

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE & MISSION COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2024

INTRODUCTION

"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of [g] your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant." Col. 1:15-23.

The Christian Life and Mission Committee desires to fulfil its remit by taking every opportunity to encourage and exhort the Church to continue to have great confidence in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord and has the supremacy in all things, and the hope "held out in the gospel" is found when we come under his preeminent Lordship. This truth is at the very centre of the church's mission - to "hold out" the gospel and to proclaim it to everyone within our God-given sphere of influence. Whatever happens next does so in and through the Supreme One, and so CLAM wishes to relieve any crushing burdens people may feel that we somehow are "responsible" for the salvation of sinners - we are not - but we are called to explicitly and clearly proclaim the gospel. However, this may be done - and there are a plethora of ways for the church to do so - CLAM exists to equip the Christian and resource the church, so that the proclamation of peace through the shed blood of Jesus might be proclaimed to "every creature under heaven."

What follows is a breakdown of CLAM's working groups with reports for each. CLAM continues to be committed to the resourcing and training of congregations and office bearers. If a congregation would like more information about resources available please contact CLAM through the church office.

NATIONAL CHURCH EVENTS

Whilst the remit of National Church Events encompasses more than the "Dunblane Event", the reality is that over the past year this has been the primary focus of the working group. The group have made a number of significant changes this past year in an effort to improve procedures and also deal with some minor difficulties faced over recent years in what has nevertheless been a key and positive annual event in the denomination's calendar.

In recent years the group has put together a checklist that spans the entire year and notates deadlines and other important action points needed to be taken when organising an event of

this nature, and this year many of the deadlines have been pushed forward a couple of months in an effort to enable publicity for the Gathering to be made available in time for the General Assembly. Other significant changes include a new venue (Lendrick Muir), a new name (The Gathering), a new date (Saturday 17th August) and perhaps most significantly a new website (thegathering.media).

NCE is keen to highlight the new website as an excellent new way to see information about the event, as well as the place to book online. You can now visit thegathering.media and book tickets, pay online, and also book your child in, whether that is for the creche(3 and under) or the children/teen programme(4 and over). All of this can now be done with ease via the new website, and NCE would like to encourage commissioners to highlight the website to congregations and members. Whilst NCE wishes to emphasise the website and encourages the denomination to see this as the new, primary way to book tickets for our annual conference, physical flyers and booking forms will still be made available.

For more information on The Gathering, please see the article in Stedfast or visit thegathering.media.

CHRISTIAN LIFE ISSUES

Freedom

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." - John 8:31-37

Religious liberty is of vital importance. We have a rich heritage of freedom in our nation, hard won down the ages. We enjoy freedom to worship, freedom to share the gospel and freedom to live out a faithful Christian life in public. Many Christians elsewhere in the world do not share those blessings, so we owe it to them to guard our freedoms well. The unjust treatment of Christians in today's Britain is rarely out of the headlines. The prevailing worldview is that Christian social and moral teaching is archaic and restrictive. However, the Christian finds true liberty in the Word of God.

The freedom to articulate opinions, especially Christian worldviews, has also come to the fore, especially in the arenas of gender and sexuality and with beginning and end of life decision making. These ideas are also coming into the arena of school education. In all situations, as Christians we should follow Christ's example and be full of grace and truth (John 1:17). The Claim of Right was an Act passed by the Convention of the Estates, a sister body to the Parliament of Scotland (or Three Estates), in 1689. It is one of the key documents of United Kingdom constitutional law and Scottish constitutional law which promotes the concept of modern democracy. In the face of the civil and religious liberty being afforded in what was a liberal democracy, we see these values being eroded.

Engagement in the public square

The Working Group continues to appreciate the work of the Christian Institute, CARE (Christian Action, Research and Education) and that of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office. The two former organisations have largely represented the United Free Church's views, particularly on human gender and sexuality and further information can be found at www.christian.org.uk and www.care.org.uk. Both organisations have well informed speakers in Nigel Kenny and Dr Stuart Weir who welcome the opportunity to speak in churches or lead worship.

The Committee, represented in the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) by the Working Group Convener, has a wide range of Christian Churches and Christian organisations in Scotland in membership. The SCPO has been a very useful vehicle for being kept aware of Bills being raised at the Scottish Parliament, and also through the RADAR Committee, of issues at the United Kingdom Parliament. However, the Working Group is finding a lot of duplication in the work and will be considering our relationship with SCPO. The Group considers the work the Christian Institute and CARE to be more in line with our worldview. The largely Christian based Faith in Older people charity is one in which the Group has engaged with and would commend their online resources which can be found at: www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk.

Assisted Suicide

As this report is being written we are still awaiting the publication in full of Liam McArthur's bill on Assisted Dying. As was indicated in last year's verbal submission, this remains something of a misnomer, as it is effectively assisted suicide. The medical intervention is to enable the individual to take their own life.

The delays, which have been considerable, indicate the complexity of attempting to draft legislation which protects the vulnerable and does not automatically lead to a broadening of the intended scope. Once suicide is viewed as a legitimate medical intervention it is almost impossible to draw boundaries around it. The experience of Belgium, and Canada most recently shows how quickly narrowly permissive legislation becomes widened and almost expected to be suggested to some in the most vulnerable of positions. It has also shown that the suicide may not be a calm and quiet matter, but medical intervention has been needed when things go wrong.

We have always opposed what is termed euthanasia and in a culture that is increasingly secular in its thinking, it is all the more important that we emphasise that dignity does not depend on autonomy, but on our God-shaped image in which we are made.

We argue this, not only for ourselves, but for the sake of those who might feel vulnerable to the pressures to end life prematurely. This does not, of course mean that medical intervention must keep life going whatever, but we recognise that there is a time to die that is not in our hands.

It remains important that MSP's are aware of this viewpoint and letters to them, and better, visits to an MSP surgery especially from those with personal experience of caring well for the dying is to be encouraged.

CNK (Scotland) (Care Not Killing) has a website - <https://carenotkilling.scot/> with excellent resources to help understand what is at stake and guide you through the arguments.

The Appendix which lays out the background to this issue has been drawn from excellent work by Donald Macdonald and Peter Saunders of the Christian Medical Fellowship.

Conversion Therapy

Responses from an Evangelical Christian perspective have been submitted from The Christian Institute and Evangelical Alliance Scotland to the consultation. The Working Group has also made a response.

There are a huge number of concerns here for religious liberty. Religious belief is protected under the Equality Act 2010.

As Christians we believe that all people are made in the image of God with inherent dignity and worth. There are some practices conducted by pseudo-medical practitioners and some false preachers that are harmful to those struggling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. We oppose all abusive practises and reject the idea that anyone can be forced to live a certain lifestyle. However, the term 'conversion therapy' is too broad and confusing to be useful. A major concern is that other practices might be inadvertently criminalised in the process of 'ending conversion therapy'.

The ban threatens to criminalise Christians who offer prayer and pastoral support to members of their congregation. A proposed broad ban threatens our rights to freedom of expression and belief.

There is no medical consensus on the best way to help people who identify as transgender. The recent legal cases over the Tavistock clinic in London have shown the controversy and complexity of the issues involved. NHS England are currently conducting an independent review into gender identity services for children and young people, which includes an examination of the issues surrounding children and young people who are prescribed puberty blocking and cross sex hormone drugs.

In Europe, Sweden has ended the prescription of hormone blockers for under 18's and Finland has prioritised psychotherapy over the use of drugs. The proposed ban on conversion therapy commits the Government to a single side in these debates and makes it illegal for health and social care professionals to offer the full range of options. It also makes any discussion about issues of gender and sexuality impossible with young people, even between parents and child, unless the adults involved are totally affirming of the young person's gender and sexual identity.

Experience shows young people can be deeply confused about issues connected to gender and sexual orientation. This confusion is largely being caused by what they are being exposed to in the school environment and in wider culture. This could amount to something akin to 'conversion therapy' where young people are encouraged to think that they may need to change their gender or sexual orientation.

'Conversion therapy' is a wide umbrella term chosen by LGBT campaigners. It covers abusive practices by dubious medical practitioners and preachers which are largely illegal already. But campaigners want to go much further and criminalise repentance as well as preaching, prayer, pastoral care and even parenting that fails to endorse liberal worldviews and theology.

Coercive and abusive behaviour should be caught by existing law. But it is wrong for biblically faithful preaching, prayer, pastoral care and parenting to be in the sights of lawmakers. True 'conversion therapy' comes by sitting under the preaching of Gospel that leads to repentance and faith, and to true personhood as our identity is found in Jesus.

Education

The current worldview on gender and sexuality and transgenderism transcends into state primary and secondary education. We commend the work of Christian Values in Education www.cve-scotland.org.uk.

In one Lothians state secondary school, pupils have been taught that there are three biological sexes and that they can be pansexual if they are attracted to two or more genders. Children were also told to refer to one another as "they" if they are uncertain of their 'gender identity'. At another Highland school, a "gender neutral language guide" tells staff to avoid terms such as mother, brother or sister that might upset trans pupils.

Trina Budge, Director of For Women Scotland, called it "disgraceful that valuable time is being spent trying to instil compelled speech and push activists' unscientific, inaccurate information about gender identity theory".

Further work on the impact of transgender and conversion therapy amongst school children and young people will be reported next year.

Modern Day Slavery

At last year's General Assembly, the matter of slavery arose but seeking to raise the issue of modern day slavery when so much focus had been on historic slavery. In one sense it is understandable when historic slavery has clear boundaries, whereas modern day slavery is a complex and murky world. Added to which so much is entangled in ongoing debates with the issues of asylum and immigration where heat rather than light is mainly generated.

But slavery and trafficking are current and critical issues not to be simply bundled into the "immigration" pile and left aside. People are suffering, caught and captive; exploited, used and abused. This was made apparent in the recent scandal over care workers being sponsored by "Care companies" who had only just been set up.

We have an immigration and asylum system that seems to both allow and encourage people to disappear from the system and the most obvious route is into the trafficking arena. It is a complex area and the appendix on Modern Day Slavery seeks to provide a starter guide to the subject so that we begin to think Christianly about an often emotive, subject.

Financial contributions

The Working Group has allocated financial contributions towards the following organisations:
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office - £2,000
Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees - £1,000
Christian Action, Research and Education (CARE) - £1,000
The Christian Institute - £1,000

These are largely long-standing contributions and the Working Group will be considering whether these contributions continue in the future, and at what level.

Stedfast

The Working Group have continued to inform congregations of particular issues via Stedfast and have sourced other experts such as Dr Stuart Weir of CARE.

Future work

We continue to consider how we can meaningfully respond to the many consultations that we receive and also to communicate these often complex, issues with clarity to our people. We hope to continue to highlight these issues via Stedfast and the denominational day.

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

For several years, one of the main events which has fallen under the remit of the CYPF sub-group has been the organising of a weekend camp for P5 - S6 pupils. This has been an opportunity for children and young people from across the UF Family to come together and have lots of fun and get some great Bible Teaching at the same time. Due to the 2023 camp being held in March and the 2024 camp being planned for mid-June there has not been a weekend away within the past 12 months, but plans are well underway for the upcoming event. Please pray for the team and for all the children and young people who will be coming along to Lendrick Muir, that it would be a fun and engaging weekend for all and that the young people would grow deeper in their knowledge and love of Jesus.

Easter Scheme 2023 - This year the Easter scheme was in support of BCM Peru, you can find more information about their work on the following website: <https://en.bcmperu.org/>. The monies raised through the Easter Scheme this year will go towards supporting their "Pennies for Peru" appeal. This is a project whereby a team goes into various towns in Peru with the gospel. These events are run for children of all ages and in many rural areas. They have a need for new sound equipment to allow all the children and young people who attend to hear all that is happening even when there is a big group of them. It is our hope and prayer that the money raised will be able to assist them as they seek to purchase this important resource and that it will benefit them greatly as they share the Gospel throughout Peru.

The SPARK events have continued to be enjoyed by all those who attend. Like at the weekend camps there are times of Bible teaching as well as lots of fun, games and of course, food. It has been encouraging to see young people from different churches develop friendships. It has been commented that a benefit of belonging to a small denomination is the personal relationships which are formed throughout different churches, and it is great to see that this is the case with many of the children and young people. It has been important to the SPARK organising team to make it as easy as possible for children and young people to attend. Therefore, as had been suggested by those travelling to the events, an earlier start time has been trialled and seems to be working well for young people and their leaders. The evenings are also planned around local youth events - for example Scripture Unions 'Equip' events, so that SPARK does not get in the way of young people developing relationships with Christians in their own local area. Last year, as has been the case previously the SPARK team helped to plan the children's and teenage programmes at the Dunblane event, this was another opportunity for different young people to experience SPARK and them to meet together.

It continues to be a joy and a blessing to be able to run these events for children and young people. However, the sub-groups remit also includes encouraging and supporting individual congregations and their leaders as they undertake the vital role of discipling children and young people and encouraging families throughout their day to day lives. With this in mind,

the group continues to look for ways to pray for, resource and support our churches as they reach out to children, young people and families across the country. One of the ways this has been done previously is by holding Zoom events called "Open House" for anyone leading any kind of children's or young people's meetings, whether it's on a Sunday or mid-week - from toddlers to young adults. Those who don't have such a meeting happening just now but have a heart for this work are also more than welcome to join in. This is an opportunity to find out more about what is happening in our churches, to find out what resources there are available and also to pray and encourage each other. It is the sub-group's plan to arrange another of these events early in the academic year.

There is also a WhatsApp Group set up and running for those involved in organising children's and young people's meetings in our churches. This is open to anyone to join and those who do so can request prayer or ask for information about materials etc and share what is happening in their church. It's a great way to be informed about what is going on in the wider work of the denomination and it is always good to know others are praying for us when we need it! Please get in touch if you would like to join the group.

The Group are pleased to continue to be able to give a grant of £75 for young leaders from churches to attend the SU Training "LeadUP" course. This helps train leaders for Children and Young Peoples ministries, and we hope that this investment in the young people of our denomination will bring benefit and blessing to the local church and the wider work of our denomination over time. If any churches have young people who could benefit from such courses, please make an application to the committee for consideration.

Attention is also drawn to the fact that the denomination has an annual subscription to Energize - run by Urban Saints. It is a great resource for materials, all free to download, copy and use in our churches for work with children and young people. Just email the church office and you will be given all the information you need to access the website free of charge to make use of this great resource.

The sub-group gives thanks for all those who continue to share the Gospel with and pray for children and young people within our denomination. The commitment of all those who volunteer their time to support the work of the CYPF sub-group and to disciple and support children, young people and families locally throughout the denomination is greatly appreciated. It is imperative that we continue to pray for and help those young people we are blessed to spend time with.

RESOURCING MISSION

The purpose of Resourcing Mission is to help our members, congregations, presbyteries and General Assembly keep the primary mission of the church central, and to give aid wherever possible to assist in the fulfilment of this mission. The words of Jesus remain a costly, urgent and exciting command of the Lord Jesus Christ to his church: "Come, follow me...and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him." Matt. 4:19. It is a reminder to us that proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, summarised by Jesus in the words "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" Matthew. 4:17, is the primary vehicle through which people are saved from destruction and given life in Christ to the full. This is the great mission, the task our Lord and King has commissioned us to participate in, and is why this section of the report begins with this reminder to us all. Central to our obedience and worship of God is our participation in the mission of the missionary God who commissions his church to make disciples. It may be that in order to be faithful in this calling sacrificial decisions have to be made and, for some, a re-prioritisation of what is most important. For

others, the heart is willing but the resources are weak. Resourcing Mission, in this sense then, exists to "disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed" by relentlessly ringing the bell of mission and resourcing churches wherever possible.

Part Time Appointments

Resourcing Mission continues to have oversight of all part time appointments and after the review conducted last year has continued with the same protocol, albeit with the caveat that a Future Ministry Subgroup has been set up to explore various matters related to appointments. More information on this can be found under the section of the report titled "Future Ministry Subgroup". Resourcing Mission would like to express heart-felt gratitude to Rev. Dr. David Miller, Rev. Elizabeth Mackay, Rev. Colin Mackenzie, Rev. Steve Marr, Rev. Sarah Rettie, Rev. Duncan Whitty, Rev. Jerome O'Brien and Mr Sam Parkinson for all the work they do to serve the church in their ministries.

Vision for 2030

During the course of the past year it became apparent to Resourcing Mission that, whilst the acceptance by the General Assembly of "A Vision for 2030" was a positive decision, it meant that careful thought had to be given as to how Resourcing Mission made decisions on any projects brought before it for consideration. The adoption of a Vision for 2030 necessitated the work group create a document to aid in protocol when making any decisions regarding funding for projects so that demonstrably fair and repeatable guidelines could be drawn upon. This required a decision making document to be drafted (found in Appendix A), a process which took up a reasonable amount of the group's time. The hope is that now this document exists there is a clear(er) decision pathway the working group follows, and which also sheds light on why decisions are made as well as how.

The intent of the Vision for 2030 remains the beating heart of Resourcing Mission's remit, and with the good news that Ardeer has been formally appointed a revitalisation project by RM in 2023, that there is the likely possibility of another church being appointed a revitalisation project in 2024, this would bring the total number of churches currently going through a resourced revitalisation pathway up to 3. If the denomination continues on this trajectory of appointing at least 1 new church per year to be revitalised the denomination, at least in this respect, is gaining positive ground. There remains much work to be done, however, and the needs are vast and beyond anything humanly possible. Much prayer, encouragement and godly boldness is still needed.

Churches and Projects

During the past year the Presbytery of the West explored a variety of options regarding Cumnock and Ardeer congregations, including them becoming a linked charge as well as building and funding a ministry team shared between the 2 churches. It was in part because of these proposals that RM recognised the need for through to be given to protocol for decision making that would be fair and repeatable, as well as in line with the Vision for 2030. Once in place, Resourcing Mission made the decision to approve a schedule from Ardeer for full-time ministry and committed to providing the resources necessary to make that appointment a reality. At time of writing Ardeer has been selected as the next formal revitalisation project and, pending schedules and next steps, will be in a position to explore filling the role created. RM was pleased to hear of the progress made at Chryston regarding their collaboration with the Cinnamon Project and was pleased to match-fund a request to appoint a worker for a six months. RM noted that in Aberdeen Torry Ian Hepburn's employment would come to an end

as of the 31st of December 2023. This, in effect, closes this particular chapter of Torry partnering with Resourcing Mission as a formal revitalisation project. RM has spent time visiting Uddingston Park to hear about their encouraging plans to appoint a ministry assistant, and commends Uddingston Park for their foresight and desire to see ministry continuing beyond the inevitable retirement of Rev. Bruce McDowell; the idea of potentially bringing on board someone who might also undertake further training and studies is to be commended. RM continues to partner with Darnley as a formally recognised revitalisation project with continued commitment to supplement stipendiary payments for a total period of 5 years, up to the amount of £5,000 per annum, and RM is encouraged by the reports of growth and vitality emerging from the congregation. If RM would make one point of note for all congregations and presbyteries it would be a reminder that all congregations that receive ministry grants must submit an annual schedule whilst that support is ongoing.

During the past year Croftfoot submitted a schedule asking for assistance in starting up a missional cafe ministry, and with the decision-making document now in place RM were happy to give financial resources of 33.3% towards start-up costs, in line with the guidelines outlined regarding small 2030 vision projects. Please see appendix A for more details. RM was encouraged to receive a schedule from Cathcart for either full-time or part-time ministry which was approved for an initial 5 year appointment. RM also noted receipt of a joint schedule from Carnoustie and Montrose for full-time ministry. During the past year Mr Paul Harkess took the decision to resign from his position as ministry assistant and church planter in Onthank: Kilmarnock. This decision was not taken lightly and was done with the full support of Kilmaurs: Maxwell & Kilmarnock congregation and office bearers, and RM notes that Paul remains an elder at Kilmaurs and committed member of that local church. At time of writing RM intends to visit Kilmaurs office bearers to discuss the future vision for the area.

Church and Manse Building Regulations

Where a congregation is planning to undertake work on their property the permission of Presbytery is required regardless of whether a grant is being requested or not when the work planned is over a certain figure. The Committee in the light of the increased costs involved in such work have reviewed the figures involved and are recommending to the General Assembly that the figures be now set at £10,000 and £5,000 where the congregation is in receipt of funding from Resourcing Mission.

Future Ministry Subgroup

This report is an interim report, the intention of the Future Ministry Subgroup being to bring concrete recommendations to the 2025 General Assembly.

The General Assembly agreed the following in 2023: "the appointment of a "Future Ministry Subgroup" made up of representatives from the 3 General Assembly Committees, created to explore a wide range of matters including tenure, employment, salaries and stipend, manse and tax regulations."

From its very first meeting onwards the Future Ministry Subgroup (henceforth referred to as FMSG) recognised the complexity of the matters it was asked to explore, as well as the far-reaching consequences, but also possibilities. When considering matters of practice and procedure it must be acknowledged that we operate on models we have received from previous assemblies, rooted in historical contexts that helped shape what we have inherited. Much of it has served us well and continues to do so and will continue to do so, but some of it may no longer be applicable or best practice. This is in no way implying the past is wrong but

rather that as time moves on there is a requirement for us to review and, if necessary, renew our practices and procedures. This is particularly relevant given the General Assembly's adoption of "A Vision for 2030", committing to the planting of new churches, revitalisation of struggling churches, and resourcing of healthy churches. Much discussion has already taken place in various committees about how best to go about various aspects of this vision, and whether certain parts of our practice and procedure could be adapted to aid and advance "A Vision for 2030". Central to the discussions of FMSG has been the importance of having systems in place that are flexible. Flexibility, then, has become a key concept. Is it possible for the UF to fully exploit existing procedures and apply them in more flexible ways to better serve the denomination's vision, or do we need to change certain practices to gain the flexibility needed?

As things stand congregations who can afford full-time ministry can only receive full-time ministry. Should this procedure be made more flexible to allow a wider range of ministry options, including team ministries or bi-vocational ministries? Is our current practice regarding the provision of a manse flexible enough to serve our vision, or should time be spent exploring alternative options that still offer the advantages a manse affords for ministry, whilst also recognising that times have changed and so too have the needs of some entering the ministry? Regarding tenure, we have inherited a system that includes both inductions and appointments, but is the context of today and the vision we have for our denomination best served by a model of induction, or does the flexibility of appointments serve our churches better? Currently there is a requirement that all applicants for ministry assistant posts normally be members of a UF congregation for 1 year before applying. Is this procedure still applicable? CLAM has received a procedure whereby grants for ministry are only given to full-time contexts. Should this be changed to include part-time contexts too?

At time of writing the subgroup is awaiting responses from presbyteries which will be used to direct further discussions accordingly. Some of the areas of interest that have dominated discussion within the past year have centred around tax regulations, manse protocols and how best to leverage our current structures to be as flexible as possible for the ever-changing and adapting approaches to ministry emerging in the 21st century. The Subgroup hopes to bring a report to the 2025 General Assembly with suitable recommendations on all major areas touched upon.

GLOBAL FOCUS

Global Focus Working Group Prayer Week - Last year's Global Focus Prayer Week, which took place between 8th - 15th October was, we think, well received but it is difficult to know for sure as we received very little feedback. Following careful consideration, it has been agreed that, in 2024, there will be a shorter prayer focus in October, with the longer Prayer Week reverting to February in 2025.

Mission Partner Terminology - The Global Focus Working Group was asked by CLAM to look at the terminology used to describe Mission Partners who have some kind of link to the denomination but the United Free Church is not their Sending Agency, therefore has no responsibility regarding employment law, finance or oversight of their particular mission focus or location of work There was an extensive discussion looking at a number of issues. Finally, it was agreed that the term 'Mission Partner' would be used to describe the organisations the Global Focus Working Group partners with, currently Flying Mission Botswana, Flying Mission Zambia and the Scottish Churches' China Group (SCCG) while 'United Free Church Mission Associate(s)' would be used to describe retired or working mission staff who have a link with the denomination but, for whom, the United Free Church has no employment oversight.

Lebogang - In June 2023 we received notification that the Lebogang Project was being suspended for the foreseeable future. There were a number of reasons for this and it was, obviously, a decision that was taken by African Havens and Flying Mission Care after various attempts to change and modify the programme had been unsuccessful. As the Global Focus Working Group had already sent some funding for Lebogang we were asked if this could now be redirected towards the Kgatelopele Tuition Programme. This provides educational support to youngsters from the Old Naledi area of Gaborone. Despite Old Naledi being one of the most deprived areas of the city this programme is having great success in changing the lives of students attending it. It opens up new options for these youngsters and is helping to break the cycle of deprivation for many.

E-Update - The monthly E-Update has, again, proved to be a very useful tool in sharing information, insights and prayer points, from Global Focus Working Group partners and United Free Church Mission Associate(s). The regularity of the E-Update has enabled the wider Denomination to keep abreast of ongoing situations that impact on the work and witness of mission partners and mission associates. Repeatedly we have heard from partner organisations and mission associates how important it is to them to know that they are being faithfully supported in prayer by so many people in the United Free Church.

Rerotlthe Day Care Centre (provides pre-school children in a remote part of Botswana with day care and a feeding programme) - The Global Focus Working Group was encouraged to hear that the Board of Rerotlthe are actively seeking wider financial support from local government in Botswana. They will also have a Peace Corp volunteer based with them during this year. All of this helps to take some of the financial burden off of Global Focus who are continuing to reduce the grant which is given to the centre. This reduction is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, it is never good practice to build a culture of dependency with a partner project. Secondly, Global Focus simply does not have the resources to continue with that level of grant. Flying Mission Botswana are being informed at each stage of the reduction in funding giving them time to look for alternative sources of finance.

Photo Competition/Calendar - Once again, we were delighted with the outcome of the Photo Competition and Calendar. The winning entries, as before, formed the basis of a stunning calendar of which just over 400 were sold. It was very encouraging to know that, not only were they used as gifts, but also as a way of sharing the Gospel with family, friends and neighbours. The sum of £2,570 was raised for Open Doors and we received this from their donations team, 'we are just so grateful that you have considered Open Doors to receive the proceeds of your competition. Thank you and your Church's support and prayers for your persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.'

Due to circumstances the funds raised from the sale of the 2023 calendar were only handed over to Nanjing Rainbow in November 2023. Again, they were extremely appreciative of the support.

2024 Photo Competition/2025 Calendar - The original decision to close the competition in August was based on the assumption that people would submit photos they had taken during their summer holidays. This has not proven to be the case with many of the photos taken some years before. This being the case, there is no requirement to stay with the original timeframe and a new timeframe was agreed upon:

competition would close in early April with judging taking place mid-late April.

winning photographs would be submitted for layout in early May

completed calendar would be checked mid-May

printing to take place at the end of May meaning the calendar would be available to be sold at Ladies Day, the General Assembly and the Lendrickmuir Day.

Conclusion

The Global Focus Working Group would like to thank Mission Partners and Mission Associates for taking the time to keep us updated on their work and witness in such a wide variety of settings. Our Christian mission, here in Scotland, can receive and learn so much from the world -wide family of God. The Global Focus Working Group is very aware that this is an additional task that the Partners and Associates need to build into already busy schedules and is grateful for the dedication to keeping the Group and the Denomination updated.

In the name of the Committee,

NATHAN R OWENS
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APPENDIX 1

Resourcing Mission Decision-Making Priorities & Processes Document

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Preamble

Whilst the Resourcing Mission Group is aware of its responsibility to ensure the continued support of ongoing ministry where necessary, this document is not intended to consider this responsibility. Resourcing Mission has a limited budget, several ongoing commitments and is regularly called upon to provide assistance to many missional projects. This document, then, is specifically designed to set out the decision-making priorities and the criteria that Resourcing Mission will follow to guide it in deciding upon the projects that are placed before it for consideration.

Decision-Making Priorities:

1.1 Vision 2030. Resourcing Mission prioritises ministries and projects which clearly fit within the General Assembly's Vision for 2030. This means church plants, revitalisation projects and the resourcing of 'hub' churches will normally take priority of access to funding over more "traditional" models of ministry and projects. Is the request for funding to establish a new church? Is the request for funding to revitalise a struggling church with the expressed permission and buy-in from the congregation and presbytery? Is the request for funding going to strategically benefit a stronger church in order for them to help other churches and ministries in the presbytery?

1.2 Observation. Resourcing Mission will prioritise ministries/projects where there is evidence of the Spirit already moving and/or a clearly expressed desire on behalf of the congregation for real change in a direction in line with a Vision for 2030.

1.3 Context. Resourcing Mission will consider the context of the congregation and request for resources. Has the church received funding/support in the recent past? Has the church had meaningful full-time or part-time ministry in the recent past?

If multiple churches approach Resourcing Mission for aid then the amount of ministry/funding/support churches have had may be considered. For example, it could be that a church which hasn't had an established ministry nor access to funding in recent years is given priority access over a church which has. A project from one or more congregations may be considered, as well as an approach from a single congregation.

1.4 Criteria. In most instances, and within the context of our Presbyterian government, healthy churches are self-governing, self-replicating through disciple making, and self-funding (amongst other things). We recognise that there are many excellent churches where God is at work, which do not meet these criteria. Church health is difficult to assess and is in a spiritual sense evaluated only by the Holy Spirit, not human metrics. Nonetheless, RM will look for

funding proposals which offer concrete plans for growth in these three areas. We will look for proposals possibly leading to an increase in disciples and potential future church leaders. We recognise such growth takes time, and that the way God works is not always the same or linear.

This means that two sorts of projects will not be favoured. First, projects primarily focused on social or community activities outside the church without a close connection with the life of the local church or a clear potential for contributing to the making of disciples within the church. Second, projects which request funding merely for a 'caretaking' style ministry. Asking for funding primarily for pastoral care or maintaining the ongoing Sunday worship are not the sort of projects we are seeking to fund, unless there is a proposal for how a new approach to pastoral care or Sunday worship will enhance the three features of healthy churches listed above.

Community, charity, or social work outside the church and ministry focused on maintaining Sunday worship and caring for congregants are wonderful. However, projects focusing only on these things without a clear path for how such ministry contributes to church health are not the sort of project RM will aim to fund given RM's remit which is helping to revitalise and plant healthy churches.

Decision-Making Processes:

For projects which require 'active involvement' - seeking denominational resources for additional staffing, church planting etc. - Vision 2030 projects are distinct from situations with more traditional charges. This means it is not Resourcing Mission's main priority to simply extend or "top up" more traditional ministries

2.1 Flowchart of Progress:

Congregational approach to Presbytery - are all relevant documents and schedules prepared?

Presbytery - does the project have Presbytery approval?

Presbytery approach to Resourcing Mission working group

2.2 Follow Up by Resourcing Mission:

Resourcing Mission may wish to visit a congregation to gather further information. Discussion should take cognisance of the RM Project Decision Discussion Sheet (Means/Motive Opportunity). Resourcing Mission Finance sub-group should be offered the opportunity to make comments.

2.3 Documents:

The following documents are normally needed as part of the decision making process:

A covering letter or statement outlining the desired project including any relevant information that might help Resourcing Mission make a decision. This should include a clear statement of the vision of the project, including an assessment of where the church is currently regarding the vision, where the vision takes them, and how they intend to get there.

Resourcing Mission Schedule

Latest Annual Congregational Report

A cogent and up-to-date summary of the congregation's finances

A Congregational Profile

To help facilitate this process Resourcing Mission can make available the following documents:

Resourcing Mission Schedule

Resourcing Mission Decision-Making Priorities & Processes document

Resourcing Mission Project Decision Discussion Sheet

2.4 Resourcing Mission Meeting Dates & Closing Dates:

There are now 2 "thresholds" or closing dates for new Vision 2030 project applications. Autumn and New Year allow fairness for applications to be considered across the denomination and to avoid a 'first come, first served approach'. The closing dates for

applications are the 1st of January and 1st of September on an annual, rolling basis. This then allows Resourcing Mission to have 2 meetings after each deadline date to take any action and make any decisions.

Normally Resourcing Mission will meet at least 4 times per year - In September, November, January and March.

2.5 Funding Guidelines:

Large Vision 2030 projects - In terms of funding, a large project is normally one costing over £10,000. A typical funding model used throughout churches and charities is a '1/3/3/3' model, where the church contributes a third, the denomination/governing body contributes up to a third, and the final third is obtained via external funding. In light of this RM will normally fund up to 33.3% of a large Vision 2030 project. However, it may be that an extraordinary situation or project arises where RM decides to go above the ordinary level of funding.

Small Vision 2030 projects - In terms of funding, a small project is normally one costing under £10,000. Again, RM will follow a typical funding model whereby the church contributes a third, the denomination/governing body contributes up to a third, and the final third is obtained via external funding. In light of this RM will normally fund up to 33.3% of a small Vision 2030 project. However, it may be that an extraordinary situation or project arises where RM decides to go above the ordinary level of funding.

It will be observed that, whilst the funding level in respect of both types of projects is the same, it being stated in this document allows the Group to amend and adjust the levels as time and circumstances dictate, whilst still allowing for variation in the event of exceptional circumstances.

2.6 When a Decision is Reached:

If permission is not granted by RM, a letter explaining this with feedback and the offer of a visit is given. Consideration should be given for a process for re-submission for applications, or for a new application from a congregation.

If permission is granted, there should be annual reviews (even if the project is being supported for a time period e.g. three years). A 'core group' involving Presbytery and RM members should be considered for support and for more regular meetings and accountability, especially in church planting situations. RM should be involved in the recruitment of the staff appointment(s) and should have an appropriate 'induction' into how a Reformed, Presbyterian church operates.

At a point before the agreed RM support ceases, a review takes place involving the means/motives/opportunity process, a copy of the financial situation and a new 'congregational profile' highlighting the progress and achievements made/any change to the original vision submitted.

CLI - Appendix I - Conversion therapy

Letter sent by the 'Let us pray' (www.letuspray.org.uk) coalition to Emma Roddick, the Equalities Minister by various church leaders expresses some of the concerns:

We write as church leaders and pastoral workers to express our concern about plans for a legislative ban on so-called conversion therapy:

As Christians, we are commanded by Christ to love our neighbour. Therefore, we strongly oppose abusive and coercive practices and we support the use of existing law to protect all people from verbal and physical abuse.

Our concern is that the kind of conversion therapy law which the Scottish Government is being advised to introduce is not about protecting people from abuse. It is about targeting the orthodox belief and practice of Christian churches.

Holyrood's Equalities Committee and the Government's Expert Advisory Group on Ending Conversion Practices both called on the Government to model its legislation on the conversion therapy ban currently in force in the Australian state of Victoria. The campaigners whom the Scottish Government is seeking to satisfy refer to the Victoria ban as the "gold standard".

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is one of the bodies responsible for enforcement of the ban. In guidance issued to church leaders, the Commission specifies state-sanctioned language for prayers and pastoral conversations. It requires that religious people must only pray in a way that affirms everyone as "perfect as they are". It says that prayers that "talk about a person's brokenness or need to repent", or which "ask for a person to not act on their attractions", are harmful and therefore likely to be illegal.

No sincere Christian may in good conscience deny the historic faith in this way. It is a central tenet of the Christian faith that every human being is not "perfect as they are". In the Lord's Prayer we ask God "to forgive us our sins" and "lead us not into temptation". Praying the Lord's Prayer with a person who identifies as gay or trans in Victoria could - under the kind of ban you are being asked to legislate - lead to an accusation of unlawful conversion therapy.

This demonstrates the problem that the Scottish Government will face should it push ahead with plans for a Bill on 'ending conversion practices'. It is not possible to satisfy the demands of pro-ban activists whilst also protecting basic religious freedoms.

We do not think the Government will be able to avoid criminalising aspects of the ordinary work of churches and we urge you not to proceed with a Bill.'

Appendix II - Modern Day Slavery & Human Trafficking

The issue of historic slavery has come to particular prominence in the last few years and its echoes persist on. Yet whilst it is relatively easy to condemn historic slavery it is in danger of missing the sad truth that slavery is not merely an historic construct but is very much a present reality for many in the world today, not least in the UK. There may be much to be said for looking at this historically, but it must not take our eyes off the pressing issue of present sufferings.

What perhaps inhibits a clear look at the issue is that, for better or worse, it is intrinsically tied into the wider issue of immigration, whose current focus is singularly on numbers on boats, without offering a clear perspective on the 'who' of, not simply immigration, but asylum seekers and the underbelly of trafficking.

There is a very clear biblical perspective to be had on this issue, not least because it is from the Bible's perspective that we acknowledge the intrinsic worth of every individual, being made in the image of God. But more, from the perspective of the end of all things, we see where value lies when in Revelation the outcomes of Babylon and Jerusalem are seen.

The new Jerusalem is to be glorious and the home of righteousness. Babylon as depicted in Revelation 18 has a very contemporary feel to it even as the divine Woe! is pronounced. The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no-one buys their cargoes any more - cargoes of gold, silver and bodies and souls of men.

Human trafficking which is tied to the slavery question denies people their God-given dignity, personal opportunity, and hope. Slavery is not a problem of history but an urgent issue for today. Such an abhorrent act demands a response. The Church has a biblically mandated responsibility to care and seek justice for the most vulnerable in our society.

Though there is mention of slavery in the Old Testament laws, three things need to be said clearly. The first is that chattel slavery is not within those laws, though far from unknown in the rest of the world in which they lived. The second is the attitude to both slaves and to refugees is one of openness and care. The third is the consistent reminder of Israel's own slavery. They were to be a people recognising the liberty that was theirs through the grace of the saving God. A number of biblical texts from the law point both of these things up.

Deuteronomy 23: 15 If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. 16 Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him. Or in Deuteronomy 24: 17 Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

However, from a Christian perspective, the language often used in the discussion of these issues is not helpful to a proper, balanced and caring approach to these intertwined issues. This results in the desperate needs of especially asylum seekers being submerged underneath a general view of immigration. Such an approach actually tends to make easier the work of traffickers because it provides no safe routes of asylum; and easily demonises asylum seekers so that "disappearing" within the country seems best, which leaves them open to the abuse of modern slavery.

The complexity of the problem

The greatest difficulty in even understanding the problem, let alone seeing clearly the way through, is the way in which these are interlinking and interwoven issues: slavery itself, human trafficking and very particularly, the sex trade. All stamped on top of the wider issues of immigration and asylum. However, it is also important to separate out the issues of asylum from immigration generally from trafficking. Though interwoven they should not be confused.

The legislation currently in place in Scotland and in England/Wales is: a) Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 and b) Modern Slavery Act 2015

Both Acts have been undermined recently by the Illegal Migration Act 2023 (better known as the 'Small Boats Bill'). Because of this new legislation potential victims of human trafficking

are entitled to no support from the state unless they are British nationals. Those who are not British will be immediately detained and deported.

There must surely be a concern for the welfare of vulnerable individuals who may, even unintentionally, be harmed by being trafficked through changes to the law.

One of the key problems that Scotland, England and Wales share is that purchasing people for sex remains legal. This effectively leaves a welcome mat out for those wishing to traffic people for the purposes of sexual exploitation e.g. prostitution, which is one of the dominant purposes of human trafficking. Northern Irish law, on the other hand, criminalises the purchase of sex and is therefore much more robust.

The broad reach of modern day slavery

Whilst it has to be faced that slavery is a fact within modern day Britain, it is also true that British people, even Christians, can contribute to slavery more widely by the drive for the consumption of cheap goods, where we may not consider the conditions under which workers in say, Bangladesh are working whilst we purchase cheap clothing. The same is true of some kinds of electrical and technology goods from other countries.

Likewise, more broadly whilst people may feel they have no direct involvement in the sex trade or the exploitation of vulnerable women, the disturbingly wide accessibility and use of pornography, again even within the church, is not harmless in any sense.

It is a complex issue, but one in which vulnerable human lives are at stake with nowhere to turn. Two immediate things that could be done: first to learn more about the subject. Skim through some of the articles in <https://care.org.uk/cause/human-trafficking>

Second: Could you support a Christian organisation that works with those rescued from trafficking and exploitation and put forward individuals who would be willing to become trained to serve in a restoration programme for them?

Appendix III - Assisted Suicide

What does the Bible say about death and dying?

The Bible tells us that when God created human beings, death was not part of the picture. Death entered the world as the result of human rebellion against God (Genesis 3). It is an impostor in God's creation.

Death is not the end of existence, nor is there an endless cycle of reincarnation. The Bible says that people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). There are only two possible destinies for us - to live with God forever in the new world that is coming, or to be eternally separated from him in hell. But the Christian hope is that by God's grace we can look forward to a future after death beyond our wildest imaginings, secured for us by Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf and received through repentance and faith (Romans 10:9-10).

Our destiny is to be with God forever in a new world with "no death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4), clothed with new bodies like Christ's own resurrected body (Philippians 3:21) and reunited with our fellow believers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

These beliefs about death have profound implications for the way we all live and the way Christian doctors should practise medicine. We will recognise the inevitability of death and dying as part of the human condition. We will also recognise that death is not the end of our existence and that choices and decisions made in this life will have profound consequences for our destiny in the next. We will also be clear that although Jesus healed many people he did not come primarily to empty the hospitals. He came to empty the graveyards! As Christians we recognise therefore that a person's greatest need is not restoration of physical health but restoration of a broken relationship with God. Jesus graphically asked what profit there would be for someone to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul (Mark 8:36).

Life and death are in God's hands

The creation narrative tells us that human beings are unique in being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and it is on this basis that God declares murder punishable by death (Genesis 9:6-7). Human beings, being made in the image of God, are not to be unjustly killed. Note that these are principles given to all humankind. All human beings belong to God (Psalms 24:1) and all human beings are accountable to God and will one day face judgment (Revelation 20:11-15, 21:8, 22:14, 15).

The prohibition against killing legally innocent people is later formalised in God's covenant agreement with his chosen people Israel in the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). But what does this mean? The English language has a confusion that is not present in the original text. There are in fact ten Hebrew words translated "kill" in the (Authorised Version of the) Bible, all with different shades of meaning, but only one of them is implicated in the sixth commandment, the word *ratsach*. Its Greek equivalent is *phoneuo* and its most accurate translation is murder (NIV). The meaning of the word is further defined in four main passages in the Pentateuch (Exodus 21:12-14; Leviticus 24:17-21; Numbers 35:16-31; Deuteronomy 19:4-13).

These passages resolve any ambiguity for us and leave us with a precise definition of what is prohibited, namely the "intentional killing of an innocent human being." This means:

Intentional killing is wrong

The sixth commandment forbids intentional killing. Anyone killing another human being unintentionally was able to flee to a city of refuge where he would gain some protection. However this "manslaughter" provision applied only in very limited circumstances: "For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbour to cut wood, and as he swings his axe to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbour and kill him" (Deuteronomy 19:5). Killing resulting from negligence was not excused as unintentional (Exodus 21:29). Neither was killing "in hostility" even if not necessarily premeditated (Numbers 35:21).

The commandment forbids the killing of an innocent human being. In the Old Testament God authorised or permitted killing in three situations: in the context of holy war, for capital offences and in proportionate self-defence (Exodus 22:2). There were over twenty capital offences ranging from murder to contempt of court. In these situations the Israelites had the obligation of carrying out the judicial killing as God's representatives. The self-defence provision only operated if someone who had broken into a house after dark intending to commit a crime was killed by the owner while protecting his family and property.

God only authorised the killing of the guilty. The shedding of innocent blood is uniformly condemned throughout Scripture (Exodus 23:7; 2 Kings 21:16; Psalms 106:37,38; Jeremiah 19:4).

We must not become confused here with legal, psychological or social definitions of murder. The Bible does not support the conclusions others have argued that murder is "the killing of a human being unlawfully with malice aforethought" or killing with "a feeling of ill-will" or "illegal killing inimical to the community." It is rather the intentional killing of an innocent human being.

Euthanasia clearly falls within this biblical definition. There is no provision in the Bible for killing on grounds of diminished responsibility (on the basis of age or illness) and there is no provision for compassionate killing, even at the person's request. Similarly, there is no recognition of a "right to die" as all human life belongs to God (Psalms 24:1). Suicide (and therefore, assisted suicide) is a breach of the sixth commandment, and it is not surprising therefore that throughout the Bible, suicide is either viewed without comment, or is viewed negatively (Job 2:9-10; Matthew 27:1-10; Acts 1:16-20).

Only God has the authority to take human life. He points us to a better way, offering hope, love and compassionate care.

Principles

What principles can we draw from the Biblical material to help us decide about end of life issues such as euthanasia and assisted suicide?

-The sanctity of human life Human beings are made in God's image; life is a gift of God and he is sovereign over our lives. We are not totally independent, autonomous beings but are dependent on God, on other human beings and on our environment. We flourish through relationships of mutual give and take, care and dependence. Human worth and dignity do not depend on any capability or attribute such as consciousness, intelligence, ability to communicate, full bodily function or physical perfection, but on our being made in God's image. The congenitally deformed baby, the deeply unconscious accident victim, the dementia sufferer, the terminally ill person, all deserve the full protection of the law as human beings and full acceptance, respect and necessary care to the very end.

- The duty to preserve life to its natural end The prohibition on the taking of human life implies that we must do all in our power to preserve life, while recognising that the time does come when death must be allowed to supervene. We do not have a duty to try to prolong life indefinitely. Good medical practice recognises when the natural limit to a life has come. Allowing death to supervene by ceasing burdensome curative treatment while continuing supportive and palliative care is not euthanasia. The intention of stopping the treatment is not to kill the patient but to relieve suffering. It is the disease that kills the patient. Our times are in God's hands and he is sovereign over our lives and our time of death.

- The duty to relieve suffering and pain We cannot eliminate suffering from this fallen world, but we can do much to alleviate it. God has enabled human beings to discover the wonder of modern medicine, especially good palliative care, to ease the burden of dying. Christians have been in the forefront of pioneering palliative care through the Hospice movement (e.g. Dame Cicely Saunders at St Christopher's Hospice, London). Widespread availability of good palliative care has been shown to reduce the demands for euthanasia in individual cases.

Reasons for the demand for euthanasia

Traditionally the medical profession (since Hippocrates) and the Christian church have been against euthanasia. Following the dreadful atrocities of the Nazi era, there was a revulsion against euthanasia, which had been widely used by the Nazis to eliminate what they considered undesirable elements in the population - "life not worthy of life". However, there are various factors which have led to an increasing demand for it to be legalised since the late twentieth century.

In recent years the main argument for requesting the legalisation of euthanasia or assisted suicide has shifted from humanitarian compassion for those with intolerable suffering to the "right to die". This is encapsulated in the name of a recently formed campaign group, My Life, My Death, My Choice.

1. Modern humanistic thought stresses individual autonomy and the right of the individual to choose when, where and how life should end, rather than leave it in God's hands or be dictated to by the medical profession. Thus, if a person cannot face the prospect of prolonged weakness, pain or loss of independence, he should be allowed to ask for his life to be ended and all assistance given to him. It is claimed that it is the individual's right to decide when his/her life is no longer worth living and to demand help to end their life if they cannot do so by themselves. It is fear of the process of dying rather than death itself that motivates people to campaign for euthanasia. These fears are centred not only on intolerable pain but on various losses - of independence, of dignity, of enjoyment in usual activities, of control of bodily functions.

When we look at actual reasons for requesting assisted suicide under the State of Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, often held up as model for legislation, we find that pain is far down the list. In 2015 218 lethal prescriptions were written and 132 people died from their ingestion. Of these, 96.2% cited as their concern loss of ability to engage in enjoyable activities, 92.4% loss of autonomy, 75.4% loss of dignity, 48.1% being a burden to family, friends/caregivers, 35.7% loss of control of bodily functions, 28.7% concern about inadequate pain control and only 2.3% cited financial concerns.

2. The concept of quality of life has led to the belief that the severely disabled infant, people with persistent vegetative state or with locked in syndrome, the terminally ill sufferer may be

regarded as not having a quality of life sufficient for them to be kept alive, and this is thought to justify euthanasia. The problem with this is the difficulty of deciding what is an acceptable quality of life. Who is to take this decision on behalf of the child or adult incapable of taking the decision for themselves?

3. The increasing cost of health care, coupled with the possibilities of modern technology to prolong life, has made the question of prolonging life more difficult. Many people do not want to be a burden on their relatives or the Health Service. Euthanasia is cheaper than ongoing care of the terminally ill. Others question the ethics of prolonging a life which has outlived its usefulness when the resources used could be better spent in other ways.

4. Common misunderstandings of end of life health care contribute to the seemingly high rate of approval for so called assisted dying in opinion polls. Many people have had experience of seeing dying people suffering greatly and they don't want that to happen to them. They do not seem to be aware of the great advances in palliative care which have revolutionised the care of the dying. Some people mistakenly think that nowadays people are being artificially kept alive by interfering doctors. A common view is "When my time comes, I just want to go; I don't want to be kept alive too long." When people are confronted with the question, Do you think the law should be changed to allow people dying in unbearable pain and weakness to have help to end their lives? it is no wonder they say Yes, because they have not been given the option of considering effective palliative care.

5. In recent years some dissident voices in the church have argued that we should approve of legislation to allow euthanasia or assisted suicide. For example, the Roman Catholic theologian Professor Hans Kung has written in favour of legalising euthanasia on the basis that "the all-merciful God, who has given men and women freedom and responsibility for their lives, has also left to dying people the responsibility of making a conscientious decision about the manner and time of their deaths." More recently Rev Scott McKenna of the Church of Scotland has spoken out in favour of assisted suicide. He argues that for 2,000 years the church has misunderstood God and his will for human beings. He wants us to "move beyond the theology which says that God alone will choose the hour of death and what kind of suffering is to be endured and for how long. God has given us moral responsibility, the gift of choice, along with sense, reason and intellect. We are to use our gifts and leave behind a theology which portrays God as distant, brutal and unloving." Quite apart from this caricature of the view of God as held in the historic creeds and confessions of the church and based on Biblical teaching, the picture of human autonomy is more influenced by post-Enlightenment human-centred thought than by the teaching of the Bible.

How do we respond to these arguments for euthanasia?

1. We have already seen that from a biblical perspective none of us is absolutely autonomous. We are familiar with all sorts of limitations on our autonomy in daily life. We are dependent on other people and on our environment. Our decisions affect not only ourselves but others. If I decide that, because of my advancing Multiple Sclerosis, my life is no longer worth living, I am implicitly devaluing the lives of others with a similar or even worse condition. Such a decision would be a denial of human solidarity and does not accord with Christian love. It is noteworthy that there is a strong anti-euthanasia movement among disabled people. One of the ways in which we realise our full humanity is in learning to accept care without subjective loss of dignity. This in turn reaffirms the dignity of the care giver. It is sad that campaigners for euthanasia claim that intentionally ending one's life is the best way to die with dignity. It is impossible for us to lose our inherent dignity as humans made in God's image.

2. The concept of quality of life is difficult to measure and inevitably has a subjective basis. One young man with tetraplegia from a rugby accident went to the Dignitas clinic in Zurich to end his life, which he could no longer face, while another with a similar condition is now teaching youngsters how to play rugby more safely. This highlights the inconsistent nature of the restrictions in assisted suicide legislation.

3. Some people make a case for euthanasia on the grounds of altruism. They don't want to be a financial or emotional burden on others and they think that the money spent on them would be better spent on other things. However high sounding this may seem, the argument is dangerous. The danger of manipulation of disabled, dependent or dying people from financial motives is very real.

4. There are various subsidiary arguments that can be used against the legalisation of euthanasia to convince those who do not share our Christian beliefs.

(1) It is difficult to frame a law which is specific enough and has sufficient safeguards to prevent abuse. Usually such laws are internally inconsistent. If the main argument for euthanasia is autonomy, why confine its provisions to particular classes such as the terminally ill? Why should it not be available for any who find their lives intolerable for any reason? Once suicide is seen as a human right it becomes difficult to argue for its prevention.

(2) The tendency of the scope of such laws to be broadened imperceptibly shows how difficult they are to control once the initial consensus against euthanasia is breached. Figures from Oregon, whose Death with Dignity Act is held up as a model, show that only 70% of people who died under the Act in 2016 had malignant disease, while 30% had more long term degenerative diseases. In Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium the scope of conditions qualifying has been extended with the passing of time and the overall numbers continue to grow. This indicates a cultural change, in that once the law is changed, some form of euthanasia becomes much more widely acceptable as a "treatment option" for long term and terminal conditions.

5. It is important that people be made aware of the realities of good end of life care in order to alleviate their fear of dying in uncontrollable pain. Physical suffering can be adequately alleviated in all but the rarest of cases, with up to 95% of patients having their pain and/or symptoms effectively relieved when treated by healthcare professionals with the relevant expertise. Similarly, patients with an illness such as motor neurone disease (a serious progressive neurological disorder) are often afraid of choking to death. But studies from the most experienced hospice units have demonstrated that, with appropriate palliative care, this virtually never happens. In addition, the administration of short episodes of sedative drugs can be considered as an appropriate alternative, when persons are in the dying stages, to manage distress and restlessness. This can happen when patients are often barely conscious as a result of their disease (not because of the drugs) and are no longer capable of consciously working through their issues. In this case, palliative care helps patients (and sometimes also their families) by calming their terminal agitation. Usually, the treatment is a matter of gradually increasing the level of drugs according to effect. However, there are occasions when a patient is very agitated and rapid use of large doses of drugs is essential for the safety and comfort of the patient and others. There will always be rare occasions where a patient's symptoms cannot be

completely controlled. Often these are patients who cannot resolve an issue or cannot cope with a symptom, such as with severe breathlessness. Some may also have significant psychological and/or spiritual distress which they find difficult to resolve. Indeed, almost all patients with symptoms which cannot be completely controlled have elements of this distress which is not recognised as physical. These individuals, who are already drowsy and dying of

their illness, may then request some form of sedation to relieve the burden of such suffering, in which case it may be possible to manage their distress and agitation without side effects. In other words, drugs are administered and monitored to induce a state of decreased or absent awareness (unconsciousness) in order to increase comfort in the dying process rather than, in any way, shortening life. It is very unusual for palliative care to have to use continuous sedation to keep a lucid patient asleep in order to address intolerable physical and/or mental distress. Sedating people deliberately to deal with their suffering is a very rare occurrence in the UK. Of course, it is important that patients with difficult symptoms are not promised complete relief since this is beyond the realm of medicine. In this regard, it should be noted that palliative care does not only seek to work in the area of medicine since it also endeavours to provide non-clinical support and the right environment for patients to express and work through their distress. Very few patients request euthanasia when their physical, emotional and spiritual needs have been adequately addressed.

6. In response to arguments for euthanasia based on Christian theology, those cited above have too limited a view of God's sovereignty and too expansive a view of human autonomy to be convincing. Of course, God has given us freedom and decision making responsibility, but only within the compass of his revealed will. We dare not arrogate to ourselves the responsibility of ending our lives by our own decision or asking others to end our lives for us. The main response we should make as Christians is to stress that Christian love demands that we do our utmost to promote and support good palliative care, which should be made universally available in general hospitals and in the community, and not just in specialised units such as hospices. We have a message of hope in Christ that gives a motive for selfless love and care and for the humility to surrender our lives to God when he calls us home.