

REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2014

INTRODUCTION

Our society both in Scotland and in the UK is not only becoming more secular but also more materialistic. As a result the Church and Society Committee has this year concentrated on the issues arising from the legislation that has come before the Scottish Parliament and how the poor in our society are further impoverished by society's lack of care.

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill

This Bill was debated and accepted on the 4th of February 2014 with 105 of the MSPs voting in favour of it and 18 MSPs voting against. In our previous communications with the Scottish Government, we had highlighted that in our opinion this Bill does not provide sufficient protection for the religious liberty and rights of conscience for those who are employed by Government and Local Authorities but do not accept the principles inherent in this Bill. The amendments in Appendix 1 were proposed at Stage 2 of the Equal Opportunities Committee when it met to consider the Bill. Alex Neil, the Scottish Minister responsible for the Bill, maintained that the protections that had been incorporated in the Bill were sufficient to provide adequate protection for Christians. This resulted in all the amendments in Appendix 1 being rejected by the Committee.

We have been thankful to the MSPs who sought to introduce these amendments which would provide additional protection in law for people who believe that marriage is only between a man and a woman. We have written to the three MSPs who introduced these amendments and expressed our gratitude for their commitment to marriage as we understand it.

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

This Bill has now been introduced to the Scottish Parliament and is at Stage One which involves consideration by the Health and Sport Committee who has asked for written evidence from interested parties. After consideration this Committee will present a report to the Parliament which makes recommendations on the general principles of the Bill. We, as a Church, remain completely opposed to this Bill and our response to the request for written evidence is found in Appendix 2.

We have also prepared a response to this Bill which we hope to send to the MSPs before they vote on the Bill at the end of Stage One. This response is found in Appendix 3.

ACTS

Action of Churches Together in Scotland is undergoing a reorganisation. This reorganisation is ongoing at present but we look forward to working with them in the future.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION

The Scottish Churches Housing Action [SCHA] continues to campaign for more affordable houses as the easiest route for people to escape from homelessness. The other projects that they have launched over the years continue to provide support for many who have found accommodation and need help in setting up home. The report from Alastair Cameron, their Chief Executive is found in Appendix 4.

CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND

Christian Aid in Scotland has decided to follow the UK Board and streamline its relations with the Churches in Scotland by no longer having a representative from each Church at its meetings. However, there will be the opportunity at least once a year for the churches to meet with their management team. Christian Aid continue their work abroad and in identifying multi nationals who evade paying their taxes in some of the poorer countries in the world with the effect that the governments of these countries have reduced resources to help their own people.

Christian Aid has indicated that they are prepared to work with Congregations and bring their resources to help and support projects that Congregations may be interested in undertaking. The Christian Aid report is found in Appendix 5.

WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND

The Work Place Chaplaincy has now become independent from the Church of Scotland with regard to its funding. Details of the recent work of the Chaplaincy are described by the Rev Iain McFadzean and are found in Appendix 6.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES RACIAL JUSTICE GROUP

At present we are not represented on the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group but we continue to receive updates from them. The group is researching immigration issues affecting ministers from Africa and Asia who are invited to come to this country to serve as ministers.

THE BURDEN OF THE POOR

On the 4th of March this year, the Glasgow Herald ran an article entitled: 'CHARITIES CLAIM SCOTLAND FACES A "HUMANITARIAN CRISES" CAUSED BY POVERTY'. The charities claimed more than 870,000 people in Scotland were living in poverty, with a fifth of children in Scotland living below the breadline and 23,000 people having turned to food banks in the past 6 months. Martin Sime, Chief Executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, said "With nearly a 1,000,000 people in Scotland living in poverty, we have a humanitarian crisis on our hands and we need everyone's help to tackle it."

The paper in Appendix 7 entitled THE BURDEN OF THE POOR reminds us of our Christian duty to do all that we can to help those who are in need.

FOOD BANKS

The BBC reported on the 25th February 2014 that the demand for food banks in Scotland had almost tripled in the last two years. They also reported that one day the Glasgow City Mission foodbank had to close as they had run out of food.

Often people find themselves in the dreadful situation of having to choose between heating their homes and feeding their families. In a country that is supposed to have a good welfare system, this is a scandalous situation and again we as Christians have a duty to help the hungry. Appendix 8 comments on the foodbank scheme and suggests reasons for the recent increased demand.

A FAIRER BANKING SYSTEM

At the 2013 Assembly, the Committee gave an undertaking that we would further comment on the banking system in the UK and suggest how it could become fairer to all in our society. In preparing this paper we became aware of the service that the Credit Unions

offer. Details regarding this alternative form of banking can be found on the internet or at your local Citizens Advice Bureau. The paper can be found in Appendix 9.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) continues to provide the Committee with details of the legislation going through both Houses of Parliament. The SCPO also provides resources in dealing with the legislation that particularly affects the Churches. We are always grateful for all the help that the SCPO provides to us. The report on the work of the SCPO is found in Appendix 10.

CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS

The following contributions were made in 2013

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 2,250-00
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 2,000-00
Work Place Chaplaincy in Scotland	£ 1,000-00
TOTAL	£ 5,250-00

CONCLUSION

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
IAIN S. SMITH
JOHN O. FULTON

Convener
Vice-Convener
Secretary

Appendix 1

Proposed Amendments to the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill

AMENDMENT 1 (ADOPTION & FOSTERING)

Proposed by Richard Lyle

If the law is changed there is great concern that, increasingly, couples will be prevented from fostering or adopting because of their views on traditional marriage.

AMENDMENT 2 (PROTECTION OF CHARITABLE STATUS)

Proposed by Richard Lyle

The aim of the amendment is to ensure that an organisation's charitable status cannot be removed because it supports traditional marriage. The view that marriage can only be between a man and a woman should not come into play when determining the eligibility of an organisation's charitable status.

AMENDMENT 3 (PUBLIC AUTHORITY FUNCTIONS)

Proposed by Siobhan McMahon

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places public authorities under a duty to have regard to the need to "eliminate discrimination", "advance equality of opportunity" and "foster good relations", including the need to "tackle prejudice". There are concerns that this sweeping Duty could enable public authorities to undermine the effectiveness of protections provided in the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill, disadvantaging those with traditional beliefs about marriage.

AMENDMENT 25 (NO COMPULSION TO BE INVOLVED IN SAME-SEX MARRIAGE)

Proposed by John Mason

The purpose of Amendment 25 is to ensure that those groups and individuals who do not wish to participate in same-sex marriages will have their religious liberty and rights of conscience protected.

AMENDMENT 26 (BELIEF IN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE WORTHY OF RESPECT)

Proposed by John Mason

The Government has repeatedly insisted that this Bill will not penalise those who sincerely hold the belief that marriage is only between a man and a woman. These assurances have been given despite the evidence that this has already been happening before marriage has been redefined.

AMENDMENT 27 (REVIEW OF THE BILL)

Proposed by John Mason

The consequences of the redefinition of marriage are not fully known. Amendment 27 requires a review of the legislation after five years. Many civil liberty concerns have been raised with respect to the Bill, only to be largely dismissed by supporters of same-sex marriage. The review will look into the legislation's impact on civil liberty, which will enable proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the Government's protections. The review will not in any way damage the passage of the Bill. It will, however, enable MSPs to more accurately assess to what extent the Government's assurances have been vindicated or contradicted by events.

AMENDMENT 30 (COMMENCEMENT OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE LINKED TO AMENDMENTS TO THE EQUALITY ACT 2010)

Proposed by John Mason

Amendment 30 provides that the commencement of the same-sex marriage elements of the Bill would be conditional upon the UK Equality Act 2010 being amended. This is necessary because the roots of the key issues which may cause difficulty for people who disagree with same-sex marriage if the law is changed are not contained within the Bill itself, but in the provisions of the Equality Act.

Appendix 2

Stage 1 consideration of the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

On 13 March 2014 the Health and Sport Committee launched a call for written evidence in order to inform its Stage 1 consideration of the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill.

1. Do you agree with the general purpose of the Bill to make it permissible, in the circumstances provided for, to assist another to commit suicide?

We are completely opposed to this Bill as we believe it is fatally flawed in that it robs the vulnerable and the frail in our society of the protection that they need at the end of their life.

2. Do you have any views on how the provisions in this Bill compare with those from the previous End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill?

We are appalled that both Bills involve Doctors to prescribe drugs which will kill another human being. This is in direct contradiction to the Hippocratic Oath that they have taken. Two of the statements in the Oath that are relevant to this Bill are;

- *“I will use treatments for the benefit of the ill in accordance with my ability and my judgement, but from what is to their harm and injustice I will keep them”*
- *“And I will not give a drug that is deadly to anyone if asked, nor will I suggest the way to such a counsel”*

3. The Bill precludes any criminal and civil liability for those providing assistance, providing the processes and requirements set out in the Bill have been adhered to. Do you wish to make any comment on this?

We respectfully suggest that whatever the processes and requirements set out in the Bill providing assistance to another to commit suicide should remain a criminal offence.

4. The Bill outlines a three stage declaration and request process that would be required to be followed by an individual seeking assisted suicide. Do you have any comment on the process being proposed?

Whatever processes are being proposed they cannot be safely regulated by Government legislation. Where assisted suicide is practised i.e. Oregon in the USA and Holland, the number of assisted suicides continues to rise each year whereas we would have expected that the numbers would have plateaued.

5. Do you have any comment on the provisions requiring that the person seeking assisted suicide must have a terminal or life-shortening illness, or a progressive condition which is either terminal or life-shortening?

Whatever condition the person seeking assisted suicide suffers from, it is likely that modern palliative care can ensure a significant reduction in pain to allow a dignified end to life.

6. Are you satisfied with the eligibility requirements as regards age, capacity, and connection with Scotland as set out in the Bill?

This Bill has removed the requirement for a psychiatric evaluation which may result in people with depression seeking to end their life unnecessarily. In our opinion this is a significant flaw in this Bill.

7. Do you have any comment on the roles of medical practitioners and pharmacists as provided for in the Bill?

Pharmacists will have to stock and dispense chemicals that are extremely poisonous to those seeking assisted suicide. This is contrary to their normal practice in that what they usually dispense are drugs which treat a variety of conditions to relieve suffering.

The attempted involvement of General Practitioners in this process is morally unacceptable as they have taken an oath to heal rather than kill people. Their College in a survey of its members this year made a clear statement that the majority of their members remained completely opposed to any change in the law on assisted suicide.

8. Do you have any comment on the means by which a person would be permitted to end his/her life under the Bill?

It is always sad whenever a human being is prepared to end their life by whatever means. The means is really irrelevant as they will kill themselves. In Scotland the Government has been campaigning to reduce suicides yet this legislation may have the opposite effect of increasing the rate of suicides. This would be an anomalous situation if the Scottish Government supports this Bill.

9. Do you have any comment on the role of licensed facilitators as provided for in the Bill?
This is a terrible burden to place on anyone, to help another human being end their life.

10. Do you have any comment on the role of the police as provided for in the Bill?
The role of the police in a civilised society is to protect people and prevent killing but this legislation asks them to condone the ending of life.

11. Do you have any comment to make about the Bill not already covered in your answers to the questions above.

We believe that this legislation sets a dangerous precedent in that if legalised would become a routine procedure to end life which has both state and society's approval. This is a step too far in that it could easily become an established part of medical and clinical practice. We as a Church remain completely opposed to this legislation. The previous Bill in 2010 was rejected by the Scottish Parliament as being inherently unsafe. Nothing has changed with respect to the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill as it is also unsafe. We hope that the Scottish Parliamentarians will reject this proposed legislation and if it is rejected we would suggest that a moratorium of at least a decade be placed on any such legislation being introduced to the Scottish Parliament in the future.

Appendix 3

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

Dear (MSP)

We take this opportunity on behalf of the members of the United Free Church of Scotland to express our views on the fundamental issue and principles related to the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill.

We believe that this Bill is not significantly different from the previous Bill in 2010, nor do we accept Ms MacDonald's premise that the ethical issues involved do not need to be discussed as this was done when the previous Bill was presented to the Scottish Parliament. As we are totally and completely opposed to this legislation we do not intend to focus on the details of the Bill but rather once more examine the fundamental ethical issues that in a just and civilised society must take precedence over autonomy. This is particularly important for the elderly and the disabled who become dependent on others to look after them that they should be able to do so without losing their dignity.

In the present Bill the requirement for a psychiatric assessment has been removed. How can the General Practitioner [GP] who is involved in assessing patients who have "...an illness which in his or her case is terminal or life-shortening or a condition which, in his or her case, is progressive and either terminal or life-shortening." can be sure that the patient is not depressed as well? If the patient's depression is treated they may not wish to continue with the assisted suicide. It would be anomalous for the Scottish Government to support the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill after its recent campaign to reduce suicides in Scotland.

The proposed Bill relies heavily on the involvement of the patient's GP and they are the group who will be most affected by this Bill. A GPs involvement in assisted suicide will not only be contrary to the Hippocratic Oath that Doctors have sworn to uphold but also to the position of their College, who, on the 21st February 2014 announced its "continued opposition to change the law on assisted dying" [1]. Two of the reasons for this response were that it would be "detrimental to the doctor-patient relationship" and that it would "put the most vulnerable groups in society at risk"

Many have made the false assumption that patients who suffer from locked-in syndrome [LIS], usually due to motor neurone disease, who can only communicate by eye movements, would have reached a state where life would not be worth living any more. However, the largest study of LIS patients [2] showed that 72% of these patients [47 out of 65 patients] were happy despite their condition. Only 28% [18 out of 65 patients] described themselves as unhappy but only 7% [5 out of 65 patients] expressed a wish for euthanasia. The results from this study calls into question the very basis of this Bill.

The proposed Assisted Suicide legislation is unnecessary as in Scotland we have one of the best palliative care provision in the world. Physical suffering at the end of life, which many dread, can now in the majority of cases be relieved by appropriate care. We are of the opinion that it would be more beneficial to the Scottish population that the best palliative care that exists is available to everyone in Scotland wherever they live rather than the introduction of this legislation.

We believe that the Law in Scotland as it stands on this matter is safe and assures the most vulnerable in our society of adequate protection. The previous Bill in 2010 was rejected by our Parliamentarians as being inherently unsafe and we hope that when they come to debate the Assisted Suicide Bill in the cold light of day that they will again reject this Bill on the grounds of public safety as this criterion remains unchanged.

References

[1] Royal College of General Practitioners announces continued opposition to change in law on assisted dying. Published on 21 February 2014.

[2] A survey on self-assessed well being in a cohort of chronic locked-in syndrome patients: happy majority, miserable minority. Bruno MA et al. British Medical Journal – Open (2011)

Appendix 4

Homelessness in Scotland

In the year of the 2012 'homelessness target', the Scottish Government reported a continuing drop in homelessness applications. 39,827 households were recorded as applying to their local authority for help with homelessness in 2012-13. This was a drop of 13% on the previous year, representing a return to the levels experienced during the mid-1990s.

The homelessness target was set in 2002: within 10 years, almost all applicants were to be treated as in priority need – previously, people who were not considered vulnerable were given lower priority. The Scottish Government announced in early 2013 that the target had been met.

The drop in applications is put down to a new approach by local authorities, which means a 'housing options' interview is carried out with each applicant, reviewing possible alternatives. This means that making a homelessness application is now more an action of last resort if other options cannot be found, or prove unsuccessful.

The central strategy on homelessness relies on considerable effort by charities and other voluntary organisations, among whom the churches feature prominently. Organisations such as Glasgow Lodging House Mission, CrossReach, Bethany Christian Trust and other church-based groups help prevent homelessness as well as helping those who fall through the safety net. The starter packs movement, led by Scottish Churches Housing Action, has projects in most major towns and cities, often serving the rural areas around them.

The rise of foodbanks has been a notable feature of 2013: again the churches are prominent in initiating and supporting these, in some cases in conjunction with starter pack initiatives. They cater for a much wider group than simply homeless people, and have become an important part of the network of services.

The drop in the headline rate of homelessness is encouraging, but there are fears for particular groups. People with multiple problems compounding their homelessness – such as drug or alcohol abuse, a history of being abused, or mental illness – are finding it increasingly difficult. People with complex problems are less well served by the housing options approach. There are reports that rough sleeping among such groups may be increasing.

Underlying the overall picture are two key features:

- ❖ The continuing shortage in supply of affordable homes for rent, which for most represent the route out of homelessness
- ❖ The negative impacts of the Westminster coalition's policies on social security, particularly the 'bedroom tax' and sanctions on work-seekers.

Scottish Churches Housing Action, which brings together the main Christian bodies including the Church of Scotland, will celebrate its 20th anniversary in the coming year. It has the support of the Guild through the Julius Project, which develops befriending schemes for homeless people. Its new charity, Whitebeam Homes, is addressing the shortage of affordable rented housing; and it is establishing supported lodgings, to be piloted in Scottish Borders, to help young people at risk of homelessness.

Appendix 5

CHRISTIAN AID REPORT

The churches are at the very heart of Christian Aid's partnership working, and we recognize that they underpin everything that we do. Over the last year we have engaged with churches through a variety of events across the length and breadth of the country and the last year has been no exception to this.

Working with Churches and partner organizations, Christian Aid played a key role in the 'Enough Food for Everyone IF' campaign that encouraged people to look at issues around global hunger and to campaign on some of the structural issues that perpetuate hunger in an age of plenty, namely: tax dodging by some unscrupulous Multi-nationals that deny much needed revenue to governments; climate change which makes it harder and harder for people to make a living from traditional farming methods; and lack of land rights that prevents the poorest having rights to farm land. The campaign was very successful in that we saw hunger on the G8 agenda and concrete action taken by the UK government on our tax justice asks. This was made possible by people in Churches across the country writing and lobbying their MPs and MSPs, as well as travelling to Belfast with us for the G8 in June.

As a follow on from this campaign, we partnered with the Scottish Episcopal Church to produce a Lent resource called "And everyone ate and had enough – recipes for change". This resource is available to all Churches for a donation and is full of good, affordable recipes, prayers, Bible studies and partner stories which explore the issues of hunger. Please be in touch with one of the Christian Aid offices if you would like a copy –it is not dated so it can be used in any year, like the advent resource we did last year, "Come all you faithful – an advent journey with the Palestinian people".

We continue to arrange events around the country to let supporters find out more about aspects of our work and we have been working with the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church to lead events on the 24th of each month on the work of our partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories and to pray for peace for all people who call the Holy Land home. Our Christian Aid Week theme this year is on peace and the work that our partner organizations are doing around the world to enable communities to live more safely.

We have been working with the Church of Scotland and Jubilee Scotland to help communities explore the relationship between debt and tax and the effect it has had, and continues to have on Churches and partners in Africa. Our work alongside Eco-congregations continues to enable Churches to engage with climate change both locally and globally. And as ever we respond to local Church needs to run events that people are interested in locally to them.

Our fundraising work has once again witnessed the dedication of Christian Aid supporters as they raised money through a variety of local and national events, such as Burn's suppers, Bridge walks, book sales, quizzes and Big Christmas Sings to name but a few. This year we produced a poetry book which includes poems from around the world entitled, "more poetry, less poverty" and groups have held poetry evenings to use this and raise funds for us. We greatly appreciate the efforts of supporters and Churches in raising money for us, both during Christian Aid Week, and throughout the year.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the United Free Church for all the support they give to Christian Aid year round, and to let you know that we are here to resource the churches. Please do be in touch with us if there is anything we can do to support the work that you are doing here in Scotland.

Appendix 6

WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND

WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND (WPCS) is the cross-denominational activity of churches engaging within this country's working life.

Our aim is to complement the work of our churches nationally, enhancing businesses and enriching lives at a time when so many people have little or no awareness of the love of God.

We are an incorporated charity drawing together churches, business and statutory authorities in Scotland to enhance individual and societal well-being. Today, on our board of trustees, we have representatives from the CBI, the Scottish Retail Consortium, the STUC and a number of churches.

The past year has been one of fast growth and exciting developments for WPCS. We now have chaplains working in more than 1300 business outlets across Scotland, including the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Royal Mail in The Borders, in local authority offices, supermarkets, shopping malls, transport companies, national chains and independents.

And we are heartened by the positive reception we have been receiving from Scottish Christian churches, of all denominations. In some cities – where we support marginalised groups – we also work with the wider faith community on a basis of mutual respect and understanding.

WPCS Chief Executive Rev Iain McFadzean and his senior management team of three Regional Organisers for the West, Centre and East of Scotland, are constantly aware of the need for the charity to be sustainable. Doors are opening and opportunities are presented to us which affirm our vision and reinforce our commitment to showing, through our attitude and actions, God's love for our fellow human beings. However every expansion into new areas is prayerfully managed and resourced by careful preparation and research.

Said Rev McFadzean: "The challenge is to continue to grow and develop WPCS not just for today's challenges, but in order to be able to respond to tomorrow's and that means planning now for training, structures and developments, sometimes many years ahead, but at the same time, ensuring we are as good as we can be – right now."

Over the past year, there have been several high points, collectively and individually, for our chaplains. There have been other times when chaplains have been called to share in the very difficult experiences of those they serve. Our work with the SFRS and those involved in the devastating Clutha helicopter crash in Glasgow demonstrated not only to others, but to ourselves, the strength of commitment, faith and solidarity amongst the volunteers and staff of WPCS. In the aftermath, chaplains continue to work with those affected and show the love of Christ to the people who are hurting.

Echoing the widespread praise offered to all involved in the Clutha tragedy and further reinforcing WPCS' support for its staff and volunteers, Rev McFadzean's Christmas message focussed on how much he valued every member of the team. "WPCS will always try to be there in the times of high profile crisis, but what we can never underestimate is the work you all do in being present in the constant, low-profile, challenges and crises that so many share with us daily," he reminded them.

WPCS has taken a pro-active role in national issues, sending representatives to the Scottish Government's launch of their: 'Preparing to Care' guidelines for dealing with psychosocial care and psychological first aid after an emergency situation. That event highlighted the quality of training WPCS provides - training which aligns with the latest thinking on helping people handle trauma.

We also submitted a response to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee on how to deliver regeneration in Scotland. Rev McFadzean said

Scotland needs to recognise the immense asset it has in its people and WPCS could make a valuable contribution to the regeneration debate. This year WPCS participated in Holyrood Magazine's 'Regeneration 2014: Breathing Life into Scotland's Town Centres' conference in Edinburgh to highlight the front-line knowledge our chaplains have of how our town centres and the people who work in them are faring.

Strong links with the STUC have been strengthened over the year as WPCS works with Dundee City Council to organise International Workers' Memorial Day lectures. This year's lecture, on April 25, was given by outgoing Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Sir Harry Burns. The event proved so popular that a bigger venue had to be found.

On a different level, one of our Falkirk volunteer chaplains donated the Royalties from the first of her two published books to WPCS, demonstrating the commitment of those who give their time for chaplaincy.

In September last year, we held our first-ever national gathering of staff and volunteers to celebrate WPCS and enjoy fellowship and encouragement. Those present heard how WPCS had grown from very small beginnings two years previously, to having 11 full time chaplains and more than 80 volunteers. Patience and perseverance were the themes running through the day which was also attended by our Aberdeen Retail Chaplains/Street Pastors partners. Rev Dr Andrew Fair of Arbroath's St Andrew's Parish Church led the prayers and study, reminding the assembled chaplains of Eugene Peterson's time-tested prescription for discipleship: 'A long obedience in the same direction'.

WPCS' online profile continues to grow through our website and social media platforms and from November right through to the beginning of January we ran an advertising campaign on Lothian Buses, aimed at raising awareness to WPCS in the capital during the busy Christmas shopping period. Feedback from all of those efforts has been extremely positive.

From the chief executive faced with tough decisions, to the 'new start' stressed over a family illness or bereavement, or the sole proprietor facing ruin, speaking with a workplace chaplain in confidence, perhaps over several months, has been shown to make the difference between someone going on long-term sick leave or leaving their job and being able to retain or even improve their capacity to 'bounce back' not only in the workplace but in their community.

Said CBI Scotland Director, Iain McMillan, who is a Trustee of WPCS: " WPCS is making a real impact upon both business and society in Scotland, their co-operative model is not only benefiting individuals, it is building collaboration and respect into our society."

Chaplains are happy to visit and talk to organisations and churches about their role in Scotland's workplaces. To find out more about our work and how to get in touch, please visit our website, www.wpcscotland.co.uk.

Appendix 7

The Burden of the Poor

Poverty and human deprivation has been recognized as a central challenge to the development of human society ever since the dawn of history. Yet poverty persists despite all our efforts to find a way to eliminate it. It is indeed a burden to the development of the nations. But it is a more immediate and severe burden to the poor themselves.

In the UK there are few who struggle to survive from a state of absolute poverty, who do not have enough to eat and may not have homes to shelter in during the night. But there are many who experience relative poverty and who know the harsh reality of finding food to feed families and money to pay the rent. Life becomes a grinding struggle just to exist. A struggle which leads many to seek refuge in alcohol or drugs, or with money lenders. In the UK relative poverty is defined as those with an income less than 60% of the national median value. This means that in Scotland there are more than 100 thousand individuals living in low income households.

The secular state endeavours to tackle the problem by means of the welfare system but sadly in a time of financial difficulty welfare becomes a target for savings. The secular society, of late, has developed a blame culture. It believes that the poor are themselves to blame and if we cut their income they will somehow go out and find work and enjoy a rich life. If only it were that easy! At the time of the G8 summit meeting in Gleneagles in 2005 Nelson Mandela came out of retirement to address the nations. This quote from his speech is a trenchant call for action:-

*"Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. **YOU** can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom."*

The leaders of the nations listened and said they would do something, but then there was a financial crash and their attention focused elsewhere. Reducing poverty became less important than repairing the economy, for the secular world is basically a selfish world.

But for Christians the situation is very different. The Old Testament clearly teaches that God had a special love and regard for the poor. He instructed those, who had more, to share with them and not to oppress them. When he delivered the Hebrew tribes from Egyptian bondage, shaped them into a nation, and gave them laws, He made provision for the needy among them. as indicated in Deuteronomy 15: 11.

"There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in your land."

Deuteronomy 15: Vs 11.

Then in the New Testament we read of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus was one of poverty. Jesus was a poor man who spent his ministry helping the poor. In His public ministry healing and preaching were inseparable. His ministry was to the whole person. He knew that people with hungry stomachs and diseased bodies need liberation physically in order to hear the word of God. No one in society was beneath Him. He stooped low to raise everybody, the lepers, the cripples, the blind, the deaf, the prostitutes, tax collectors, women and children.

In His last parable, of the sheep and the goats, Jesus portrays the final judgment when we shall all stand before God and give an account on what we did to Jesus, who came to us as the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the naked and the prisoner. So closely did Jesus identify Himself with the world's needy.

Human beings are godlike beings made in God's likeness, and possessing unique capacities which distinguish them from the animal creation. True human beings are fallen, and the divine image is defaced, but despite all contrary appearances it has not been

destroyed. So when we look at the poor we are looking at someone made in God's image. If we love God and wish to serve Him we must help those who have fallen into misfortune.

So how are we doing in this land of ours? At first glance it would appear to be not too badly. We have recognized that there is a problem and that there are a significant number of citizens who suffer from poverty. And we have tried to bring help to them by means of a welfare system and a caring society. But is it enough?

Recent studies suggest that the number of people living in poverty remains stubbornly high. The gap between the richest 10% of the population and the poorest 10% seems to be increasing. Many folk believe that a large number of those claiming benefits are dishonest. They accept politician's statements that the way to escape from governmental deficits is to cut welfare spending. The result is families living on the margin and the growth of food banks run by charities and the churches.

The problem is great but there are things that we can do. We can call upon the Government to reduce the gap between the very rich and the very poor, and we can support the Food Bank movement and other organisations that seek to help those who suffer from poverty, wherever it is suitable to do so.

Appendix 8

FOOD BANKS

Speaking recently at the opening of a Foodbank, the Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, said that he was both happy and sad at its opening. *'It is tremendous that in our society there are still people who care enough about others to do something practical for them and bring food to centres like this. And I am very proud of the fact that the church has been in the vanguard of helping people in such circumstances.*

However, I am sad because such a thing ought not to be needed. Those of us who can afford food can't begin to imagine what it must be like for people who are at their wits' end because they don't know where their next meal is coming from or how they are going to pay their bills. That's a reflection on all of us, on Britain as a society – we are a broken society in some ways."

Increasing Numbers

His comments reflect the mixed feelings which many people have at the ever-growing number of food banks. In Scotland, the Trussell Trust reported recently that from only one foodbank in 2007, they now have 43 such facilities and there are similar centres which are not affiliated to them. Between April 2012 and April 2013 foodbanks helped 14,318 people including about 4,000 children. However between April 2013 and February 2014 the number increased dramatically to 56,062 people (equivalent to 1% of the population of Scotland) including 17,348 children.

Reasons for the Increase

Evidence suggests that there are a number of factors which have led to such an increase in the number of people needing such help. A report commissioned by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said that the main factors driving the increased demand were low income, rising food costs and increased indebtedness. Many charities, Church leaders and others have seen a link between the increased demand and recent welfare reforms with the introduction of Universal Credit etc. The UK Government has stated that the welfare reforms were 'about building a country where people are not trapped in a cycle of dependency but are able to get on, stand on their own two feet and build a better life for themselves and their family'. Undoubtedly most of those making use of foodbank would share those aspirations but in practice many find that their circumstances leave them trapped in poverty.

Trussell Trust reported that 30% of people were referred to a foodbank due to a delay in benefits being paid; 18% due to low income and 15% due to benefit changes. Many people who are in employment are on such low incomes that they have to choose between food and heating their homes. Parents are going hungry in order to feed their children. Often those who come to food banks have walked quite a distance to get there because they cannot afford the bus fare.

Is the system abused?

Sometimes it is alleged that there is abuse of food banks with stories that people who receive food then go and sell it. As with any system, there will be those who seek to abuse it but there are restrictions which mean that people have to be referred by doctors, social workers, health visitors etc. so that only those who are most in need receive food handouts. They are supplied with food for 3 days and normally only receive this help on a maximum of 3 occasions.

Future of Food Banks

Those who are involved with food banks often state that they look forward to being out of work because their services are no longer needed. However that day seems a long way off! In the meantime there is an opportunity for churches to become involved in this valuable service to some of the most vulnerable and needy people in our society. There is no need for every church to operate a foodbank but there is scope for congregations to gather food which can be passed on to food banks in the local area where demand often outstrips supply.

Appendix 9

A FAIRER BANKING SYSTEM

In the paper the Committee produced last year entitled *The Banking Crisis and The Church* we were encouraged “to urge our governments to regulate the Banks so that they work for the good of society as a whole and not so as to cause the weaker members to suffer.” It would seem so far that our governments seem to be reluctant to engage in regulating the Banks. In order for us to influence government in this respect we need to understand the difference between “the good old days” of banking when we may have “kept a bank manager in the wardrobe” to how banks are managed today.

Prior to the deregulation of the banks in the 1980s the banks had a code of conduct which can be summarised as follows:

- Banks should hold a reserve of capital to meet any loss of capital.
- Banks should hold enough cash in reserve to meet any requests from their depositors.
- Banks should not lend any more than the money deposited by their customers.
- If banks borrow money from professional investors on a fixed term basis, then they should not lend that money to others for a period any longer than the fixed term they have agreed to so that the banks can repay the loan when it becomes due.

These rules do not appear to be difficult to understand and we can see that in the final analysis they are common sense rules. The politicians wrongly assumed that the banking industry would self regulate by adhering to these basic rules. As well as abandoning these cardinal rules of banking, two other factors were to play an important part in the banking crisis of 2007 and 2008.

The other two factors that had such an important role to play in the banking collapse were:

- The banks became huge organisations when they bought other smaller banks and building societies. The result of this was that the banking organisations became so large and complex that no one human could control these large organisations properly.
- These huge banking organisations appointed business people as their Chief Executive Officers [CEO]. These people did not understand the risks of not having adequate reserves in their banks and they took what we now see, with hindsight, as foolhardy investment risks. The CEOs and many of those who worked in the investment arms of the banks were motivated by nothing more than greed to increase the banks profits.

For a while everything seemed rosy for the bankers. The profits of the banks rose each year as did the remuneration for those who worked in the investment side of the banks. The banks became driven by the “bonus” culture and many of those who worked for the banks became hugely rich.

So what went wrong? In 2000 most of the loans provided by British banks were funded by money provided by their customer’s deposits indicating that the banks were following the rules described above. However, by 2008 this had changed radically in that the money they had given out as loans was £900 billion more than the money they had received from their depositors. This £900 billion had been borrowed by the banks from various financial institutions and big investors. When it became apparent to the financial institutions and big investors that some banks, particularly in America, might not be able to repay their debts they demanded their money back from the British banks. This left the British banks with a £900 billion debt which they were unable to settle on their own. The banks then had no option but to seek a bail out from the Government.

Is there a solution to the banking crisis? The Committee is of the view that the banking sector needs to be regulated again by the Bank of England. The Government seems hesitant to do this but the banking crisis clearly shows that the banking industry is unable to self regulate and this can only be done by Government intervention. We would suggest that the basis of the new regulations would be the four rules outlined above. We would also suggest that the CEO of any British bank should be a banker and not as has happened in the past a business person no matter how successful they may have been. We would also recommend that the banks be downsized as they have become too big and complicated. In particular we would suggest the investment arm of the banks become a totally separate organization from the high street side of the bank. There is also the issue of the “bonus culture” which according to reports in the press is still operating in some banks. This issue needs to be dealt with so that the profits from the investment arm of the bank are paid into the capital reserve of the bank and the bonus is seen as an appropriate reward for successful investment.

Banks have also been criticised for miss selling various banking products particularly mortgages and insurance. We believe that the time has come for the banks to be totally transparent when offering banking products to the general public and this should involve the banks explaining to their customers in clear and simple language precisely what the customer is agreeing to in the transaction.

Some banks have been recently shown not to have adequate and reliable technology when customers cannot access their accounts for a number of days. We would suggest that the banks that have experienced these difficulties should invest in technology that is more robust and has adequate backup systems.

There is an alternative to the High Street banks and that is the credit unions of which there are 113 in Scotland. Credit Unions are non-profit making organisations which are owned by its members and provides low cost loans to its members. The Scottish Government has been very supportive of this movement and the Government has provided £1.3 million pounds to them from their Third Sector Enterprise Funds. Loans from a credit union are much cheaper than banks but are usually limited to £10,000 or less. This suggests that credit unions will be unable to provide mortgage facilities.

Appendix 10
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office
Annual Report 2013

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) works to help Scotland's Churches build fruitful and influential relationships with the Scottish and UK Parliaments and Governments.

Scottish Churches are part of civic life. Their commitments to the well-being of the nation and its people is deeply rooted and based on Christian values. The SCPO helps Scottish Churches to :

- Engage more effectively in the political process
- Translate their commitment to the welfare of Scotland into Parliamentary debate
- Contribute the range and depth of their experience, and their faith reflection on that experience, to the decision-making process
- Demonstrate a degree of common witness and joint Christian endeavour on an important aspect of national life.

The SCPO consists of two staff members. Twelve denominations are associated with the SCPO, each with a representative on an Advisory Group which meets every six to eight weeks when the Scottish and UK Parliaments are sitting. Dr Donald Macdonald represents the United Free Church of Scotland.

Referendum on Scottish independence

The months leading up to the referendum on Scottish independence on 18 September 2014 has been a major area of work for the SCPO. A significant project has been supporting the Church of Scotland's *Imagining Scotland's Future* programme of community consultation events. The purpose of the events was to create a politically neutral space in which people in which communities across Scotland could explore the values and aspirations they have for the future of Scotland ahead of the Referendum on Scottish Independence in 2014. The event used a guided and structured discussion to explore what participants feel is important for the future of Scotland by focussing on 3 questions:

1. What values are most important to you for the Future of Scotland?
2. How can we make Scotland a better place to be?
3. How do we put our aspirations into action?

During 2013 there were 32 events including over 900 participants; many of these events were either hosted by ecumenical groups or invited ecumenical participation. A report of these events entitled *Imagining Scotland's Future: Our Vision* is available from the Church of Scotland website at www.churchofscotland.org.uk under 'Speak Out'.

The SCPO has also:

- Produced a politically impartial briefing paper on the Scottish Government's proposals for independence as set out in the White Paper *Scotland's Future*.
- Published a 'how to' guide for congregations or groups who wish to run their own community consultation exploring the future of Scotland.
- Prepared guidance for congregations and church groups who would like to hold a referendum debate or event, similar to a hustings meeting.

Parliamentary liaison and communication

The SCPO continues to liaise with MSPs, MPs and their research staff, both in reaction to political events, and proactively sharing the work of the Churches with elected representatives and officials. The SCPO has supported the Church of Scotland to speak out on a range of issues, including meeting with MPs and MSPs to discuss human trafficking; the

impact of welfare reform and the role of faith in Scottish society. In addition, support for individual denominations by writing letters to politicians ahead of particular parliamentary debates have included:

- A cap on the up rating of benefits
- The criminalisation of the purchase of sex
- High cost credit
- The Transparency in Lobbying, Non Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill

Whilst there is a place for national-led political engagement, there is also an important role for individuals or congregations to keep in touch with local representatives. MPs and MSPs are there to serve their local communities and so it is important that churches tell their representatives what is going on, and challenge them when there is a need to speak out. Good communication is a vital aspect of influencing political decision-makers, and the staff members of the SCPO are always available to give advice to people who are keen to engage with politicians on topical issues. The SCPO offer workshops on “how to lobby your MSP”.

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014

The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act was passed in February 2014. Many denominations associated with SCPO have been involved in discussions with the Scottish Government and campaigns during 2013 as this Bill passed through the Scottish Parliament.

Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014

This new UK Parliament legislation has implications for organisations, including churches, who speak out on political matters in election campaigns. The SCPO is working with other UK Church partners and the Electoral Commission to help ensure compliance with the law.

SCPO Research on Congregational Responses to Welfare Reform

SCPO designed and distributed a survey with the intention of carrying out research about the role of local churches in responding to social needs within their communities. The survey was titled "Responding to Welfare Reform: Scottish Churches' responses to social need" which reflected a desire to explore whether churches had detected an increasing need for support within their communities as the changes to the welfare system are beginning to take effect - this was particularly reflected in the section about pastoral support needs in the survey. The survey offered respondents the opportunity to share information about the types of support their congregation offered; how they were involved; pastoral care implications; and the impact that involvement in supporting the wider community had on the churches' campaigning work.

The findings of the survey demonstrated that there are many examples of good work going on in Scotland in offering assistance to those who need it. This assistance is made increasingly necessary by a growing number of people in local congregations and the wider community requiring assistance, partly because of the generally poorer economic situation; and partly due to the changes to the welfare benefits system which are now beginning to take effect.

However, the provision of services is only one side of the coin. Tackling the underlying reasons which cause the need for food banks, homeless shelters and crisis assistance is also crucial. This survey has demonstrated that the lack of information is often cited as a barrier to people taking more decisive campaigning action: this is a point for campaigners to note. However the importance of local-led activity has been a strong theme coming out of this survey, and so perhaps churches working together at a local level can pool resources, not only in serving their local communities through practical action, but in speaking out against injustices within society.

The SCPO Briefing Paper on Congregational Responses to Welfare Reform can be found on the SCPO website at www.actsparl.org in the “Briefings” section.

Ecumenical Roundtables

In 2013 the SCPO has continued to enable ecumenical discussion and shared policy-making by hosting topic-specific roundtable conversations. These events, which have usually focussed on a particular government consultation or legislative proposal, have been open to participation from the 12 denominations associated with SCPO as well as other Christian organisations, for the exchange of views and ideas. Roundtable events have been held to discuss the regulation of sexual entertainment venues and human trafficking.

Church Leaders and Representatives meeting with the First Minister

A meeting took place between Scottish Church Leaders and Representatives and the First Minister on 20 February 2013. Matters discussed by senior figures from eleven Scottish Churches included the proposed changes to marriage law on which views from across the churches were expressed. The Church Leaders and Representatives highlighted the transformational work done by churches in the community and welcomed the First Minister's assurance that there is a continuing role for faith in Scottish society. This annual meeting illustrates the increasingly active engagement between Churches and civic society in Scotland, both nationally and locally. A meeting in 2014 is expected to be held shortly

Scottish Churches Anti-Human Trafficking Group

The SCPO provides advice to this ecumenical group. The group has responded to consultations on various human trafficking proposals around the UK. Particular emphasis has been placed on engaging with a proposal for a Scottish Parliament Members' Bill made by Jenny Marra MSP. The group responded to this proposal in December 2013 and encouraged denominations and church members to also respond.

Consultations and Relationships

The SCPO has also continued to support denominations in preparation of official responses to Government consultations and Parliamentary inquiries, and to build good relationships with a wide range of people working on public policy, in government, think tanks, political parties and voluntary organisations.

Staffing

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer, Chloe Clemmons, is on maternity leave from March 2014. David Bradwell will fill the post for the duration of Chloe's leave. Alison Bennett, who has been with the SCPO for over five years has recently left to join the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, a new Research Officer will be recruited shortly. Fiona Brown remains the SCPO Administrator.

Contact

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