

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2015**

**INTRODUCTION**

There has been a great deal of activity in Scottish society since our last report to the General Assembly of 2014. We have had the referendum followed by the Smith Commission and at the time of writing this report we do not know what effect the recommendations of the Smith Commission will have on the government of Scotland. However, the Church and Society Committee have this year concentrated on issues that the Committee have had under consideration for some time.

The Report is structured differently this year in that the issues that the Committee have commented on are at the beginning of the Report, with reports from the various organisations that we support coming at the end of the Report.

**SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

The Health and Sport Committee have now completed both their written evidence and oral evidence sessions. It is expected that after consideration this Committee will present a report to the Parliament and make recommendations on the Bill. The passage of this Bill through Parliament has been slow and the details of when it will be presented to Parliament are, at present, unclear.

As a Church, we are opposed to this Bill and our response to the request for written evidence can be found Appendix 2 of the 2014 Report to the General Assembly. Last year we also prepared a considered response to this Bill, which we intend to circulate amongst all MSPs before they vote on the Bill. This response can be found in Appendix 3 of the 2014 Report to the General Assembly.

It is still our intention, when we know the date that this Bill will be debated in the Scottish Parliament, to circulate comments and suggestions that members of the United Free Church can use to inform their MSP of their opposition to this Bill.

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 [Named Person Legislation]

The legal challenge against the Scottish Government proposals to appoint a “named person” for every child under 18 has been rejected by the Court of Session on all counts. The court decision on the Named Person judicial review found that:  
*Part 4 (Named Persons) does not contravene the European Court of Human Rights [ECHR] rights, European Union [EU] law or fundamental common law rights. This also applies to the information sharing provisions of the legislation, which the court found were not in breach of the Data Protection Act.*

A date for an Appeal has been set for early June when the case against the “named person” will be considered by three judges.

It is the Committee’s view that this Bill has at its heart the good of young people in Scotland. We often see in the media tragic incidents of young people who have been failed by

our system. The ethos of this legislation is that the “named person” will have the authority to coordinate and mobilise the various organisations that have a responsibility for the well being of children and young people. Draft Guidelines have been published for this Bill and the Committee have made a summary of the Guidelines relating to the “named person”. This summary is found in Appendix 1.

There is now a consultation on the draft guidance for this Bill and our response is found in Appendix 2.

### Organ and Tissue Donation (Scotland) Bill

Anne McTaggart MSP has introduced a private members bill, which if it becomes law, will change the procedure by which consent is given for organ and tissue donations.

At present only those who have consented to organ donation and carry a card indicating their wish can be considered as donors. The proposed legislation will reverse the present system in that it will be assumed that everyone can be an organ donor unless they have specifically indicated that they have opted out.

This is a radical change to the process of obtaining consent for organ donation and our comments on the proposed legislation can be found in Appendix 3.

## **BANKING**

The Committee has been concerned in recent years about the reluctance of Government and the Bank of England to regulating the banking industry. The last two reports to the General Assembly have highlighted our concern. We have again expressed our concerns to both Government and the Bank of England and this is found in Appendix 4.

## **CARING FOR THE CARERS**

Carers are wonderful people. They are often on duty 24 hours a day, receive no pay and have little free time for themselves. Carers do not think how it affects them and rarely think of their own well being. The Committee has this year been concerned that people who have recently become carers do not know about the resources that are available to them. We have put together a list of resources that they may find useful and this is found in Appendix 5.

## **FOOD BANKS**

Unfortunately food banks continue to be an important part of some people’s lives and there has been an increase in the number of people who have depended on food banks in Scotland this year compared to last year. A summary of the Trussell Trust report is found in Appendix 6.

## **WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES IN EUROPE**

The World Communion of Reformed Churches in Europe (WCRC-Europe) held their 2015 conference in Belfast. The United Free Church was represented by Mr. Ian Buchanan the

Vice Convener of the Church and Society Committee and he has prepared a summary of the conference which is found in Appendix 7.

The keynote speaker explored nationalism in a European context and the content of the address is of value to us in post referendum Scotland. The summary also highlights the issues that some Reformed Churches in Europe are facing.

### **TRANSATLANTIC TRADE and INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP**

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States of America [USA] and the European Union [EU] countries will reduce tariffs and other barriers to trade between the USA and EU countries. This partnership will allow companies on both sides of the Atlantic easier access to each other's markets. Both Governments in London and in Edinburgh together with the main political parties in the UK support this agreement as they envisage that TTIP could add £10 billion to the UK economy.

Although this agreement would appear to benefit our economy, many have reservations about this deal. The opponents of the deal suggest the worst possible scenarios that include:

- The possibility that foreign companies may be able to sue national governments for what they consider to be unfair treatment. This would include private firms who provide and run NHS services.
- The tobacco giants may be able to challenge the restrictive regulations that have been imposed on the advertisement and sale of tobacco.
- Food standards could also be affected. The EU has strict regulations regarding Genetically Modified crops, the use of pesticides and food additives compared to the USA. This treaty could open up the European countries to cheaper food produced to poorer standards.

These suggested reservations are disconcerting for all of us in the UK. Negotiations on the TTIP are still ongoing and are expected to be completed in the autumn. The Committee will maintain a watching brief on the progress of these negotiations.

### **SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION**

The Scottish Churches Housing Action [SCHA] is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year. The SCHA continues to campaign tirelessly for more affordable housing in Scotland. They also continue to provide essential resources for the homeless who are moving into homes after a period of homelessness. The SCHA report is found in Appendix 8.

### **CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND**

Christian Aid continues to be a force for good across the world where people struggle to feed themselves and their families. Their fundraising activities every year continue to be an important way in which they fund their work. They also continue to campaign against multi-nationals who evade paying taxes particularly in the poorest countries. The Christian Aid report is found in Appendix 9.

## **WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND**

The Work Place Chaplaincy continues to grow with more Chaplains now working in various business outlets throughout Scotland. Chaplains are also prepared to come and talk about their work to congregations. The Chaplaincy report is found in Appendix 10.

## **SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE**

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) continues to provide important advice and information about the political process both in Edinburgh and London. The Committee value and are very grateful for the provision of this resource to all the Scottish Churches. This year the SCPO is moving into the Church of Scotland Offices in 121 George Street, Edinburgh. The SCPO report is found in Appendix 11.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS**

The following contributions were made in 2014

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 2,500
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 2,250
Work Place Chaplaincy in Scotland	£ 1,250
TOTAL	£ 6,000

## **CONCLUSION**

The Convener wishes to express his gratitude to each member of the Committee together with previous members for their contributions and 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  
IAN D. BUCHANAN              Vice-Convener  
JOHN O. FULTON                Secretary