

## REPORT OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2019

### INTRODUCTION

Being a small denomination, the United Free Church may be like a small fish in a large ocean when it comes to tackling issues that are impacting on society today. However, by working with others it is possible to make a big difference and the Church and Society Committee is pleased to be associated with the organisations and groups that are mentioned in this report.

As well as continuing to look at issues relating to refugees, dementia, loneliness and isolation, the Committee has been considering the two issues raised at last year's General Assembly, namely gambling and funeral poverty.

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)

There have been no significant developments with regard to this legislation at the time of writing.

#### Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill

This is a Bill for an Act of the Scottish Parliament to make provision about authorisation of the removal and use of part of the body of a deceased person for transplantation and other purposes; and for connected purposes.

The primary purpose of the Bill is to introduce a soft opt-out system of organ and tissue donation for deceased donors. The Bill would amend the existing Scottish legislation that supports donation—the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006—by introducing a new additional form of authorisation called “deemed authorisation”. In practice that means that, if a person was not known to have any objection to donation, donation may proceed.

Deemed authorisation would apply to most adults from the age of 16 who have not otherwise explicitly opted in or opted out of donation. However, the Bill contains safeguards aimed at ensuring that donation will not proceed if that is not what the person would have wanted. The Bill also provides safeguards for those adults who lack the capacity to understand deemed authorisation and for adults who are resident in Scotland for fewer than 12 months—neither will be subject to deemed authorisation.

In February this year MSPs agreed the general principles of the Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill.

#### Proposed Changes to Civil Partnership Legislation

The Scottish Government consulted on the future of civil partnerships in Scotland. The consultation had two options. The **first option** would be to make provision laying down that no new civil partnerships can be entered into in Scotland from a set date in the future. Existing civil partners could remain in their civil partnerships if they wished and would continue to enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as at present. The **second option** would be the

introduction of opposite sex civil partnerships. Opposite sex civil partnerships would be along the same lines as same sex civil partnerships.

The Committee responded to the consultation with the view that as same sex marriage was now legal there was no need for civil partnerships.

### Scottish Government Hate Crime Legislation

The Scottish Government consulted on Lord Bracadale's recommendations as per his review on Hate Crime Legislation. The Committee made a response to some of the questions in the consultation highlighting concerns raised if Hate Crime Legislation was changed in light of the recommendations.

## **DEMENTIA CARE**

In August, one of the workshops at Dunblane was led by Andy Lowndes on Playlists for Life where music is used to help people living with dementia.

Playlist for Life wants everyone with dementia to have a unique, personal playlist - all the tunes that are most deeply attached to their memories and emotions, gathered together in one place. More than 20 years of scientific research has shown that listening to a personal playlist can make living with dementia easier and happier.

There is material available promoting the Playlist for Life concept and Playlist for Life has also appointed someone to work with communities to encourage people to make use of their services.

Tommy Whitelaw, awarded the British Citizen Award for services to healthcare in 2015, was a full-time carer for his late mother Joan who had vascular dementia. He has become a passionate, committed and determined advocate for people living with dementia and their unpaid family carers. There are a number of videos such as 'Tommy on Tour', available on YouTube, where he talks about his experiences as a carer and about his mother living with dementia, which are insightful and really worth watching.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Following last year's General Assembly, the Convener wrote a letter to Clare Haughey MSP, Minister for Mental Health, stating that the General Assembly supported the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Campaign "Going to Be". A response was received thanking the General Assembly for their expression of support for SAMH. The letter also indicated that Scottish Ministers strongly feel that there is a need to improve their Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and they have been working closely with SAMH commissioning them to produce an audit of CAMHS in Scotland.

## **GAMBLING**

A letter of support was sent to Tracey Crouch MP as she had resigned as Sports Minister after being angered by a delay in the introduction of a cut to the maximum stake for fixed odd betting terminals (FOBT).

Following its original decision to reduce the maximum stake on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) the UK Government confirmed it would enforce a new ruling from April 2019. After that cut off point, customers of betting shops around the UK are now restricted to a £2 max bet – a significant reduction from the original figure of £100.

The Committee has considered the Paragraph of Deliverance No 8 of the 2018 General Assembly, that is:

**'The General Assembly recognising current attitudes in society to gambling, ask the Church and Society Committee to examine the issues that arise as a result in the life of the church and to report to the next General Assembly.'**

In 1977 the General Assembly re-affirmed what the position regarding gambling had been. In the General Assembly Deliverances it records 'the Church's objection to all forms of gambling and enjoin Kirk Sessions to discountenance the raising of money for Church purposes by means of raffles and other games of chance', following a similar deliverance given in 1976. This was added to in the deliverance at the General Assembly in 1995 by once again re-affirming their conviction that 'gambling in any form may have harmful effects both to the individual and to the family unit and urged all Church members to abstain from such activities including the National Lottery'.

In 1997 there was a deliverance focusing on the National Lottery where the United Free Church of Scotland not only reaffirmed its opposition to the National Lottery but encouraged Christians everywhere to have their hearts set on treasure in heaven rather than on earth, and urged them not to participate in the Lottery but, for the sake of the nation, to encourage others not to be involved in the Lottery and to urge the Government itself to abandon the Lottery.

In the 2004 report of the Committee of Ethics and Current Affairs it highlighted that the lottery appeals to the selfish and greedy part of our nature and attention was drawn to various portions of the Scriptures that are so diametrically opposed to this. At the 2004 General Assembly agreed the following Deliverance:

1. 'The General Assembly believing that the practice of gambling appeals to the baser aspects of mankind's nature and is contrary to God's will, re-affirm their opposition to gambling in any form and urge all members to abstain from such activities including the National Lottery and associated scratch-cards.'
2. 'The General Assembly recognising the calling of the Christian Church to function as salt and light to the world, recommend to Congregations and Committees of the Church that they do not apply for grants to the Good Causes Fund of the National Lottery.'

In recent years there has been a dramatic shift in the way that gambling has become increasingly socially acceptable. There has been a proliferation of lotteries, prize draws and games in which people are able to gamble, particularly in the media and online. There has also been a significant increase in advertising relating to one form of gambling or another, while there has been a big emphasis put on the 'good causes' that many lotteries, raffles and scratch-cards support. So should the United Free Church change its approach to gambling in 2019?

It is still the case that it is often the poor who spend more money on the lottery and other forms of gambling, instead of using it to care for their dependents, as they see it as a chance for a quick fix in their situation but, more often than not, it only leaves them further impoverished. It is the children in families cursed by gambling addiction who suffer the most.

The "Young People and Gambling Report 2018" by the Gambling Commission reveals that over the last year there has been an increase in the percentage of 11-16 year olds who gamble and an increase in the percentage who are classified as problem gamblers. There has also been concern expressed in the media that more young people are buying scratch-cards and being more exposed to advertising relating to gambling.

With the price of many lottery tickets, scratch-cards, raffle tickets, etc. being similar it is hard to argue that one form of gambling to raise funds is acceptable when another is not, even when the odds of winning may be so different.

The Church and Society Committee therefore sees no reason for the United Free Church to change its position on gambling and if the Church is going to be able to stand for what it believes in, then congregations need to be prepared not to use the likes of raffle tickets, tombolas and other games of chance to help raise Church funds.

The Committee very much regrets that it can be difficult for organisations, charities and other groups to obtain funding without having to consider looking for support from the 'Good Causes Fund' of the National Lottery or another lottery fund. Governments have abdicated their responsibility of providing funding. It is a form of indirect taxation, which disproportionately affects the poorest in our society. With this in mind, congregations should not be seeking any lottery funded grants. This re-affirms the position held by the General Assembly when this matter has been considered in the past. In God we trust, there are other ways of raising the funds that a congregation requires.

### **FUNERAL POVERTY**

The following paragraph was accepted at last year's General Assembly:

**'The General Assembly ask the Church and Society Committee to consult with other Churches and relevant groups with a view to raising awareness of the growing problem of funeral poverty and to encourage the Scottish Government to continue taking action to alleviate the suffering this causes.'**

To tackle funeral poverty, the Scottish Government has published a Funeral Costs Plan, which commits to ten actions and a summary can be found in Appendix 1.

The first Inspector of Funeral Directors in Scotland, Ms. Natalie McKail, was appointed in July 2017. The first report was published in August 2018. This has involved a review of the funeral profession with a view to making recommendations to the Scottish Ministers on how it should be regulated, including whether to introduce a licensing regime.

The Convener attended a round table meeting arranged by Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office and a government staff member involved in producing guidance on funeral costs. At the heart of the funeral costs draft guidance is ensuring that consumers are aware of the full array of cost options when arranging a funeral, to ensure that decisions are as informed as possible. However, there was some concern expressed at the meeting that in the draft guidance there had been little acknowledgement of what churches and ministers do that can help to reduce funeral costs. In February this year an analysis of the consultation on the draft guidance was published.

The Committee has been made aware of the website "beyond.life", which enables users to compare the costs involved in planning a funeral. Users can input the area they live in and the services they wish and then receive a comparison on what is available locally.

The Committee has been involved in producing the following three leaflets to provide information for church members and, hopefully, to be shared with people in their communities:

- "Moving On From This World – Have You Thought About Planning A Funeral?"
- "Bereavement – A Word For Those Bereaved"
- "Bereavement – How We Can All Help"

The Committee thanks the churches of four denominations in Dundee for allowing it to adapt their leaflet "Have You Thought About Planning A Funeral?" as a basis for the United Free Church version. The U. F. version is in a format that should allow churches or Presbyteries to include local information before printing.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge that the leaflets on bereavement are based on an article written for 'Stedfast' by the late Rev. Robert G. Lindsay B.D. of the United Free Church.

The Scottish Government has also produced a booklet "Planning Your Own Funeral" (published in August 2017) and is available by following links at [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot).

## **LONELINESS AND ISOLATION**

Following consultation, the Scottish Government have produced its first strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and build stronger social connections. The Minister for Older People and Equalities, Christina McKelvie, has stated that the intention is to use the Strategy to bring together the different parts of Government that can make a real difference in this area. But there is recognition that the biggest impact can only be delivered if communities themselves play their part.

The strategy has four priorities:

Priority 1: Empower communities and build shared ownership

Priority 2: Promote positive attitudes and tackle stigma

Priority 3: Create opportunities for people to connect

Priority 4: Support an infrastructure that fosters connections

The Church and Society Committee asked congregations to feedback any initiatives they have introduced to provide support in this area with the intention of sharing these through an article in 'Stedfast'.

## **REFUGEES / SCOTTISH FAITHS ACTION FOR REFUGEES**

The Umeed Bakhsh Family are Christians and have been living in Glasgow for more than six years since fleeing from Pakistan. Church leaders and representatives wrote to Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Home Secretary, to urge the Home Office to intervene and allow this family to stay in this country. The Moderator, Mr John Cross, added his name to this letter.

The Committee sent a letter to Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, to express the Committee's serious concern following the announcement by Serco of their intention to remove families and individuals from their homes in Glasgow who they say have been denied asylum by the UK Government. A similar letter was sent to Mr Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Planning.

Mr. Ian Buchanan continues to represent the Committee on Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees and the SFAR report is found in Appendix 2.

## **CHRISTIAN AID SCOTLAND**

Christian Aid Scotland supports individuals, partners and churches to stamp out the global scandal of poverty, which robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, as well as power over their own lives. Through their international, humanitarian and advocacy work they tackle both its effects and root causes.

Christian Aid aims to inspire people of all faiths and none to challenge the root causes of poverty through fundraising, campaigning and awareness raising. Representatives speak about Christian Aid's work in churches, schools and youth groups. They support volunteers and campaigners to take action against injustice. They also organise events and host visitors from their partner organisations.

The Christian Aid report is found in Appendix 3.

### **SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION**

Scottish Churches Housing Action (SCHA) brings together the main Churches in their work to eliminate homelessness in Scotland. SCHA develops volunteering at a local level to help homeless people. They encourage the use of church property for much-needed affordable homes as well as linking local problems of homelessness with national means of tackling them.

The Committee is most grateful to Rev. Ann Purdie as she continues to represent the United Free Church on the SCHA Committee.

The SCHA report is found in Appendix 4.

### **WORK PLACE CHAPLAINCY SCOTLAND**

Work Place Chaplaincy aims to offer relevant pastoral and spiritual support to people where they are – in the setting of their daily work and individual lives. The chaplains come from a variety of backgrounds, some from church leadership and chaplaincy backgrounds with others from industry, education and commerce.

More about their work and the challenges faced are given in the report found in Appendix 5.

### **SCOTTISH CHURCHES PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE**

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) is a multi-denominational organisation which exists to build fruitful relationships between the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government and religious groups in Scotland. It also supports the churches' engagement with the UK Parliament and Government.

The SCPO Advisory Group is made up of representatives from different denominations and it allows them to consider current parliamentary issues, topical briefing papers, Church responses to government consultations and, on occasions, arrange meetings with MPs and MSPs. The Committee is represented on the SCPO Advisory Group by Mr. Ian Buchanan.

The SCPO provides advice and support to individuals, groups and churches and the Committee very much appreciates this continuing support.

The SCPO report is found in Appendix 6.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONS**

The following contributions were made in 2018:

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	£2250
Scottish Churches Housing Action	£2250
Work Place Chaplaincy Scotland	£1000
Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees	£500
TOTAL	£6000

### **CONCLUSION**

The Committee wishes to thank the Rev J O Fulton, General Secretary now retired, and Mrs Helena Jarvis for the enormous amount of work that they have undertaken on behalf of the Committee throughout the year and wishes John a happy retirement blessed by God. The Committee also appreciates the time and effort that Mr. Bill Cairns gives to representing the Committee on the Church of Scotland Church & Society Council.

In the name of the Committee

IAN D. BUCHANAN	Convener
ELIZABETH MCNAUGHTON	Vice-convener
MARTIN C KEANE	Clerk

