

JOINT PUBLIC ISSUES TEAM Newsletter 3. February 2007

COMMISSION ON INTEGRATION AND COHESION

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church and United Reformed Church have made a joint submission to the Government's Commission on Integration and Cohesion. This followed a consultation by the three denominations in which people were invited to share their experiences and views on what makes for a harmonious society in which all people can flourish, and what faith communities, local authorities and government can do to bring this about. To see the full submission and recommendations visit www.jointpublicissuesteam.org.uk or ring Alice Lundsten on 020 7467 5248.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION REGULATIONS

Regulations will be introduced very soon for England, Scotland and Wales that make it illegal to discriminate against someone on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services. A number of religious groups organised protests at similar regulations for Northern Ireland which were introduced earlier. Opponents fear that the regulations will restrict their ability to act according to their beliefs, preventing commercial enterprises such as hotels from refusing homosexual customers. The Catholic Church sought exemption from the regulations with regard to its adoption agencies. The Baptist and Methodist Churches responded to the Government's original *Getting Equal* consultation in June 2006. The Methodist response is on their website (www.methodist.org.uk) or ring Alice Lundsten on 020 7467 5248 for a copy. The Baptist response is available on request from Graham Sparkes at Baptist House (01235 517728; gsparkes@baptist.org.uk). The Joint Public Issues Team has prepared a factual briefing on the current position (see www.jointpublicissues.org.uk).

ASSISTED DYING

The United Reformed Church is currently debating the issue of assisted dying for the terminally ill. Church members have been encouraged to respond to a questionnaire; in some cases local congregations and districts have held meetings to discuss the issue. The 120 responses received to date suggest there is very little support for legislation that would empower medical staff to intervene in ways which deliberately seek to assist a patient to die. However, there is a strong feeling that there is a time to die and there are circumstances in which it would be wrong to continue to provide treatment designed to prolong life, regardless of cost. There is also a strong view that good quality palliative care needs to be more uniformly available and that medical staff need more training in this discipline. Recommendations regarding Church policy will go to the URC General Assembly, meeting in Manchester in July. The Report, together with a study guide, will then be available to churches. More details from Wendy Cooper on 020 7916 8632.

POST OFFICE REORGANISATION

The Department for Trade and Industry is currently consulting on the reorganisation of the Post Office network (deadline 4 March 2007). This has been widely reported in the media as a preamble to massive closures of rural post offices, with warnings of the effects this could have on community and village life. See www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/page36024.html. Graham Jones (Methodist-URC Rural Consultant) is undertaking conversations with the Post Office and with the Church of England to investigate options for churches to accommodate Post Office facilities.

VOTES FOR PRISONERS

A response to a government consultation of whether convicted prisoners should be given the right to vote, is being prepared on behalf of the Churches. The URC Church and Society committee has approved the idea that, in principle, they should, because it is a basic human right and because it would encourage a sense of civic responsibility, among people who often feel marginalised and have a poorly developed sense of responsibility. The consultation is by the Department for

Constitutional Affairs. See www.dca.org.uk . More details regarding the Churches' response, from Stuart Dew on 020 7916 8632.

POLITICAL EXTREMISM

The Methodist Church has produced draft guidelines for churches in areas which are represented by councillors from extreme political parties. Ministers and lay people can experience difficult issues around offering pastoral support to these councillors, being asked to rent out rooms, and being invited to co-operate in community campaigns. The guidelines draw on statements made by the Churches on the incompatibility of the promotion of racism and religious intolerance with our Churches' social witness, biblical teaching and understanding of the love of God for all people. The Methodist Church is seeking responses by the middle of March to these draft guidelines which will then be made available to all churches. To see the proposals and comment on them visit www.jointpublicissteam.org.uk, email politicalaffairs@methodistchurch.org.uk or write to NM31 Consultation, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.

GAMBLING AND THE SUPER-CASINO ANNOUNCEMENT

Niall Cooper, Co-ordinator of Manchester-based Church Action on Poverty, condemned the decision to locate the UK's first super-casino in the city as 'a threat to worsen the city's already poor record on debt and child poverty' (see www.church-poverty.org.uk). The Methodist Church and Salvation Army have challenged the Government and the gambling industry to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of the social and economic impacts (see www.methodist.org.uk >news, >news stories 30 January).

PROTEST AGAINST TRIDENT REPLACEMENT - Saturday 24 February

Demonstration in London organised by Stop the War Coalition, CND and the British Muslim Initiative, starting at 12 noon from Speaker's Corner, ending with a rally in Trafalgar Square. For further details visit www.stopwar.org.uk . Prior to the march, there will be a service for Christians of all traditions at 10.30 am at Hinde Street Methodist Church, London W1U 2QJ (10 minutes walk from Speaker's Corner). For further details visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk .

SET ALL FREE

Worship resources for use on 25 March, 200 years to the day that the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed, are available to download from www.setallfree.net (select 'resources' > worship materials). Also included are prayers and reflections to use on other dates through the year. Go to the 'What's on' section to register your event and/or find out what's happening in your area. Look out for a major focus in the media, and commemorative postage stamps, featuring six of the abolitionists, to be issued on 22 March.

JUSTSHARE DEBATES

1.05-1.55 pm at St Mary-le-Bow Church, Cheapside, London EC2V 6AU: **Tuesday 27 February - 'Global Poverty: the Empire Strikes Back'** - examining the root causes of poverty in the world today; speakers: **Wilf Wilde** (political economist and author), and **Andrew Britton** (former director, National Institute of Economic and Social Research). **Tuesday 6 March - 'Treasure in Clay Jars: the Church and Her Money'** - The Church of England's approach to investment and the ethics that surround it; speakers: **Eve Poole** (academic) and **Neville White**, (Manager of SRI funds CCLA and secretary to the CofE Ethical Investment Advisory Group). JustShare is a coalition of churches and agencies. www.justshare.org.uk

LIFESTYLES - One person's lifestyle: another person's life

Ecumenical World Development Consultation, **21-23 March** at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Places are still available for this conference focusing on concern for natural resources, use of wealth and attitudes to growth and wealth, and how we respond practically through personal lifestyle choices, campaigning, theological reflection and worship. For details/booking form contact Alison Blick: 020 7691 9867; alison.blick@urc.org.uk or download booking form from www.ecocongregation.org/englandandwales/downloads/LifestylesEWDC.pdf .

CONTACT

THE JOINT PUBLIC ISSUES TEAM newsletter is distributed through existing denominational mailing lists. If you are reading a copy that someone else has given you, and you would like to be added to the mailing, or if you have any other queries, contact Wendy Cooper wendy.cooper@urc.org.uk tel. 020 7916 8632. 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT.