

Issue 17 September 2003

# Public Issues

## Double Overseas Aid and Halve Poverty - *Really?*



This Autumn the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be deploying his considerable powers of intellect and persuasion in an effort to persuade his opposite numbers in the rich G7 countries to support the idea of an International Finance Facility (IFF). This is an initiative of the British Government which it believes is both possible and essential if the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be met by 2015.

The world community has signed up to the MDGs which should halve world poverty; but the challenge of providing adequate resources to the poorest countries quickly enough has still to be met. The IFF proposal is highly technical in detail and the full story can be obtained via [IFF@hm-treasury.gov.uk](mailto:IFF@hm-treasury.gov.uk) However, in essence the IFF would use guarantees of future aid flows from the rich country governments to raise money now on the international financial markets. This money is then provided to developing countries to help them reach the MDGs. The hope is that the extra money released in this way, over and above what traditional year-by-year aid budgets would have provided, will double the total flow of resources to the poorer countries in the period to 2015.

### Millennium Development Goals by 2015

- Every child has schooling
- Avoidable infant and maternal mortality is prevented
- That more people have access to clean water
- Poverty is halved

The Chancellor has some support from within the EU, but crucially needs to win support from the USA. He has asked the churches to help mobilise support for the plan and to encourage their American contacts to view it sympathetically. John Ellis, the Connexional Secretary for Business and Economic Affairs, has attended a meeting with the Chancellor on the details of the IFF and is exploring how the churches' stance can best be developed. Anyone with particular comments to offer is welcome to contact him on 020 7467 5297 or at [EllisJ@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:EllisJ@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## A national syllabus for RE?

Methodist and Free Church Education Officers have joined Anglican and Catholic colleagues in encouraging the Secretary of State to consider implementing a national syllabus for Religious Education.

Very few Local Authorities now employ specialist Religious Education Advisors and can no longer be expected to produce a high-quality local syllabus of their own. And it has been recognised in many areas that the broad-based multi-faith syllabuses, once a feature solely of inner-city LEAs, have much to offer children and young people in other parts of the country. The syllabus drawn up for use in multi-cultural Bradford, for instance, is currently used by twenty-two other authorities.

Teacher training institutions also support a national syllabus. They find it increasingly difficult to prepare students to as high a standard in this as in other subjects, because of the variation of syllabus requirements. And HMI reports that the majority of teachers of Religious Education would also have more confidence in a national syllabus. Most such teachers, especially in primary education, are not specialists in the subject.

The increasing popularity of short-course GCSE Religious Education has effectively introduced a national syllabus at Key Stage 4, and the churches argue that it makes sense to consider a similar arrangement for the earlier Key Stages. In the same way that GCSE courses allow for alternative papers, so a national syllabus could offer choices that would allow schools to choose the programme of learning most suited to their own pupils.

The churches' Education Officers remain committed, however, to local SACRES (Standing Advisory Committees for Religious Education) as the best means of ensuring that Religious Education and Collective Worship maintain their traditional place in compulsory education, and that local resources are harnessed to enhance their delivery ■



## How healthy is your Credit Union?

If you have plenty of money, there is no shortage of people willing to lend you more. If you have very little money, you may be in much greater need of a loan but will find it much harder to obtain. Even if you are highly disciplined and sure you will repay everything on schedule, the interest rate offered may be horrific.

One escape route from this aspect of financial exclusion is the credit union movement. It is a major factor in the spectrum of possibilities in the United States and Ireland and has been growing significantly, albeit from a tiny base, in Britain. Credit unions are community-based alternatives to traditional banks and are able to take deposits and make modest loans without having to meet all the regulatory requirements and costs imposed on authorised banks.

The present British Government has been reflecting for several years on how best to regulate our credit unions. Official consultation exercises have taken place. However there are suggestions from some quarters that the Government's current approach has too little regard for the volunteer nature of most credit unions. It is claimed that in their enthusiasm to ensure credit unions are safe investments for depositors, the Government is in danger of strangling the movement.

The Methodist Church has not engaged in the debate to date. However we are aware that some churches and probably many individual Methodists are engaged in promoting and running credit unions. **If you have direct experience of this area of work and have comments to offer, the Connexional Team would like to hear from you.** If there is a clear feeling from around the Connexion that the Methodist Church should be making representations to the Government, we would certainly want to consider taking up the issue.

Please send any thoughts to Rachel Lampard at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR or at [LampardR@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:LampardR@methodistchurch.org.uk) by the end of October. Your expertise will be most helpful to us ■

## Hidden Chaplains

**How does your church make its impact on your community? No doubt one element is Sunday services on your premises; probably another is the mixture of groups and activities using your premises during the week. Another will be the constant quiet witness of your members as they live their ordinary lives.**

Somewhere in the middle of all this activity there may be a chaplaincy role: your minister, or a lay person sent out on behalf of the Church, develops a lasting relationship with a group outside the local church structures. He or she is unashamedly motivated by their Christian convictions but seeks to provide pastoral care and spiritual help to people of any faith or none. The focus of their work might be a school or college, a hospital, a local store or office block, or the prison.

The Methodist Church seeks to support individuals called to this work through various Connexional Co-ordinators of chaplaincy work. Their principal role is to provide support and advice. In some cases they organise regular gatherings for Chaplains working in related areas for fellowship, worship, inspiration and training.

Not all work of a chaplaincy nature fits neatly into these categories. For example, David Hardy, the chaplain to the enthusiastic volunteers who run the South Devon Railway, is part of the Methodist Church's mission; he exercises a growing ministry entirely as a result of local initiatives. (If you have never experienced a carol service on a steam train, there might still be a few tickets left for this Christmas.) If your church has developed a chaplaincy link locally, even in an informal way and under another name, the Connexional Team would still want to help where it can. Pioneering work in new areas can be as lonely as it is exciting and networking with chaplains with some relevant experience in related work might be an important source of strength.

Therefore if you or your church feel you are undertaking a chaplaincy which might benefit from being linked in with the Connexional support arrangements, please do not hesitate to contact one of the Co-ordinators below. They would be delighted to hear from you and to suggest where your work could most effectively be embraced within the existing structures.

And someone else might be inspired by the story of what you are doing ■



## Sharing Ideas

How does your church or circuit engage with issues of public concern or social responsibility? The Public Issues Link Mailing would like to offer you the opportunity to exchange ideas and good practice. Below Revd Tim Perkins explains what has been happening in Thatcham in Berkshire.

*"The Thatcham Christian Forum provides opportunities for people to reflect on significant issues from a moral and spiritual perspective. The inaugural meeting in March was addressed by Sheikh Zaki Badawi of the Muslim College, who spoke on the place of Islam in Britain today. As well as outlining the basic beliefs and practices of Islam, Dr Badawi tackled some of the controversial issues facing British Muslims, not least the prospect of war in the Middle East. He recognised the tension between liberal democracy and the desire to tackle terrorism, but said that "a liberal society like Britain fights terrorists with freedom not with passing laws to restrict freedom". Conversations like this can only help to improve our mutual understanding. The Forum plans further meetings on the morality of war, crime, and Judaism."*

We would like to hear about other ways in which you are engaging with public issues in your area ■

**Please send ideas or pictures to Rachel Lampard at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Rd, London NW1 5JR or LampardR@methodistchurch.org.uk**

Chaplaincy	Contact	Telephone	E-mail
Schools	Kathleen Wood	020 8579 7719	<a href="mailto:woodk@uk.uumail.com">woodk@uk.uumail.com</a>
Further Education	Alan Murray	020 7898 1517	<a href="mailto:alan.murray@c-of-e.org.uk">alan.murray@c-of-e.org.uk</a>
Higher Education	Robert Jones	020 8392 3497	<a href="mailto:r.l.jones@roehampton.ac.uk">r.l.jones@roehampton.ac.uk</a>
Workplace Chaplains	John Ellis	020 7467 5297	<a href="mailto:ellisj@methodistchurch.org.uk">ellisj@methodistchurch.org.uk</a>
Prisons	Alan Ogier	020 7217 8048	<a href="mailto:ogiera@methodistchurch.org.uk">ogiera@methodistchurch.org.uk</a>
Forces	Jake Watson	01579350116	<a href="mailto:andjing@aol.com">andjing@aol.com</a>

# Resources

## Christians in Politics

Christians in Politics (CiP) was set up by the Conservative Christian Fellowship, the Christian Socialist Movement and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum to encourage Christian involvement in the mainstream political parties.

CiP has recently produced a poster for churches using the image of a football match to ask whether people are "players" or "spectators" in political life. Posters are available free from Kemi Akinruli at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Rd, London NW1 5JR – please send an A4 sized self-addressed envelope with a 20p stamp.

For more information visit the Christians in Politics website ([www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk](http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk)) or call the national helpline (020 8786 9095)



## Sarum College

Are you interested in Christian faith and political ideologies? International relations? Medical ethics and public policy? The bible and politics?

These are just some of the modules offered by Sarum College's **Politics and Theology Course**. The distance-learning modules can be studied individually or over two to three years.

Methodist Deacon Ray Fox recently completed the course and said "Sarum training was a must for me. It filled the gaping holes in my training and experience, and equipped me to do my work more effectively."

For more details see the full prospectus at [www.sarum.ac.uk/society/prospect.htm](http://www.sarum.ac.uk/society/prospect.htm) or ring 01722-424818

## Homelessness Sunday - 25 January 2004

### Building Justice – yes we can!

The eleventh annual Homelessness Sunday, organised by Housing Justice and the Scottish Churches Housing Agency, takes as its theme Jesus' dramatic announcement at the outset of his ministry that he came to restore society as well as save individuals. A resource pack, posters and prayers cards can be purchased from Housing Justice, 209 Old Marylebone Rd, 020-7723-7273. For further information see [www.homelessness-sunday.org.uk](http://www.homelessness-sunday.org.uk)

## Housing Justice

Housing Justice is a new ecumenical charity formed from the merger of the Churches National Housing Coalition and CHAS the Catholic Housing Aid Society. The new charity will work to mobilise the resources of Christians and others to reduce and ultimately eliminate homelessness and bad housing. Housing Justice currently runs a network of housing advice centres, Megabite (a food token scheme), and Regenerate (bringing together tenants and local activists) as well as providing campaigning, policy and education resources for the churches. For more information visit [www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk)

### Further Information

Please contact Rachel Lampard,  
Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR  
Tel: 020 7486 5502 Fax: 020 7467 5282

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### Who has been sent copies direct?

Ministers and Deacons in pastoral charge

### Who else in your church might find this useful?

Local preachers  .....  
Mission Secretaries  .....  
House Groups  .....  
Youth Groups  .....

Please write their names and get them to tick the box when they have received or seen a copy.