

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016**

INTRODUCTION

'Who is my neighbour?' A significant facet of Jesus' ministry was meeting the needs of those around him. Luke, for example, records a series of activities by Jesus in which He met the various spiritual and physical needs of people. We are all very familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan where Jesus illustrates just how far Christians should go in helping others. Simply, whenever and wherever there is a need, and whoever needs it, the Church should make itself available to help. Christ's teaching could not be more relevant than at the present time.

In the past year Committee members have been looking at a number of issues new to them. These have included the situation facing refugees and asylum seekers, the increasing numbers of male suicides and the provisions made for those with mental health issues. It has been very much a learning process, making contact with those who have the knowledge and expertise and, where possible, working with others to pool resources.

In the lead up to the Scottish Parliamentary Election in May the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) provided a hustings resource pack, which included briefings covering a range of issues and a selection of relevant questions. An email was sent out to the churches giving details of how the resource pack could be accessed. SCPO also provided material for the EU referendum scheduled to take place on 23rd June. The Committee took the decision to remain neutral with regard to both the election and the referendum.

The Committee would welcome to hear from anyone within the denomination who could contribute knowledge and experience on any of the topics covered in the report or know of any appropriate resources.

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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

Although the Named Person legislation is not due to be fully implemented until August of this year, it continues to be a controversial matter. Many feel there is still a great deal of confusion and lack of clarity as to how the legislation will work in practice. There are also the concerns about the potential of outside intrusion into family life as expressed in the deliverance at last year's General Assembly.

A legal challenge was made against the Scottish Government proposals in 2014 to appoint a 'named person' for every child under 18. Lord Pentland refused an initial petition for the judicial review of the legislation at the Court of Session in January 2015 but campaigners appealed against the decision. A panel of three judges reconsidered the case in June 2015 but refused that appeal, stating that the legislation does not breach human rights or European Union law.

The most recent challenge from campaigners relates to the current law that says social services can intervene where a child is at risk of significant harm, whereas, with the new legislation, named persons can intervene merely where there are concerns about a child's "wellbeing" or "happiness". The result of the current challenge is still awaited.

It is important to be aware that as well as a number of charities, organizations (including some Churches) and groups speaking out against this new legislation, there are

also children's charities, parents' groups and one of the teaching unions who have indicated their support to the introduction of the named person.

The Committee has kept itself informed of the draft and then revised guidelines and the range of views on the matter and provided a written response to the consultation paper setting out the proposals for the complaints process concerning the functions of the named person or Child's Plan. The Committee will continue to monitor how the named person scheme is implemented.

The Scottish Government have provided questions and answers on the role of the named person for parents and families at the website address:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/named-person>

Organ and Tissue Donation (Scotland) Bill

The Transplantation Bill, introduced by Anne McTaggart (MSP) was voted down after a Scottish Government amendment to reject it was supported by the majority of members.

The bill would have introduced a soft opt-out system as opposed to the current opt-in system, allowing for organs and tissues to be removed from an adult after death if they had not registered or expressed an objection during their lifetime. Families would have been consulted to establish any objection that had not been registered.

The Scottish Government has proposed commencing its own detailed consultation on further methods to increase organ donations and transplants, including soft opt-out, as an early priority in the next Scottish Parliament.

Wales became the first part of the UK to introduce presumed consent for organ donation, with the change coming into force in December 2015, and it will be valuable to see how the legislation works itself out in practice.

The Lobbying (Scotland) Bill

In March 2016 legislation that increases the transparency in lobbying was passed by the Scottish Parliament.

The names of major political lobbyists in Scotland are to be made public to improve transparency. The bill includes setting up an online register to include a list of organisations which spend large amounts of cash employing people to influence MSPs and would also take in organisations that have sustained contact with politicians. These organisations would need to provide information on meetings with MSPs, events and hospitality involving MSPs and details of what the lobbying aimed to achieve.

The Parliament will now take forward the implementation of the Lobbying (Scotland) Bill, continuing to working with stakeholders and this includes undertaking awareness raising as part of that process. It remains to be seen how this will impact on various church denominations and the work of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO).

PROFESSIONAL CARERS

At last year's General Assembly attention was drawn to the problems that can arise when people require the support of professional carers. The Committee has been looking at this particular issue and how support might be better provided at home. There have been two initiatives that the Committee have identified that could help to improve the situation.

The Scottish Government introduced the Carers (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament in March 2015 and it was given royal assent in March 2016. The Act is intended to ensure better and more consistent support for carers and young carers so that they can continue to care, if they so wish, in better health and to have a life alongside caring:

The Act:

- Introduces the Adult Carer Support Plan;
- Introduces a Young Carers Statement to recognise the unique needs of young carers;
- Places a duty on local authorities to provide support to carers and young carers based on local eligibility criteria;
- Ensures that carers and young carers will be at the centre of decision making on how services are designed, delivered and evaluated;
- Places a duty on local authorities to create an information and advice service.

Many of the professional carers had been paid no more than the minimum wage. However, the new “National Living Wage” (NLW) has been introduced, which now applies to workers aged 25 and over. Initially the rate has been set at £7.20 per hour but is expected to rise to 60% of median earnings by 2020 and this may encourage more professional carers to remain in the profession. This would lead to a more experienced workforce and also provide the opportunity of better continuity of support for those who are being cared for. It is, however, recognised that local authorities and private firms have expressed concern as to whether they will be able to cover these increasing staffing costs.

TRANSATLANTIC TRADE and INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) trade agreement currently being negotiated between the EU and the US continues to be controversial. Negotiations were launched at the G8 summit at Lough Erne in June 2013. The first negotiating round took place in July 2013. However, after thirteen negotiating rounds having taken place so far, there is still no conclusion.

A summary of TTIP, taken from the House of Commons Briefing Paper by Dominic Webb, 4 December 2015, is given in Appendix 1. The Committee intend maintaining a watching brief on the progress of any continuing negotiations.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The matter of human trafficking was raised at last year’s General Assembly.

Rev. Elizabeth Mackay represented the Committee at a meeting arranged by Christian Aid which is looking at the possibility of setting up a group to work on projects relating to gender such as human trafficking and gender based violence. It is early days yet to see where this initiative will lead.

REFUGEES / SCOTTISH FAITHS ACTION FOR REFUGEES

The refugee crisis has been dominating the news and for many it can seem that, with millions of people on the move and in desperate need of help, there is little of significance that a small denomination like ours can do. However, when working with others a much more meaningful and co-ordinated approach can be taken.

With this in mind, the Committee has been represented by Mr. Ian Buchanan on the newly set up Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR). The project, initiated by the Church of Scotland, seeks to co-ordinate and promote action by faith communities to support asylum seekers and refugees. Currently there are Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Interfaith Groups associated with the project. The aims and objectives of SFAR are given in Appendix 2.

Mr. David Bradwell was appointed by the Church of Scotland as the Refugee Co-ordinator and he has already written an article for our denomination's magazine 'Stedfast' about SFAR. Mr. Matthew Ross, the Secretary of ACTS, allocates some of his office time to support the project and some of the financial support is also coming from ACTS.

SUICIDE / MENTAL HEALTH

From the most recent statistics (2013), in Scotland the age group with the highest suicide rate per 100,000 for all persons, males and females, is 35-44 years. The rate is about three times higher in men than women of this age group.

The issue of mental health is recognised as one of the major public health challenges in Scotland. Around one in three people are estimated to be affected by mental health issues in any one year. For many there is still a stigma attached to mental health.

We should be aware that mental health is something that affects all groups of society, including young people as highlighted in the paper by CrossReach, the Social Care arm of the Church of Scotland. The paper is found in Appendix 3.

So far the Committee has only just begun to look at these issues – to find out what the Church can learn and what positive contribution it can make to support those with mental health issues.

Improving mental health is a stated priority for the Scottish Government. In December 2015 the Scottish Government produced a paper on research and mental health policy in Scotland, to improve both the impact of research and the evidence base for strategy. From this, work on mental health has been divided into five main areas:

- Work to promote good mental health and improve mental health services is set out in the Mental Health Strategy;
- Work to improve services for people living with dementia, their families and carers is set out in the Dementia Strategy;
- Work to reduce suicide and self harm;
- Responsibility for, and development of mental health law;
- Supporting Scottish Ministers statutory role in respect of Restricted patients.

Breathing Space is a national phoneline service delivered by NHS 24, which is a free, confidential, phone service for anyone in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. 2016 has been designated Scotland's 'Year of Listening' (YoL) by Breathing Space, which is intended to raise awareness throughout 2016 that listening, and being listened to, is good for a person's mental health.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION

Scottish Churches Housing Action continues to help churches and others make practical responses to the challenge of homelessness in Scotland. As well as encouraging the development of affordable housing, SCHA works to increase understanding of homelessness, and policies that will end it. SCHA also helps set up starter pack projects for homeless people all over Scotland as well as other volunteering initiatives to tackle problems of homelessness and poor housing. The report from Scottish Churches Housing Action is found in Appendix 4.

CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND

2015 marked Christian Aid's 70th anniversary and, as part of this, Christian Aid Scotland set itself a major challenge – to climb 70 Munros and, by doing so, raised money for its work.

Christian Aid continues to work towards its vision of ending poverty and works with many partners throughout the world in order to realise this goal. As well as helping to provide for the needs of the poor, Christian Aid is also concerned about dealing with the causes, such as issues arising from climate change and tax justice. The Christian Aid report is found in Appendix 5.

WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND

The Work Place Chaplaincy continues to provide high quality trained chaplains of any denomination and more about their work and the challenges faced are given in the report found in Appendix 6.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE

Currently there is a review taking place of the work carried out by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO). It is looking into the reasons why it works the way it does, with particular focus on the impact that SCPO is having and the changing context within Scottish politics. The Committee has very much appreciated all the resources that have been distributed by SCPO and have been feeding in its responses to the review process.

This year SCPO provided ecumenical resources for both the Scottish Parliamentary elections and the EU referendum. The SCPO report is found in Appendix 7.

CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS

The following contributions were made in 2015:

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

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

IAN D. BUCHANAN Convener

ERIC M. WORTON Vice-convener

JOHN O. FULTON Secretary