

## **REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2010**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This session the Church and Society Committee have considered a range of issues. Many of the issues have emanated from the Scottish Parliament and this has involved the committee contributing to various consultation processes. When the committee has been concerned about how these issues may affect our nation, we have endeavoured to bring a Christian influence to bear.

### **SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

#### Energy Efficiency Action Plan.

In October the Scottish Government published a large consultation document on its proposed Energy Efficiency Action Plan for Scotland. Appendix 1 contains our comments on this plan.

#### Consultation on Living and Dying Well

In November 2009 the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care produced a consultation paper entitled Living and Dying Well. This paper addressed palliative and end of life care from a public health and health promotion perspective to facilitate a wider discussion of death, dying and bereavement across society. The main body of this paper and the Churches response to it are contained in Appendix 2.

#### End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Independent MSP Margo MacDonald introduced the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill in the Scottish Parliament on 20 January 2010. The purpose of this Members Bill is described in the Policy Memorandum accompanying it as "to enable persons whose life has become intolerable and who meet the conditions prescribed in the Bill to legally access assistance to end their life". Although suicide – defined as self-inflicted death – has never been a crime in Scotland, it is currently illegal under Scots law to assist another person to end their life, even if that help is explicitly requested by the person wishing to die.

The committee having been aware that this Bill deals with serious moral and ethical issues have prepared a response which will be submitted when the ad hoc End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill Committee calls for written evidence. The response is contained in Appendix 3.

### **BRINGING KINGDOM VALUES TO MODERN SOCIETY**

The committee observed that in many of its responses to what is happening in society today it tends to be reactive and it would be good to have something more proactive in terms of how the Church today should relate to society where there is a crisis in all sorts of ways. We need the Church to engage with the world at large and help people handle the many problems. The Church tends to be conservative when there is a need to be radical. There is a danger we are preoccupied with preserving our own position. As well as the global issues, there is a need for local churches to look at how they engage with their local communities and the people there. The committee's deliberations on this matter are found in Appendix 4.

## **ACTS CHURCH and SOCIETY NETWORK**

The Church and Society Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland continue to be represented on the Church and Society Network of ACTS. As such, written and verbal reports from the Network are tabled at each of the UF Church and Society meetings for information, discussion and action. This provides the committee with useful information on many other UK and World Wide Issues.

ACTS is launching a new website and it is hoped that it will be more widely used and information will be available on who visits the site. Their website is: [www.acts-scotland.org](http://www.acts-scotland.org)

## **SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION**

The Scottish Churches Housing Action (SCHA) seeks to publicise the plight of the homeless in three ways. First, by informing the Members of the Scottish Parliament of its work, second through the media and third through the very close association that the SCHA has with the Churches of all the Denominations in Scotland. The Local Authorities recognise the expertise that the SCHA has and will often work very closely with them when they identify local homelessness issues.

The Government has given the SCHA a grant of £91,000 this year and has provided financial support to the association for the last fifteen years. However, Government funding is coming to an end in 2010 as it is considered that the SCHA is able to be more self supporting. If congregations have been associated with the SCHA in the past we would encourage them to continue supporting them.

The SCHA is hoping to launch a new initiative in Edinburgh called Supported Lodgings. This initiative offers supported lodgings to young people who have been homeless or who are at risk of homelessness. Supported lodgings provide accommodation for a homeless person within a family home where there is a spare accommodation and it is hoped that a member of the family can have some time to provide some mentoring i.e. passing on skills in cooking, budgeting etc. More information is available at: [www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/accommodation/supportedlodgings/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/accommodation/supportedlodgings/).

## **CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND**

Below is a report prepared by Kathy Galloway who is the new Scottish Director of Christian Aid in Scotland.

*Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.*

At the heart of Christian Aid's work is, as it always has been, overcoming poverty. In 2009, this has meant action on climate change because it affects the world's poorest and most vulnerable people first and most; like the nomadic herders in Northern Kenya, who trek hundreds of miles in search of water, or poor farming families in Bangladesh, forced by rising sea levels to leave their homes for temporary and illegal camps on embankments, where they cannot earn a living; or poor rural communities in Central America who live with increasingly frequent and intense hurricanes. Christian Aid knows from its partners very clearly that climate change causes loss of homes, land, livelihoods and security.

Much of Christian Aid's work in these areas is implemented through its 680 partner organizations in 49 countries. This is the practical expression of support which is the primary task of Christian Aid. But this work would not and could not exist without the awareness-

raising, informing, fundraising, advocacy and campaigning that happens here at home. Christian Aid in Scotland has undergone significant organizational change in the last few years and is now looking forward to a period of stability, consolidation and positive outward focus.

The global financial crisis and recession in Britain have already hit the voluntary sector hard and Christian Aid has not been exempt from this. Christian Aid Week is therefore all the more important and in 2010 will have a particular focus on Kenya and on the urgent need for water and improved sanitation. Further information about the Christian Aid is available from Ron Thomson, the United Free Church representative on the Christian Aid Advisory Committee for Scotland.

**SCOTTISH CHURCHES RACIAL JUSTICE**

We were delighted to hear that the Rev. Francis Alao has been appointed as the Racial Justice Officer. Mr Alao is from Nigeria and has worked for “Heart for the City” in Glasgow. We wish Mr Alao God’s blessing as he takes up this work.

**SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE**

This committee is grateful for all the support that the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office provides to our Denomination in its interaction with both the Holyrood and Westminster Parliaments. The Parliamentary Office not only provides useful information about Bills passing through both Houses of Parliament but also give wise guidance on how to effectively lobby our Parliamentarians. We wish to thank Chloe Clemmons, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer and her staff for all their help throughout the year. The annual report of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer is found in Appendix 5.

**CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS**

The following contributions were made in 2009

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£ 2,000
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£ 2,000
Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer	£ 1,400
TOTAL	£ 5,400

**CONCLUSION**

The Convener wishes to express his gratitude to each member of the committee for their hard work and their enthusiasm together with the skills and expertise that they bring to the committee. The committee is indebted for the enormous amount of work that the General Secretary, the Rev John Fulton and Mrs Helena Jarvis 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