology regarding the beginning of the universe.

WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND

Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland (WPCS) was set up in November 2010 with the Rev Iain McFadzean as its National Director. Nearly two years later the WPCS employs 11 chaplains and 70 volunteer chaplains covering 700 workplaces in Scotland.

This year sees the implementation of various training programmes including Confidentiality, Conflict Management, Building Resilience and dealing with Trauma. Some of these programmes will be outsourced and bring an income to WPCS. A new Edinburgh West Chaplain, Rev Grant McLaughlin was appointed in February 2013. His duties will include being the Chaplain to the Gyle Shopping Centre, Gyle Business Centre and Edinburgh Airport. This appointment is in partnership with Corstorphine Old Parish Church. It is hoped to build a team of volunteers on the west side of Edinburgh to assist the Chaplain. The chaplains in the centre and east of Edinburgh cover areas from the city centre shopping and business to the docks in Leith. Every cruise liner arriving in Leith gets a visit from a volunteer chaplain.

At the moment the post of Regional Organiser for the West of Scotland is vacant. This report of the ongoing work of the WPCS is very encouraging and God is blessing this work.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES RACIAL JUSTICE GROUP

The Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group (SCRJG) has been undertaking a review of their work, brought about partly because of a reduction in the funding available for their work. As a result the hours worked by Francis Alao, the Racial Justice Officer, have been reduced to 20 hours per week at present and from 20th September he will no longer be employed by the group. The group stress that this has been brought about due to funding issues and does not reflect any wish on the part of the churches to withdraw from this valuable work.

The Group have agreed that they should continue to work with MECTIS (Minority Ethnic Christians Together in Scotland) on racial justice matters and seek to promote the involvement of MECTIS members in other aspects of the work of ACTS. SCRJG will be having further discussions with ACTS on the best way of continuing work on racial justice. One possibility is to employ a researcher for short periods to carry out specific work which will promote a positive response by churches and other groups to immigrant communities in Scotland.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) provides our Committee with essential information regarding what is happening in the world of politics and how it will affect the Church. We are always grateful for the help that the SCPO provides to all the Churches in Scotland. The report on the work of the SCPO is found in Appendix 8.

CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS

The following contributions were made in 2012

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 2,000-00
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 1,750-00
Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer	£ 1,600-00
Work Place Chaplaincy in Scotland	£ 900-00
TOTAL	£ 6,250-00

CONCLUSION

The Convener wishes to express his gratitude to each member of the Committee for their commitment to the work of the Committee. The Committee wishes to thank 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

IAIN S SMITH

Vice-Convener

JOHN O FULTON

Secretary