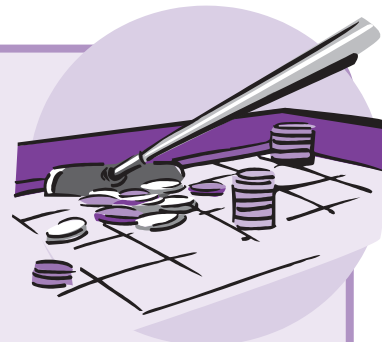


Public Issues

Gambling on our future?



The Government has proposed modernising gambling regulation and increasing opportunities to gamble. But will this be achieved at the cost of an increase in “problem gamblers”? Rachel Lampard, who gave evidence to a parliamentary committee on behalf of the Methodist Church, outlines some concerns.

Certain proposals contained in the Draft Gambling Bill, currently being considered by a parliamentary Scrutiny Committee, are to be welcomed. There will be additional protections for children and a requirement that gambling operators abide by Codes of Social Responsibility to keep their licences. However there are concerns that the proposals will not prevent a serious increase in the number of people who have problems with their gambling.

There are an estimated 370,000 problem gamblers in Britain, and each person’s gambling affects an average of 10 people around them. Problem gambling can lead to people losing their jobs, homes, health, families and relationships. A recent survey suggested that whilst the average household debt is around £5,000, for problem gamblers it is £19,000.

Gambling is for adults, not for children

Britain is the only western country which allows children – of any age – to gamble. The Government has said that gambling is an adult activity, but proposes to re-classify the low stake, low prize slot-machines as “amusement” machines rather than gaming machines, implying that they are safe for children. According to the charity GamCare, 50% of compulsive gamblers have problems arising from slot-machines. Whilst children may play with lower stakes and prizes, the addictive nature of the games are the same. The principle that gambling is not for children needs to be applied across the board, and children should be prohibited from playing on so-called amusement machines.

Prevent a proliferation of “hard” gambling

Some forms of gambling are more addictive than others and so need to be regulated carefully. The new proposals will allow people to walk off the streets into casinos, without having to become members 24 hours in advance. In addition casinos will be able to have new jackpot machines with unlimited stakes and prizes, which, research in other countries suggests, are highly addictive. Mega-casinos will be able to have an unlimited number of these. The Government needs to impose controls on the new jackpot machines, and deregulate slowly whilst researching the impact of the changes.

Make the gambling industry socially responsible

The Draft Gambling Bill will, for the first time, require the gambling industry to take responsibility for the harm that gambling can cause to some people. Companies will have to abide by Codes covering, for example, the protection of vulnerable people if they want to keep their licences. These Codes need to be given a central place within the Bill, and companies should have to demonstrate a practical commitment to social responsibility before getting a licence.

The parliamentary Scrutiny Committee will report to the Government at the beginning of April, and a full Gambling Bill may come before Parliament this summer or in the following session. If you share the concerns outlined here, you might like to consider writing to your MP as soon as possible.

A full briefing on the Draft Gambling Bill, containing further details of the proposals and hints on writing to your MP, is available from Rachel Lampard, Secretary for Parliamentary and Political Affairs, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Rd, London NW1 5JR, tel 020 7467 5298 or e-mail LampardR@methodistchurch.org.uk or via the Methodist Church website www.methodist.org.uk

The Credit Union Story

In the September 2003 Link Mailing we asked for stories about Methodist involvement in credit unions and especially views on the regulatory regime to which they are subject. Now we can record our thanks for a very helpful response from around the Connexion.

We have confirmed our guess that Methodists are active in the setting up and running of credit unions. We had news from Newcastle, urban Yorkshire and Lancashire. Nor is this involvement confined to the northern cities. We heard from Lincolnshire, and it was six Christians from several different denominations who started what is now the Crawley Credit Union in Sussex.

Several Methodists who are involved in national credit union bodies also contacted us and gave us their overview of the movement. Like the local volunteers, they were concerned at the increased workload caused by the authorisation and reporting requirements of the Financial Services Authority.

In parallel with the request to Methodists, we have explored the links of the United Reformed Church's Church-related Community Workers with the credit unions and have again had a positive response.

We are now exploring when and how we can most usefully make representations to the Government or the FSA in the light of the collective experience of Christians with first hand knowledge of the potential and the problems of our credit unions.

John Ellis
Secretary for Business and Economic Affairs

New Ways of Addressing our Children

We are all familiar with the idea of the Chaplain in the workplace, prison or university. Now, a new opportunity is developing in our community schools, where a greater awareness of the significance



of the spiritual development of children and young people is encouraging teachers to develop links with faith communities. Many would say that the Christian Church has better opportunities for making partnerships with schools now than at any time in the past century.

An increasing number of Methodist ministers and lay workers are being invited into schools in what we, and sometimes even the school, recognise as a chaplaincy role. Often growing from an established pattern of leading Collective Worship, sometimes arising from a traumatic incident the school has suffered, but occasionally in response to a direct request, chaplaincy work in schools is one of the most exciting new mission opportunities. And the door is open to us if only we are prepared to take the risk, and to recognise the realities of this novel situation. Questions that need to be addressed include:-

- **Have we a vocabulary that can engage children and young people in discussion about spiritual issues – in the playground and the school corridor, rather than in Junior Church?**
- **Can we work in partnership with teachers in developing opportunities for children and young people to reflect on the 'big questions'?**
- **How do we establish and maintain the trust of parents of children of other faiths?**

Kathleen Wood, Education Officer in the Connexional Team, met a number of school 'chaplains' during her Study Leave two years ago and others more recently. Now she has received support from Methodists and other Free Church denominations to begin work on some training materials that could be used by individuals or groups to enhance their schools work, or to give them a springboard from which to embark. She is keen to hear from anyone working in this field willing to talk with her about the project. Kathleen can be contacted by phone: 020 8579 7719 or e-mail: woodk@uk.uumail.com

Apology

In the last Public Issues insert we listed the Methodist Connexional Chaplaincy Co-ordinators. Unfortunately the gremlins got into the system, and the Health Care Chaplaincy details disappeared.

Revd Christine Pocock, Free Churches Secretary for Health Care Chaplaincy, Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH tel 020 7529 8136 e-mail chaplaincy@CTE.org.uk

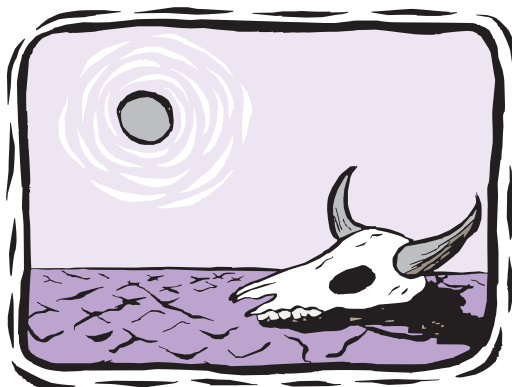
Warmer weather is on the way

There is now more evidence that the earth is getting warmer as a result of pollutants in the atmosphere. Average temperatures rose in the past century by over half a degree centigrade. The majority of this rise came in the last 30 years. Recent research shows that this is due to a saturation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that is now higher than at any point in human history and is still rising¹.

Although the scientific analysis is now more comprehensive we can still only guess at the likely impact of global temperature rise. Sea levels could rise by 70-80 centimetres threatening the habitable areas of Pacific Island States as well as coastal villages and towns in the UK. Large reductions in rainfall will provoke widespread food crises particularly in tropical climes.

This leads us to an inevitable and uncomfortable conclusion that severe ecological harm amongst the world's poorest will occur as a result of the emissions of the world's most prolific consumers. We are concerned then not only with the ethics of our stewardship of God's creation but also with an issue of justice.

The good news is that the science also provides us with a clearer picture of what must be achieved. Scientists are calling for a reduction in global emissions of 60% by 2050. This is not as impossible as it first seems, but does require some significant changes in national policies and individual lifestyle choices. Cumbria District's Energy Pack provides small groups with resources to study energy production and use.



The hope is that global average temperatures might cease to rise if the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can be stabilised at around 500 parts per million (the current level is 380 parts per million). The ECO Congregation programme provides materials to help various church groups to consider their own response. The materials support the process of carrying out an environmental audit within a church. Churches that choose to go further and carry out at least 3 individual projects, which between them have a positive effect on the church, their individual members and the local community, can then apply for an ECO Congregation award.

For information on ECO Congregation see www.ecocongregation.org.uk or tel 01942 612 639

Resources

Cumbria District 'Energy Study Pack' available from Methodist Publishing House, e-mail sales@mph.org.uk; Tel. 01733 325002

"Cool it! – Climate Change and the Devon Churches" available from Devon Churches Green Action, e-mail greenaction@christiancare.freeserve.co.uk; Tel. 01392 278875

Enquiries to environment@methodistchurch.org.uk

¹Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - Third Assessment Report - Climate Change 2001

An International Arms Trade Treaty?

By the end of the 1990s nearly 90% of war-victims were non-combatants and at least half of these were children. The trade in small arms fuels these wars, wasting life, natural resources and vast sums of money. There are around 639 million small arms and light weapons in the world today. Eight million more are produced every year.

Weapons too easily find their way into the hands of rebel armies and their victims are often children and other vulnerable groups.

National arms export controls are riddled with loopholes. Amnesty International, Oxfam and others are calling for an International Arms Control Treaty. The proposed Treaty is backed by 7 national governments and many UK MPs, but not yet by the British Government.

You can help to bring about effective arms control by asking your MP to support the Early Day Motion number 109 calling for an International Arms Trade Treaty and explaining why you feel that it is necessary. If your MP is a minister or front bench spokesperson, they are unlikely to sign an EDM, but you can still bring the issue to their attention. Find out whether your MP has already signed from the following web page:

<http://edm.ais.co.uk/>

If as a result your MP commits to signing the motion please let us know by sending an email to internationalaffairs@methodistchurch.org.uk or writing to Steve Hucklesby at Methodist Church House

Further information can be obtained from the Control Arms Coalition - www.controlarms.org

Remembering the workers

300 people died at work in Britain last year. 10,000 died of occupational diseases. If they had died in a train crash or in Iraq we would all have heard about them.

Workers Memorial Day is an opportunity each year to remember those who die as a result of their work and to encourage action to improve health and safety standards. In some places last year Methodists took the lead in preparing a civic service which was built around this theme. Others marked the occasion in the course of regular worship.

This year the relevant Sunday is 25 April. A leaflet giving background information and liturgical material has been prepared by the union AMICUS and can be obtained from Methodist Church House (0207 467 5248 or Oppong-AsareS@methodistchurch.org.uk) or viewed on the TUC website (www.tuc.org.uk). Other ideas for marking the day are available from Greater Manchester Hazards Centre (www.gmhazards.org.uk).

The Interaction of Faith and Film

17-19 September 2004

A weekend conference examining the interaction of faith and films to be held at the University of Durham. Organised by the Christian Communication Centre together with the Methodist Interface group, the weekend will include a range of speakers and seminars as well as practical film watching!

To receive a flier with full details, please send an SAE to Rachel Lampard, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR

International security and our response

One year on from the launch of military action in Iraq, how can the Church contribute to the debate on international security and the terrorist threat?

A Defence White Paper published in December 2003 proposes adapting UK defence forces to meet future threats. The paper outlines a greater possible need for pro-active intervention - a position mirrored by United States Government's Foreign Policy. The Defence White Paper emphasises the role of NATO and recognises the role of the UN Security Council and the EU. However it also states that we need the flexibility to build 'coalitions of the willing' to deal with specific threats (presumably when international bodies fail to agree with proposals for military action).

In October 2003, the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered a lecture at the Royal Institute of International Affairs defending the presumption against violence that underpins 'just war' ethics. Church leaders, ministers and theologians in the UK continue to develop ethical and pragmatic responses to threats to our security and contribute to the public policy debate.

Let us know your thoughts or any initiatives or debates in which you are engaged. E-mail hucklesbys@methodistchurch.org.uk or write to Steve Hucklesby at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR.

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 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.