

Public Issues

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Copenhagen Climate Campaign

In December world leaders will gather in Copenhagen to discuss a new climate change agreement. Asking over 180 governments to act with urgency is a tall order, yet this is what the UN Copenhagen Summit aims to achieve.

Why the urgency? The Copenhagen Summit will agree actions on reduced carbon emissions from 2013 to 2017, as a successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Global carbon emissions will need to have peaked by 2017 if we are to have a reasonable chance of avoiding a rise in global temperatures of 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Beyond the 2° threshold scientists predict an increased likelihood of 'feedbacks' which will accelerate climate change. For example, the loss of Arctic sea ice reduces the ability of the planet to reflect heat and therefore increases the amount of heat absorbed. Such fundamental changes to our climate system could be irreversible.

Isn't recovery from recession the priority now? Global economic output is predicted to fall in 2009, and so we can expect reduced carbon emissions this year. However, when the economy picks up global carbon emissions are likely to increase again. If industry is to contribute solutions through investment in new technologies, then governments must first take the lead. Strong binding targets are needed to attract long-term investment in low carbon technologies.

What must governments agree at Copenhagen? The Methodist Church is



joining other organisations in calling for:-

- A global agreement on carbon emissions to keep global warming below 2°. This requires that developed countries agree to **reduce their emissions by at least 40% by 2020.**
- **Industrialised countries not to use carbon offsets** (paying for emissions reductions in less polluting countries) to duck their responsibility for reducing domestic emissions.
- All countries to agree a **global cut in emissions from the power sector** of at least one third by 2020.
- Industrialised countries to take responsibility for **helping developing countries to build low-carbon economies** and adapt to climate change.

How are churches getting involved in the lead up to Copenhagen?

National Church leaders have urged the UK Government and the European Union to take a strong position at Copenhagen. The Methodist Conference this year received the report *Hope in God's Future*, which stated that it is intellectually and morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge the

need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

Take Action

- Write to your MP. Visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk for tips.
- Join a mass gathering in London on Saturday 5 December 2009. A special service will take place at 11.00am at Westminster Central Hall with the President of Conference, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.
- Read the Methodist Conference report *Hope in God's Future* and think about how it could be studied in your church. Available from Methodist Publishing, www.mph.org.uk, 01733 235 962 or methodistpublishing@methodistchurch.org.uk
- Preach on the issue of environmental integrity and our responsibility to act now.
- Pray for success at the Copenhagen Summit.

Find out more

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk
www.methodist.org.uk/publicissues
www.christianaid.org.uk
www.operationnoah.org

Methodist Church in Fiji

The President of the Methodist Church of Fiji, the Revd Ame Tugaue, the General Secretary, the Revd Tuikilakila Waqairatu, and seven other church leaders appeared in court on 12 August to enter a plea of 'not guilty' to charges of attending an unauthorised committee meeting.

Having abrogated the constitution at Easter, after the courts ruled its 2006 coup illegal, the military government is demanding that all meetings have prior authorisation and that no meetings address political issues. The church leaders will report to court again on 24 September and a full trial is planned for November.

The Church was forced to cancel its annual conference and national choir festival in August and then at the last minute were informed that the permissions for smaller regional meetings that had been subsequently agreed were also withdrawn.

The military government believes that the Methodist Church should refrain from politics, saying "This is largely because we all have our individual roles to play - religion to engage in spiritual development and the Government to manage the state's affairs." The Deputy General Secretary, the Revd Tevita Banivanua described this to me as, "We can talk about Jerusalem and Galilee, but not Fiji!"

The administration, finances and preaching of the Church are being slowly, and, I believe, intentionally, crippled by the military government.

*Steve Pearce,
Methodist Church World Church
Partnership Coordinator Asia/Pacific*

Take Action

- Remember the Fijian Methodist Church in your prayers.
- Write to your MP asking them to respond to the plight of Fijian Methodists. The Connexional Team is also expressing concern to the British Government.

MPs' Expenses – Searching for the ethos of virtue?



Revelations about the misuse of some MPs' expenses caused a scandal earlier this year. The Committee on Standards in Public Life is now looking at the issue, and is expected to make some recommendations in the autumn. Earlier this year they consulted on MPs' expenses, and the Methodist Church, Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church submitted a joint response.

The Churches said that rules should not be seen as a limit to what is acceptable, but an intrinsic part of the ethos of our democratic institutions which help shape the culture into one which promotes goodness. The new rules governing expenses should model the virtuous behaviour we would expect from our politicians.

The submission also pointed out that the expenses controversy is part of a wider political disillusionment

and disengagement, and that a much greater renewal and reinvigoration of our democracy is needed.

You can read the whole submission at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/jpitpolitics

Take Action

- Do you know who your MP is? Has your church contacted them over the past year? Think about establishing good relations with your MP. If you don't know who your MP is you can find out at www.findyourmp.parliament.uk or by calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.
- When thinking about who to vote for in the next election, try to find out what your MP has said and done about lots of different issues, and how they have demonstrated their integrity, and not just about the expenses issue.

Churches challenged by the 'credit crunch'

The past 12 months have seen unprecedented events in the UK and world economy. The value of UK shares has fallen by almost a third, substantially reducing charity incomes and pension funds. The level of unemployment has risen from around 1.2million to 2.4 million and is expected to continue to rise, probably to around 3.5 million.

The Methodist Church has been seeking to find ways, in partnership where possible, to respond to the 'credit crunch'. At the beginning of the year a large conference was held at Methodist Church House, bringing together Christians from across the UK who have interest and expertise in economics. Visit www.ctbi.org.uk/382 to find out more.

It is clear that faith groups share some broad aims; the most important of these is the view that the 'back to business as usual' approach is unacceptable. The



days of excess should end and a system that puts the needs of the poorest and the environment at its heart is required.

Methodism has always had a social action role working in local communities. For instance, a church in Hitchin has started running a computer skills and CV-writing initiative, and in Bradford a large community church provides a whole range of services from childcare to advice centres, to help people in their community to find work.

Take Action

- We would like to hear how your church is responding to the credit crunch, whether it is through prayer or setting up a project. Hopefully we can share the best ideas throughout the Connexion. E-mail morrisonp@methodistchurch.org.uk or write to us at Public Issues, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.
- Please pray for people affected by the credit crunch, especially those who are seeking work or are struggling to pay bills.
- Visit the following websites to find out more about the issues:

Get Fair

www.getfair.org.uk

Church Action on Poverty

www.church-poverty.org.uk

Housing Justice

www.housingjustice.org.uk

Gordon Brown must call the next UK general election by 3 June 2010. As candidates, political agents and party activists prepare for a crucial campaign, the Churches are already preparing resources and materials to help Christians contribute to election debates.

The Methodist Church is working with partner Churches and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to produce guidelines on holding hustings meetings, information and Christian views on some of the key policy areas, advice on how to deal with extreme political parties and much more.

Further information will be available from January 2010, but if you would like to register your interest in receiving these resources when they are ready, please contact politicalaffairs@methodistchurch.org.uk or write to us at Public Issues, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.

Getting ready for the general election



Declaring faith in the public square



Ken offers reflections from the 4th Plinth

Back in July, Methodist minister Revd Ken Chalmers decided it was time to get religion back in the public square. Literally.

He was one of the 2,400 people to appear on Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth for sculptor Anthony Gormley's One and Other project. Every hour, 24 hours a day, for 100 days, a different person made the plinth their own, standing aloft alongside Nelson's Column. Ken offered the crowds visiting the Square a touch of midweek spirituality as he led worship, whilst Holy Communion was offered to passers-by at ground level.

Ken's turn on the plinth raised a whole host of questions about the relationship between art and worship, and the role of the open profession of faith in public life – certainly more than it answered.

The event seemed to be received well by those present, but I wonder how ready most Methodists are to openly declare our faith or our perspectives on certain issues. And if we do, how much of an impact can people of faith have on public opinion, anyway? I guess the only way to find out is to take that step. But in order to be persuasive, rather than alienating, we need to consider how best to engage with our audiences in ways that make sense to them. This seems to me to be one of the greatest challenges for people of faith who want to make an impact on today's pluralistic society.

*Anna Drew,
Methodist Church Lead Media Officer*

Take Action

- Join the debate about culture and religion at the Methodist discussion website The Interface – www.theinterface.org.uk
- Preach on the subject of faith in the public square and the questions it raises for Christians in a pluralist society.
- Highlight Ken Chalmers' example in a discussion in a cell, class or house group, or in a debate in your Church Council or Circuit Meeting to help think how your church can respond creatively to contemporary culture.

Peacemaking Conference



You are invited to a one day conference on peacemaking, which will be held at Methodist Church House in central London, on Saturday 6 February 2010.

The event will bring together church members and Christian peace activists to share stories, network, worship and pray together, and to think about how the Church can best respond to conflict situations around the world and here in the UK.

The conference is being held as world governments prepare for the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May, and in the final year of the World Council of Churches' 'Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010'.

Further details available from www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/jpitpeacemaking or write to us at Public Issues, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.

Equality Bill Briefing

The Equality Bill currently going through Parliament raises issues for faith-based organisations. You can read a Frequently Asked Questions paper produced by the Joint Public Issues Team at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/jpitpublications



Further Information

Please contact David Bradwell, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR
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Who has been sent copies direct?

Ministers 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 seen or received a copy.