

# Council on Social Responsibility

The Council on Social Responsibility (CSR) seeks, on behalf of the Connexion, to undertake informed study and analysis of a range of social, political, economic and constitutional issues. It attempts to consider such issues with theological insight and to provide realistic and practical recommendations for action.

The Council operates through northern and southern executives and their respective reports are printed below.

At the full council meeting in November 2003 under the guidance of Rev. David Kerr the Council had the opportunity to explore the possible direction of the council and in March 2004 the officers brought proposals to the full council meeting. After further discussion proposals with changes in the structure and working practices of the council were agreed.

There are three main objectives:

- Greater co-operation between the northern and southern executives , working together to produce joint reports.
- Effective communication with local churches and individuals
- Greater involvement of members with specific areas of expertise and interest. The council would co-opt members on to working parties to consider specific issues.

## **Connexions**

These are the proposed changes to the structure of the Council under Connexions

### **Officers**

Northern and Southern executives with ministerial convenors and lay secretaries

One treasurer

Term of office 5 years, and may serve for a maximum of two terms

Both lay secretaries and treasurer will be members of conference

### **Membership**

President, President Designate, Secretary of Conference

Ten members appointed by conference for each executive

Balance of lay/ministerial, age and gender

One young person <26years on each executive, appointed on a yearly basis in consultation with DYCW.

There will be one full council meeting held each spring with each executive hosting the meeting alternate years.

The officers will meet in November and as necessary to discuss ongoing work.

There will be greater communications between the executives, the minutes of both executives to be circulated to all members of Council.

One member in each executive will take responsibility for overseeing one area of interest and prepare responses to consultation documents.

The membership will remain unchanged for 2004-2005 and district representatives will have responsibility for compiling database of lay people with specific areas of interest and expertise and encourages local societies to identify a lay contact for the council.

### **Suggested areas of interest**

- Environment/ rural/ agriculture
- Health / medical ethics
- International affairs
- Politics/ government
- Social welfare
- Young people / education

There will be occasions when other issues will be identified and could be added in the short term.

In all areas of work the Council need to take account of the specific needs of all members of society, for example young people, elderly, those with disabilities and from different ethnic groups.

Conferences and workshops may be used to facilitate two-way communication on specific issues.

The Council will create and maintain web pages on the redesigned website for the Methodist Church in Ireland. This will provide a point of contact with CSR and reports will be made available online.

The Council ask that each society will appoint a lay contact person for CSR.

The Council will develop means of communication and co-operation with other connexional committees and other churches and voluntary agencies.

The Council will consider the feasibility of the appointment of a paid officer to work for CSR and other connexional committees.

## **REPORT OF THE NORTHERN EXECUTIVE**

The Northern Executive has spent a lot of time this year responding to consultation documents. Under the equality legislation the Executive are asked to comment on diverse issues many of which bear little relevance to the church's work. Responses have been submitted to the following:

The Shared Future document

Five Year Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan.

Pathways for change: resourcing the voluntary and community sector.

### **Political Situation**

The forthcoming European election in June provides the opportunity for parties to further set out their stalls to the electorate and it also offers the electorate to consider again which party best represents their interests and which parties are most likely to bring about the restoration of devolved partnership government.

In the absence of the much desired political break-through, normal politics is suspended and it is left to the various commissions and semi-accountable bodies to maintain the semblance of political

activity. In this regard, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the various mechanisms for its accountability with the public remains centre stage. The Northern Executive abhors any attempt by anyone or any organisation to threaten members of the Policing Board and, more particularly, the District Police Partnerships. The Executive wishes to commend all these public servants and to uphold them in our prayers.

The Executive awaits, with anticipation, the next draft of the Human Rights Commission's Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The Commission, under the quiet, authoritative and sensitive chair of Professor Brice Dickson, would appear to the victim of its own independence. It seems to be squeezed by governments who are serving their narrow vested concerns and by political parties who use every opportunity to political point score. It is a matter of regret that a number of Commissioners who do not attend meetings refuse to resign. Furthermore, it is a matter of considerable disappointment to discover that Commissioners who have served their term of office have not yet been replaced.

### **Healing the wounds in Northern Ireland**

In December 2003 representatives of the Methodist church participated in the Church Initiative Group's two-day conference under the title "Dealing with the past." This report has not yet been published.

The final report on A Shared Future: a consultation document on improving relations in Northern Ireland written by Knox & Darby has been published

([www.asharefutureni.gov.uk/knox.doc](http://www.asharefutureni.gov.uk/knox.doc))

Appendix A is a discussion document prepared by David Clements.

### **Youth Culture**

Self harming appears to be more prevalent among young people as a way of dealing with difficult emotions or circumstances in their lives. An article was published in the Methodist Newsletter to highlight the need for greater awareness and understanding of the problem. DYCW have already addressed the issue in training of youth workers.

The Northern Executive undertook a survey of 189 young people attending the Autumn Soul event in November focused on the concerns of young people and their opinions about the church's responsibility to address social issues. A paper reporting on this survey is attached as appendix B

### **Inter-church pack on Homelessness**

The Simon Communities in Ireland launched the Churches Pack on Homelessness in the Triad Centre, Armagh in March. A worship anthology centred on homelessness was prepared by Rev. Dr. Munce for use on Social Responsibility Sunday.

### **Children are unbeatable**

The Northern Executive received a request to consider supporting the Children are Unbeatable Campaign. The aims of the campaign are

- A change in the law giving children the same protection as adults.
- To promote positive parenting

Over the next months we will consider this issue further before making a decision to sign up to the campaign. There are questions as to whether changes in the law are required to give children

better protection. The Executive fully support the provision of positive parenting programs which enable parents to use effective and caring discipline to their children.

### **Asylum Seekers & refugees**

Over the past year there has been an increase in the number of asylum seekers and refugees coming to Northern Ireland. The Northern Executive condemns the recent racially motivated attacks in South Belfast resulting in some members of the Asian community who had been living there for years deciding to leave. The churches have condemned the continuing detention of asylum seekers in Maghaberry prison. The race relations committee of the Presbyterian Church have published a report "Policy on Asylum Seekers and refugees" which the Executive asks conference to recommend. ([www.presbyterianireland.org/pdfs/asylumpolicy03.pdf](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/pdfs/asylumpolicy03.pdf))

## **REPORT OF THE SOUTHERN EXECUTIVE**

The Southern Executive has been dealing with the following matters during the past year. While these have arisen primarily from concerns in the Republic of Ireland, most of them equally apply to the situation in Northern Ireland.

### **Environment**

Following on from the report to Conference in June 2003, the Southern Executive are seeking to identify and work with a number of local congregations, undertaking pilot projects. These would involve these churches undertaking actions selected by them, probably using selected parts of the CTBI 'Eco-Congregation' scheme, or material from the Church Ecology Link, as a framework. Indications of interest have been made by about eight congregations to date, both North & South.

### **Bioethics**

Having been considering this topic for some time, the Southern Executive have now prepared an overview document outlining our suggested approach to the main topics which give rise to ethical and moral concern at present. This will be used as a discussion document within the Connexion during the coming year, with a view to bringing a finalised version to Conference in 2005.

### **Simon Communities Project on Homelessness**

The Southern Executive would urge Conference to endorse the recently issued Churches Pack on Homelessness, issued by the Simon Communities in Ireland, and encourage its use by local churches.

### **Weapons Trade from Ireland**

The Southern Executive is concerned about the evidence of a growing trade in weapons related or 'dual-use' goods from Ireland. As Conference has expressed in the past, the Executive again emphasise the belief that international weapons trading (both legal and illegal) is a major facilitator of war and instability world wide, and should be stopped.

### **Other topics**

- **Sexuality:** The Southern Executive has commenced a study of issues of sexuality. The focus will be on a 'theology of sexuality', and drawing out some implications and conclusions derived from that

- **Spirituality of Older People:** The Executive are planning a consideration of issues relating to the spirituality and spiritual insights of older people
- **Suicide:** While the main project relating to the production of the suicide book is now complete, the Executive continue to be involved on an ongoing way with this topic.
- **Multiculturalism:** The Executive continue to be involved with this question, seeking to influence public opinion and national policy, and to help coordinate thinking and to share experiences within our own church structures. It is intended to seek to pull together these experiences and lessons from throughout the Connexion in ways that can help other societies adapt effectively as they progress towards being more multi-cultural in their membership.
- **Alcohol Abuse:** The Executive are deeply concerned about the growing evidence of alcohol abuse, and the social problems, and indeed crime, arising from that. We intend to make a submission to Government about this, in conjunction with the other main churches, in particular calling on both Governments to urgently adopt policies that address this issue.

## **Agenda**

1. The conference adopts the report of the council.
2. The conference recommends that the attention of our people be drawn to our Social Responsibility standards on the first Sunday in Lent, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2005 or on a Sunday as near to that date as local circumstances permit.
3. The conference recommends that Creation Sunday be observed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2004, or on a Sunday as near to that date as local circumstances permit.
4. The conference recommends that racial Justice Sunday be observed on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2004, or on a Sunday as near to that date as local circumstances permit.
5. The conference receives the report "Healing the Hurts in Northern Ireland", commends it for discussion and encourages the Council to take this work further.
6. The conference receives the report "Youth Matters" as a resource paper for discussion and encourages the Council to take this work further.
7. The conference receives and recommends the Inter-church Pack on Homelessness prepared by the Simon Communities of Ireland and encourages its use by each minister.
8. The conference welcomes the report "Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees" by the Race Relations Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The Conference recommends it as an excellent resource for discussion and study.
9. The conference receives the proposals for changes to the membership structure and working practices of the Council on Social Responsibility and gives permission for the Council to begin implementation of the changes in the incoming year.

The appointment of officers and committee are listed below, to be presented en bloc with the other appointments.

The conference re-appoints the officers as follows:

Rev. Dr. Frederick L. Munce as General Ministerial Secretary of the Council, Dr. Gwyneth Hinds as General Lay Secretary; Mrs Carol O'Bryan as General Treasurer; Mrs Heather Gandola as Treasurer, Southern Executive; Rev. E. Rosemary Lindsay as Ministerial Secretary; Mr. Robert

Cochran as Lay Secretary, Southern Executive and Dr Gwyneth Hinds takes over responsibility as Lay Secretary, Northern Executive.

The following are the members of the council for the ensuring year:

The President, the Secretary of Conference, the President Designate.

Two officers of the Home Mission Department and one each of the General Education Fund and of the Department of Youth and Children's Work.

The secretaries and Treasurers of the Council.

*District Representatives:*

Revs. Dr Kenneth Wilson, John W. Purdy, Daphne M. Twinem, T. H. Samuel McGuffin, J. Trevor Jamieson, David G. Neilands, Robert Wallace, David Clements, Mr. Anthony Walsh, Mr. Arthur Guest, Miss Patricia Donald, Mr. John Gibson, Mrs. Audrey Dickson, Mrs Catherine McCarten, Dr Clifford Hall, John Gilpin

*Elected by conference:*

Revs. Dr. S. Wesley Blair, Ruth Craig, A. Desmond Gilliland, Harold G. Good, M. Elizabeth Hewitt, J. Henry F. Keys, Dr. Johnston McMaster, Ivor N. Owens, Kenneth J. Robinson, Dr. Norman W. Taggart, Dr. Sahr J. Yambasu, Dr Sareen Galbraith, Dr. David R. S. Gallagher, Mr. David Hopley, Dr. Edith M. Loane, Miss Frances Moffitt, Ms. Joan Rippingale, Mrs. Helen Shiel, Dame Mary Uprichard, Mrs. Jennifer Woods.