

# Churches Update

## News from the Labour Party

w: labour.org.uk/faith Issue 8, 2010



## “Faith is a great starting point for politics”

**A personal message from Prime Minister, Gordon Brown**

Last year in an interview with Premier Radio I said it was “impossible” for Christians to separate their faith from politics. I said that because my upbringing in the Church of Scotland has always informed my values and my politics. In many areas, politics gives us a chance to demonstrate faith practically by caring for others - whether in global issues like international development or climate change, or in local issues like housing or jobs.

I am a firm believer that faith is a great starting point for politics. Christian values have a bearing on political decisions from education to fair taxes. I’m pleased to see the depth of Christians activism in our nation today; ordinary people taking action in their communities, demonstrating their faith by serving their neighbours in all sorts of ways.

There is no shortage of people in history for whom faith was their moral compass. From William Wilberforce to William Booth, people have long drawn on their faith in seeking social change. Without them, the road to abolishing slavery and defending the rights of children and workers would have been far longer.

**“People of faith are crucial in making Britain a better place. I want churches and other faith organisations to play a greater role”**

More recently, the Jubilee 2000 campaign successfully lobbied for the cancellation of third world debt. The idea of cancelling unpayable debts and setting people free united many groups. This idea, rooted in the teaching of the Bible, was to have a dramatic impact on this Government’s policy and the lives of millions.

As Chancellor at the time, I worked closely with churches and faith groups. Without their efforts, and the commitment they enlisted in the UK and overseas, we would never have succeeded. Together we secured the historic deal in Gleneagles in 2005 in



© Crown copyright

which G8 Finance Ministers agreed to write off \$40 billion debt owed by 18 Highly Indebted Poor Countries.

Five years later we are still honouring our commitments to world’s poorest, especially those who have suffered as a result of the global recession. But at a time when some are tempted to turn their backs we must keep going and never pass by on the other side.

People of faith are crucial in making Britain a better place. I want churches and other faith organisations to play a greater role than ever as we emerge from the greatest economic downturn for sixty years. Our society has big challenges ahead but also, I believe, a bright future.

We are making great progress in delivering a fairer and more just society. A future fair for all is one where families are supported and child poverty is ended: Where people are able to find work and the elderly and young are able to live in security with opportunity.

The Labour Party will continue to welcome Christian values as a valuable part of our public debate and Christian activists as valuable contributors to social action. Thank you for all that you do.

## Celebrating faith based welfare

Communities Secretary John Denham wants to hear about faith-based welfare projects across Britain. He thinks their contribution has not been sufficiently recognised—and has announced a £50,000 prize fund to celebrate the best examples.

It will be awarded to faith projects which are finding new ways to meet local problems, bring people together and serve local communities. Application forms can be obtained by emailing: [InnovationPrize@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:InnovationPrize@communities.gsi.gov.uk).

He has also announced that national faith based organisations can bid to share a £1million fund which will help them develop a bigger voice and strengthen their capacity to challenge and engage with Government. The fund will help give organisations the tools they need to do the job.

Speaking to faith groups at a conference in London,

John Denham said: *“Faith groups have a unique perspective which must be recognised by Government and local councils and this is especially important at a time when public services are under financial pressure. We can not afford to over look the innovative ways faith communities address issues.”*

John Denham also published a series of rebuttals of ‘myths’ which deter local councils from contracting with faith-based organisations to provide public services. The paper, entitled *‘Ensuring a level playing field’* seeks to dispel ‘myths’ amongst them: that faith groups do not help people they do not approve of and that funding will imply support for the religious views of the organisation in question; or that faith-based groups will use public money for proselytising or worship.

For more information, go to:

[www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/15073411.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/15073411.pdf).

## Discussing family matters

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

Policy on ‘the family’ is likely to feature strongly in the campaign for the General Election.

The Conservatives often criticise Government policy, but Labour’s record since 1997 has been very strong. We have supported families financially, but also strengthened parental leave and introduced flexible working so families can spend more time together, especially in the crucial, formative years of a child’s life. We have invested heavily in parenting support through *Sure Start* and introduced a National Minimum Wage.

After conflicting statements on the subject, David Cameron said the Conservatives would introduce a marriage credit in the tax system. Leaving aside doubts about whether such a policy would help people stay together, there is no doubt about its unfairness: it would disproportionately benefit the well off.

In a case of “blessed are the better off”, those on the highest incomes would benefit 13 times more from reintroducing a marriage tax allowance than those on the lowest. The highest earners would get an extra £380 a year; the lowest £30. It would be a very costly measure at a time when the deficit will need to be reduced. It is estimated that only 41% of couples would benefit at all. Widows or widowers, deserted

partners and children living in divorced households or whose parents were unmarried, would get nothing.

Marriage plays a crucial role in sustaining strong relationships and providing security for children. But it is a reality today that families come in many shapes and sizes. All the evidence points towards the importance of stable, loving relationships between parents and their children. Government must do all it can to support such relationships.

The Government recently published its Green Paper on the family. It is wide ranging and sets out measures to support *all* families. It recognises that some have complex needs and may require additional support. It aims to address choices that strengthen or weaken family life, such as balancing employment with bringing up children. The Paper also considers the position of other family members when family relationships have broken down. Recognising the severe pressures they can face, the Green Paper announced funding for specialist relationship counselling services for families with disabled children.

Strong and stable families are the bedrock of our society. Labour wants to keep it that way.



## Future Jobs Fund helps young people into work

The Government has called on businesses and other organisations to make a commitment to support young people in finding employment through the Future Jobs Fund. The Scheme is aimed at creating new community focused job opportunities to help young people find work. It is hoped that the Future Jobs Fund will ultimately create 150,000 jobs across the country.

The Salvation Army is one organisation that has taken advantage of the Future Jobs Fund. They have offered contracts for 900 placements as part of the Future Jobs Fund with each position carrying a subsidy of £6,500. Once the initial 900 places have been filled, the Department for Work and Pensions will increase the scheme to 1,800 places.

The first 900 recruits will join the Salvation Army Employment Plus (TSAEP) over the next eighteen months. They will be working in a number of settings including care homes, homeless shelters and community centres. Roland Sewell, Director of The Salvation Army Employment Plus said: *"This is an excellent opportunity to make a real difference in young peoples lives. Those who join us gain work experience and specific employability skills, continuous mentoring, and exit interview leading them*

### A message from Yvette Cooper



Labour's Work & Pensions Secretary

We are determined not to lose a generation of talent, as was the case in the last recession. As we move into a period of economic recovery, it is important that we continue to support those who are finding their way back into work. *Backing Young Britain*

helps every young person to find a job or training. This is not just a response to the recession but an investment in our future as we build a stronger Britain, ready for recovery.

*to a further job or training and the opportunity to make a positive impact on the welfare and well being of the communities and clients The Salvation Army serves."*

The Government remains committed to working with businesses, the public sector and charities as part of the national campaign *Backing Young Britain*—a call for everyone to do whatever they can to help young people through the recession.

## News in brief

### Changes to Bill please faith schools

Faith schools have welcomed an announcement by Education Secretary, Ed Balls. A government amendment to the Children's Schools and Families Bill has clarified that faith schools are permitted to teach Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHE) in accordance with their faith ethos. The bill makes PSHE – including sex and relationships education— a statutory part of the curriculum for the first time from September 2011. The Bill now provides an explicit reassurance to faith schools that they can teach PSHE in a way that reflects their religious character. There had previously been concern that the bill was ambiguous.

### Aid arrives to help earthquake victims

Since the Haiti earthquake, the Government has pledged over £20 million to assist in the aid effort. Labour's International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander also welcomed the generosity of the British public. He said: *"British people can be very proud that their donations have been translated to real help for Haiti. Although the initial, high profile disaster response phase is over, people still desperately need our assistance. I pay tribute to the British public for their continued generosity."*

### New restrictions on lap-dancing

The Home Office has announced new powers for Councils in England and Wales to restrict lap-dancing clubs. Local residents will for the first time be able to oppose a planned club on the grounds that it would be inappropriate given the character of their local neighbourhood. Alan Campbell, Minister for Crime Reduction said: *"Many people have told us they don't want a lap dancing club in their neighbourhood...From April these important reforms will give local authorities the powers they need to respond to the concerns of local people regarding the number and location of lap dancing clubs in their area."*

### Better protection for children

The Digital Economy Bill aims to equip Britain to make the most of new opportunities being created by developments in digital technology. It tightens the rules on age rating for computer games. Under the new rules—using a Europe-wide system called PEGI—games can be given 12, 15 or 18 age ratings. It will be an offence to sell games to children younger than the age rating. Speaking about the Bill, Labour's Digital Britain spokesman, Stephen Timms said: *"We need to protect our children in a way that reflects the changing nature of computer gaming."*

## Conservatives derail anti-poverty bill

### Questions asked of Conservatives' commitment after MP objects to Private Members' Bill

The Conservative Party is facing fresh questions over its commitment to international development after a Conservative—understood to be Christopher Chope MP—halted the passage of a bill in the House of Commons which would have helped millions to avoid poverty.

*The Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Bill* was blocked—effectively killing it—by a Conservative backbencher who shouted “*object!*” whilst the Bill was being put to vote. The Bill, which was laid before the House by Labour MP, Andrew Gwynne, had reached its Report Stage and Third Reading.

The Bill had sought to curb ‘vulture funds’. Investment companies buy up the defaulted debts of the world’s poorest countries at very low prices and then take them to court to recoup the debts at their full value. Latest estimates say that worldwide claims worth \$1.2bn against Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) are being litigated on by commercial creditors.

As a result of the Conservative MP’s objection, it is now highly unlikely that legislation preventing firms profiting in UK courts will be passed before the General Election.

Labour’s International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander, has written to David Cameron outlining his concerns over the attitude of those in his party. He wrote: “*I find it incredible that Conservative MPs in the chamber – who had pledged their support to the bill – then objected to it and refused to admit who was responsible.*” He also urged the Conservative leader to “*come clean*” on whether the

### A message from Andrew Gwynne MP

Labour MP for Denton and Reddish

Vulture funds are unacceptable. My Bill aimed to prevent creditors of the poorest countries from reclaiming excessive amounts on these debts. It would have given vital assistance in covering the debts of the 40 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries that qualify for international debt relief initiatives. It is staggering the Conservatives are still unwilling to support even the most basic legislation to help reduce Third World Debt.



Bill was blocked on instructions from the shadow cabinet.

Speaking about the objection, Andy Flanagan, Director of the Christian Socialist Movement, said: “*It beggars belief that someone could object to a bill like this. The practices that are being outlawed are indefensible. It is a timely reminder that Britain is still home to clandestine money-based power and vested interests that need to be challenged.*”

The Conservative Party is already facing questions over its commitment to international development. A poll conducted by the Conservative-supporting website *Conservative Home* last year found that 96% of Tory candidates at the next General Election believed that protecting the UK’s aid budget should not be a priority.

## 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](http://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](mailto:stephen@stephentimms.org.uk).

To join the Labour Party visit [www.labour.org.uk/join](http://www.labour.org.uk/join) or telephone us on 08705 900 200.