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THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Church & Society Council Newsletter

Issue 4 | APRIL | 2010

Happy Easter from the Church and Society Council General Assembly 2010



Church to Speak Out on Big Issues

Church and Society Council Executive Summary

This year the Church of Scotland will speak out and debate some of the big issues facing our society: poverty, ethics in scientific research and campaigning...

Follow the link below to read the Church and Society Council summary and find out what topics will be discussed in May.

[Read the summary>>](#)



Photo: Alexander van Dijk

Synthetic Biology

New Discussion Starter Leaflet

The Church of Scotland is one of the first churches in the world to examine the ethical issues raised by the development of artificial life - known as synthetic biology. We have produced a short leaflet summarising the pros and cons of synthetic biology. It explains what it means and includes questions to trigger debate and discussion in small groups.

The leaflet can be downloaded from our website or copies ordered by phoning or emailing our office.

[Download the leaflet here](#)

Council
Convener:
Ian Galloway



IN THIS ISSUE

Annual Day Conference

Where?: Stirling. When?:
September 11. Theme?: Justice.
Put the date in your diary.

Stevenson Prize

Meet the 2010 winners of the competition for schools at the General Assembly.

Happy Birthday SRT Project

Celebrate 40 years of the Society, Religion and Technology Project at this year's General Assembly.

The Sanctuary Pledge

Help make the UK a place which provides sanctuary for people fleeing from persecution.

Restoring Faith in Democracy

Ensure your MPs are held to account for what they do on your behalf.

Eco-Congregation Scotland

There is a steady growth in membership as it achieves charitable status.

SRT@40 Day Conference

Book your place: Edinburgh City Chambers, 1 May, Outstanding speakers.

Science Stories

Easter holiday activity: stories for 7 to 11 year olds about scientific breakthroughs.

God Science and Global Warming

Lecture by Sir John Houghton.

Worship Resources

Links to worship material relating to the Reformation.



Photo: Neil T

Poverty

Around 950,000 people in Scotland currently live in poverty: 19% of the population. For our children this startling statistic rises to 25% living in poverty. These statistics do not give a full picture of the effect that poverty and inequality have on Scottish society, but they indicate a clear priority for practical congregational action.

The report being presented to the General Assembly takes a look at individual stories and explores how successful projects which are linked with congregations have developed, what have been the triggers and what have been the challenges. The report contains the personal stories of men and women living with the implications of poverty and the work of projects and congregations deeply engaged in the fight against poverty. The main intention of the report is to encourage congregations to tackle local poverty as a practical priority.

Keep In Touch

Find out more about the issues that the Church and Society Council is involved in. Please begin or continue discussions on our Facebook Group, comment on the blogs and email us with your news, suggestions or questions.



Website



Email



Facebook



Blogs

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Full email articles are below:

Annual Day Conference



This year's theme will be **Justice**

I want justice — oceans of it. I want fairness — rivers of it.
Amos 5:24 (The Message)

Our free day conference will take place on Saturday 11 September in Stirling. Please put the date in your diary and watch this space for further information.

[Back to Top](#)

Stevenson Prize



General Assembly Event

Monday 24 May

12.30pm

Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2JL

The Church and Society Council organises an annual competition for schools to encourage good practice in the fields of Religious Education and Religious Observance. The Stevenson Prize is awarded to the secondary, primary and special school winner of this competition.

You are invited to come and meet this year's prize winners over a sandwich lunch. Children and staff from the 3 winning schools will show examples of their work before being congratulated at the General Assembly and presented with prizes of £500.

[Back to Top](#)

Happy Birthday SRT Project



General Assembly Event

Tuesday 25 May

12.30pm

The Foyer, New College, Mound Pl, Edinburgh, EH1 2LX

Come along and help us celebrate 40 years of the Society, Religion and Technology project, which continues to help the church engage with ethical issues in science. Lunch is provided and there will be the launch of a free booklet describing the history of the SRT project.

[Back to Top](#)

The Sanctuary Pledge



Britain has a proud history of providing sanctuary to people fleeing from persecution and tyranny, but that tradition is under threat. In recent years the rise of extremist politics, media scare stories, and high profile failings by the Home Office have led to this issue becoming a political football. Yet over two-thirds of the public still think it is important that the UK provides sanctuary to people fleeing persecution.

'The Sanctuary Pledge' is a campaign to encourage ordinary citizens - like you - to convince your political representatives to sign the Sanctuary Pledge at the 2010 General Election.

Please help us to rebuild support for sanctuary.

Find out more: [Sanctuary Pledge](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Restoring Faith in Democracy



The General Election is a great opportunity to ensure that politicians take account of the real issues that affect ordinary people. That, after all, is why we elect them!

One of the keys to restoring faith in democracy is to ensure that the MPs we elect at the General Election are held to account for what they do on our behalf in Parliament. Churches can play a key role in this task. But holding MPs to account is not something to be done only once every five years!

Discussions are in progress to extend this campaign to include MSPs

Please join Church Action on Poverty's 'MP Accountability Network' which provides support, advice and briefings on topics to raise with your MPs:

Follow this link to find out more:

[MP accountability Network](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Eco-Congregation Scotland



Eco-Congregation Scotland is now officially a charity! At the annual gathering held in Stirling Baptist Church on 20 March 2010 it was announced that the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) has agreed that Eco-Congregation Scotland meets the Charity test and is now registered as a Scottish charity, number SCO41287. This follows its incorporation as a company at Companies House in Edinburgh. The company is now setting up a board of directors to oversee the continued growth of the movement across Scotland.

239 congregations are now signed up members and this total is growing steadily.

For further information see the Eco-Congregation Scotland website:

[Eco-Congregation Scotland](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Day Conference: Society, Religion and Technology Project



Day conference marking 40 years of the Society, Religion and Technology Project.

Saturday 1 May 2010, 10am to 4pm, City Chambers, Edinburgh

£10 registration: lunch and refreshments included

Ethical issues at the beginning and end of life

A renewed role for nuclear power in the UK

Technology, e-Government and the citizen

To download a flyer and book this conference please visit:

<http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/councils/churchsociety/csnews.htm#srt>

[Back to Top](#)

Science Stories



Friday 16 April, Scottish Storytelling Centre, High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SR

2 – 4pm, Age 7-11

£6/£4, Family ticket £16 (4 people)

Human creativity in science and technology has been celebrated and sometimes feared in many myths. Come and listen to stories where

scientific and engineering breakthroughs are mixed with imagination. With storytellers Virginia Cano and William Docherty. Sponsored by: Science, Religion and Technology Project, Church of Scotland and St Mungo's Museum, Glasgow.

To book: Phone the box office on 0131 556 9579

In person: The Centre's box office is open Monday-Saturday, 10am-6pm.

[Back to Top](#)

God, Science and Global Warming



15 April, 7pm, Edinburgh University School on Informatics

What is the role of science in humanity's response to the ecological crisis? The former co-chair of the Nobel Prize winning International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), John Houghton discusses one of the major issues facing us today and what role faith has to play in it.

This lecture has been sponsored by the Society, Religion and Technology Project as part of the SRT@40 events.

[Click this link to book through the Edinburgh International Science Festival](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Worship Resources



This year the General Assembly will celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. Here are some links to websites relating to worship during the reformation.

A service of worship with the theme of continuing reformation in the Church:

www.mtcarmellutheran.com/frenz/reformation2008.html

From the Presbyterian Church USA an explanation of and commentary on the regular Sunday morning service (with Communion) in Reformed churches: www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/worship/lordsday.pdf

For an historical description of what happened in worship at the Scottish Reformation, see the Baird Lectures website: www.bairdtrust.org.uk (Go to 'Baird Lectures 1955' W.D.Maxwell)

[Back to Top](#)

Church and Society Council Executive Summary

[Full Article]

Parish Action

The Council's work is grounded in its interaction with local congregations. It is hoped that this year the Council can begin to achieve having a representative in every congregation, ideally some-one other than the minister as that both shares the load and speaks of the whole people of God.

Media and Communications

The Council has significantly increased its use of digital media which has allowed it to be more accessible, more effective in its communications and more able to speak with an authentic, 21st century voice.

Science and Ethics

Economics Commission

If ever there was a time for a fundamental look at what and who our economics is for it is now. Following last year's report, the Council held three conferences with some very high profile speakers and some challenging workshops. A supplementary report will lay out the proposed remit for a two year commission that will provide a unique space in Scottish Civic life for a fundamental discussion about what we need our economic system to do for everyone, not just those who know how to make it work for them.

Assisted Suicide

With a Bill coming before Parliament which would allow assisted suicide, the Council has been at the forefront of the political debate on this issue based on the 2009 report entitled End of Life Issues. A

supplementary report will give an up to date account of what's happening on this issue and what we can all do about it.

Synthetic Biology

Synthetic Biology is the cutting edge of scientific research, so cutting edge that in some ways it is difficult to define and has a whole new language! That's why we have a glossary and why it is a difficult subject to comment on. But comment we must as it raises age old questions about what we mean by progress, how we add an ethical dimension to debates about risks in scientific investigations and whether knowing how to do something means we should go ahead and do it.

Society, Religion and Technology Project 40th Anniversary events

This is a significant milestone in the life of a project that adds a great deal to our life as a church and our capacity to comment on some tough issues in society.

The report also includes a commitment to continue to work on Mental Health issues and Micro Credits.

Caring for the Earth

Responding to Climate Change Project

This section reports on the work of the Climate Change project and its not inconsiderable achievement in putting the Church at the heart of this issue in Scotland. In particular, the amendment to the Scottish Parliament's Climate Change Scotland Act which now puts a statutory duty on Scottish Ministers to publish a public engagement strategy. The report covers the Assembly's 2009 instruction to Presbyteries to produce plans to reduce carbon emissions by 5% which is now being put into effect. The report also records the success of Eco-Congregation Scotland and its successful progress towards becoming a charitable company.

Societal Issues

Congregational Responses to Poverty and Debt report

The credit crunch has thrown the effects of poverty and debt into sharp relief and congregations across the country are looking for ways to respond. Congregations cannot change global economics but can help their own communities. Through real examples and theological reflection, this report helps give the direction that might well make the difference in other congregations taking that leap in faith and making that difference.

Travellers

Travellers' communities have been excluded and discriminated against for too long. At times the institutional church has been part of that exclusion and discrimination. The Council is committed to working ecumenically towards a common response to a difficult part of our history as a church.

Politics and Government

Parliamentary office

The Council hosts and manages the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office on behalf of 11 denominations. It is a key component of the Council's ecumenical work. The monthly update on parliamentary activity is highly regarded by more than simply the Church community. This report also covers work on the General Election, constitutional issues, the campaign on alcohol pricing and the living wage, Parliamentary visits and indicates the bills that the SCPO was asked to do specific work on by one or more denominations as well as giving an index of responses made to consultations.

Peacemaking

Following the debates at the 2009 Assembly, the Council agreed to produce a paper on Christian campaigning and whether in particular it was ethical to break the law in an act of civil disobedience as part of that campaigning. This paper outlines the arguments for and against and concludes that it is acceptable but only in specific situations and after careful thought, prayer and reflection. It also includes a commitment to continue dialogue with Military Chaplains.

Education

This section gives details of a new Master's module in Religious Observance created and delivered by the Council in partnership with Glasgow University and the Scripture Union. There are 26 students on the first course. It also outlines new work on resourcing religious and moral education, the Stevenson Prize and support for School Chaplains.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs

The European ecumenical dimension of the Council's work no longer involves supporting a paid staff member but it is still very relevant to its agenda. In particular the rise of the far right in Europe is a cause of considerable concern and one that the Council continues to monitor closely. The report also gives three examples of the Council operating ecumenically in the delivery of its core activities: Racial Justice, FE

Chaplains and Travellers. The work of the Joint Faiths Advisory Board on Criminal Justice continues to be very practical and influential.

International Issues

Afghanistan

This report asks four questions about the conflict. What are the benchmarks now being used to define success given that the war in Afghanistan is now 8 years old?

- What are the indications that the present elected structures have brought any sense of stability to Afghanistan?
- Is this yet another sign that any commitment by nations to the UN does not include relinquishing the right to attack another country without reference to the collective international view?
- What role has the Church in encouraging and even facilitating alternative approaches like the traditional Afghan method of bringing as many leaders as possible from the ranks of opposing forces into a general assembly or Loya Jirga in order to actively take part in conflict resolution and the negotiation of a cease-fire? It commits the Council to lobbying for political answers and working with others to develop a position on a conflict that is in danger of seriously affecting global stability.

China

This section explains why, after some careful reflection and ecumenical conversation, it was felt that the time was not right to bring a full report on China to the Assembly.

International Development and the Financial Crisis

If ever there was a time to reach out to the poor of the world, it's at a time when the rich world is itself struggling. Global unemployment will reach 241 million; another 120 million will be reduced to living on less than \$2 a day. With some key changes to the global tax regime which stop multi national companies avoiding tax in developing countries, those countries could begin to recover. Arguably there has never been a more opportune time to establish systems to support sustainable sources of revenue for developing countries. If international policymakers take the right measures now, not only could they reduce the chances and severity of another crisis, but they could also kick away a major structural cause of poverty.

[Back to Top](#)

Church and Society Blogs



There are a variety of blogs that you can visit and bookmark:

[The Convener's Blog](#)

The (not so private!) thoughts and opinions of Rev. Ian Galloway, convener of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland.

[Eco-Congregation Scotland Blog](#)

Eco-Congregation Scotland is an ecumenical programme endorsed by Action of Churches Together in Scotland.

[End-of-life Issues Blog](#)

This blog examines a variety of issues surrounding the end of life debate.

[Addicted Lifestyle Blog](#)

This blog discusses issues relating to addiction within our lifestyle. This includes shopping (i.e. consumerism), addiction to games and betting as well as alcohol and drug addiction.

[Back to Top](#)