

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party

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Call to Prayer & Action

PM thanks churches for prayers and urges stand for international development

Gordon Brown, Labour's Prime Minister, has urged churches to continue to demand global action against international poverty. Speaking at a reception at 10 Downing Street in May in advance of the Global Day of Prayer London, the Prime Minister told around 150 Christian leaders that the poor cannot wait for the world to deliver on the Millennium Development Goals.

The Global Day of Prayer London began in 2006 and is part of a global network which started in South Africa. This year, thousands of Christians met at Millwall Football Stadium in South London, where they prayed for social concerns including gun and knife crime, HIV/AIDS, global poverty and the environment. They hope to coordinate an event at Wembley in 2010.

Gordon Brown commended the Global Day of Prayer London. *"Whether it is supporting young single parents, providing education, or helping to improve the criminal justice system, the work of leaders such as yourselves makes an invaluable contribution to British life and I'd like to thank you for that"*, he said.

Gordon urged them to support the Millennium Development Goals, eight goals for development which were agreed in 2000, and acknowledged the power of faith and prayer to effect positive change. The MDGs include pledges to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, combat diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, and achieve universal primary education, all by 2015.

Over half way towards the deadline, however, Gordon warned that these promises are in danger of being missed. At the current rate of progress, he explained, the promise of education for every child in the world will not be met until 2100. *"A century is too long to wait"*, he declared.

"If we helped only one person, that would be worth it", Gordon said. *"But we can help billions"*. He continued: *"This is indeed a summons to action. You are the people who can do it. Because it is people that will change the world"*.



The Prime Minister said: *"I know that you are passionate about promoting fairness and development in every country of the world. That is why I'm delighted that we are using this opportunity to join together to tackle global poverty"*.

Churches have already made a huge contribution towards this task. The Micah Challenge is a coalition of Christian organisations and churches, united in their call for progress in fulfilling the MDGs. Premier Christian Radio announced at the reception that it will be working with the Micah Challenge in this goal.

Following the Prime Minister's speech, those present joined hands as they prayed for Gordon's work. The Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, responded by calling for a day of prayer and fasting ahead of the UN meeting in September, where progress in meeting the MDGs will be top of the agenda.

Speaking at 10 Downing Street, Dr Jonathan Oloyede, a church leader and founder of the Global Day of Prayer London, noted: *"The Prime Minister did not check his notes because this speech was written in his heart. If we combine the speeches written on each of our hearts, we can create a resounding voice"*.

■ Global Day of Prayer London hopes to coordinate a National Day of Prayer at Wembley in 2010.

Faithworks at Labour Party's Spring Conference

In March, Faithworks hosted a fringe meeting at Labour's 2008 Spring Conference entitled: "Why faith is a great starting point for politics". The breakfast meeting, which was organised with support from the Christian Socialist Movement, was well attended—both by Conference delegates and by locals.

Faithworks was launched in 2001 and aims to support churches and other faith-based organisations to engage in and serve their local communities. Speaking at the event, Joy Madeiros, Faithworks' Director of Public Policy (pictured), urged the Government to recognise faith as a dynamic force which motivates people to behave distinctly. She was joined on stage by Rev Malcolm Duncan, the Leader of Faithworks, Yasmin Qureshi, Labour candidate for Bolton South East, and Stephen Timms, Labour's Vice Chair for Faith Groups.



Stephen said: *"Faith is a great starting point for politics. We need in our communities and in our politics the values which are inspired by faith. If we don't have them, then the life of our communities and the effectiveness of our politics will be much the poorer."*

Employment: a moral issue

A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour's Vice Chair for Faith Groups

In January this year Gordon Brown appointed me Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform at the Department for Work and Pensions. Employment policy is central to the Government's agenda, and is an issue that I have long felt very strongly about.

It's also an area of policy that I believe Christians should be deeply concerned about. The beginning of the Bible depicts God as a "worker", crafting the world. Having completed this task, He then called on humans to follow His example by working in the world. John Stott put it this way: "our potential for work is an essential part of our God-likeness".

Work is an important part of our human nature, and that is one reason why the Government should be concerned about employment. Of course, it is also essential for economic prosperity and to help people out of poverty. But it is more than that. Many people gain satisfaction from being able to work, from being able to contribute to society. John Stott wrote: God "wants us to be fulfilled, not frustrated". William Temple, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, once apparently declared unemployment to be "a social evil of the greatest magnitude". I think he was on to something.

Just before the 1997 election, the churches' report "Unemployment and the Future of Work" provided the broad based call for action to which the Government responded. Since then we've made huge progress. The number of people in work is up

by over 3 million to 29.5 million, the highest figure ever. Claimant unemployment is down at low levels not seen since the 1970s. The most recent statistics, from June 2008, show another increase in employment, with unemployment low and the number of vacancies remaining high.

Central to our success has been Government initiatives such as investment in JobCentres and the New Deal programme. But there is more to do. In February this year the Government announced new policies to get more people into work by partnering with others in public, private and voluntary sectors.

Church-based groups are already doing exceptional work in this area, and I hope that this will continue. I recently visited Spear, a welfare to work project at St Paul's Church, Hammersmith, City Gateway, working with unemployed young people in East London, and Pecan in south London—the Peckham Evangelical Churches Action Network—which has been helping to tackle unemployment since 1989. Their work includes computer classes, and the "Workout" programme to help ex-offenders into employment.

I believe we must continue to confront the evil of unemployment. As a country, it is important for economic prosperity. But work is also an important aspect of our human nature—and churches can play an important role in seeing it fulfilled.



Christian youth project receives funding

In February this year, the Government announced that it would be providing £31 million of funding to nearly 100 third sector organisations working with children. One of the groups to benefit was Urban Saints (formerly Crusaders), a Christian-based group which will receive £300,000 over three years.

The funds have been made available through the Children, Young People and Families Grant Programme, and were announced by Labour's Minister for Children and Young People, Kevin Brennan MP. In line with the Government's Every Child Matters initiative, the programme offers assistance to work of national significance which helps to ensure that children are kept safe, healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being.

Urban Saints was founded as The Crusaders Union in 1906—the same year the Labour Party took its present name. The organisation's founder, Albert Kestin, had become concerned that the church was failing to reach certain children. In response, he began weekly meetings which presented the Christian message in an accessible way. Inspired by his example, others began similar projects and Crusaders was born.



Over one hundred years later, the movement is still going strong. Today, it continues to work with thousands of children across the UK, through initiatives such as youth groups, holidays, community events and training programmes.

Commenting on the grant, Ed Balls, Labour's Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, said: "*Urban Saints in England provides an excellent service which many children from across the country have benefited from. I hope that this funding will help them to continue their excellent work into the future.*"

News in brief

Tony Blair Faith Foundation

In May 2008, Labour's former Leader and Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched his Faith Foundation. The Foundation aims to promote respect and understanding between religions, to make the case for faith as a force for good, and to encourage inter-faith cooperation to tackle global problems such as global poverty. Speaking at Westminster Cathedral in April, Tony said: "*I am passionate about the importance of faith to our modern world and about the need for people of faith to reach out to one another.*" The Foundation's advisory council includes Joel Edwards, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, and Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church. www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org

Faith and Culture in Modern Europe

On 2 June, Jim Murphy MP, Minister for Europe, hosted a seminar on 'Faith and Culture in modern Europe'. Participants from a variety of religious backgrounds explored the place of faith groups in Europe now and in the future. Jim said: "*Faith has shaped Europe's history and I believe that today faith can and should positively influence our continent and the wider world in a variety of ways.*" The event aimed to identify EU issues of concern to faith groups.

Consulting with Britain's Faith Communities

The Labour Party has launched a new consultation with faith communities. The "Faiths Taskforce" will be chaired by Alun Michael MP, Chair of the Christian Socialist Movement, while Rev Malcolm Duncan, the Leader of Faithworks, will act as an independent advisor. The results of the consultation will be presented to Labour's manifesto planning group. Gordon Brown said: "*The independence of the consultation process, under the leadership of Malcolm Duncan, gives us the opportunity to genuinely listen and enter into dialogue with people of faith and belief.*"

Gweini Report

According to a recent report by Gweini (Welsh for to serve), the contribution of faith groups to the Welsh economy is currently estimated at £102 million per year. Gweini is a collaboration by a variety of Christian organisations, including the Evangelical Alliance, Tearfund and Care. Writing in the foreword, the Labour politician and Welsh First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, said: "*The findings of this report will hold few surprises for those who, like the Welsh Assembly Government, have long recognised the great contribution made to life in Wales by all its faith communities.*"

Working hard for Britain's families

The Labour Government believes that families are the bedrock of our society. For this reason, supporting children and families has been central to our agenda since we were elected to Government in 1997. Already, Labour policies such as increased maternity pay and the right for every father to take paternity leave have enabled families to spend more time together at these crucial periods. As we look forward to the future, the Government will be deepening its commitment to supporting families across the UK.

One of Labour's flagship achievements has been the introduction of Sure Start centres. There are now over 2,900 of these centres around the UK, and the Government is on target to meet its manifesto pledge of 3,500 by 2010—one in every community. Core services include early learning and child care, parenting advice, health services, and help finding work or training. According to an independent report published in March, these centres have a positive impact on children and families.

In December last year, the Labour Government published its Children's Plan. One of the five principles which underpins the plan is that it is parents who raise children, not governments, and that the Government therefore needs to do more to support parents and families. For instance, we will allocate £34 million over the next three years to provide two expert parenting advisers in every local authority. And we are working to help parents play a more active role in their children's education.

The Labour Party's commitment to helping families has already seen parents of children up to the age of six, carers and the parents of disabled children given the right to request flexible working. Earlier this year

A message from Ed Balls



Labour's Children, Schools & Families Secretary

The Labour Party's mission has always been to tackle injustice and inequality wherever it exists. There is no greater injustice than children's life chances being limited by being born into poverty.

That is why in 1999 we made the ambitious commitment to halve child poverty by 2010 and to eliminate it by 2020. It remains one of the driving purposes of this Labour Government. We have already lifted 600,000 children out of poverty and we will take further measures to progress towards our target.

we announced that this would be extended to include children up to the age of 16—an extra 4.5 million parents across the UK.

At the heart of Labour's agenda is a concern for the most disadvantaged families. We are extending the Family Fund which supports the families of disabled children. We also remain committed to our goal eliminating child poverty by 2020. In this year's budget we announced that Child Benefit and the child element of Child Tax Credit will be increased, lifting up to 250,000 children out of poverty.

Labour policies over the past decade are helping millions of families across the UK. We are committed to tackling new challenges with the same passion.

We want to hear from you

More than ever before, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in our churches. We realise that many of you cannot commit to supporting any particular political party. Even so, we are interested to hear what you have to say, and to help you to continue your valuable work across the country.

There are a few things you can do to help us in this work.

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leaders if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so that others in your church can read about what Labour is doing.
- 3. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Vice Chair for Faith Groups), c/o The Labour Party, 39 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HA. Alternatively, email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.

To join the Labour Party visit www.labour.org.uk/join or telephone us on 08705 900 200.