

Talents

The convener and secretary remain deeply appreciative of the range of expertise and experience brought to the Committee by its members as well as that shared with us by those whom we consult. Craig Jesson has begun attending as an observer when the requirements of being an ordinand permit, and we trust it will be as fruitful a learning experience for him as it is a helpful one for us. Morag McClintock has joined us with current youth work experience, legal expertise and articulate exuberance [while co-incidentally she has helping lower the average age on the Committee]. John Wylie, as the Synod Racial Justice Co-ordinator, has this committee as his conduit to the committees of the Synod, and we welcome his wisdom and vast experience.

Fishing

The Report to last Autumn's Synod opened a debate about the fishing industry in Scotland, a matter which has exercised the committee for some years. The theology we espoused was an holistic view of the industry - which acknowledged the scientific evidence, the impact of political policy upon fishing communities, and discerning the ethics of a just and acceptable solution. The committee remained aware that the evidence of marine biologists was far from unanimous and the variable factors in statistical estimates and projections of cod stocks meant that much data had limited value. Comparisons with the fishing-out of cod in Canadian waters or the herring fish-out in British waters some decades ago with no reference to the horse-trading around European Union tend to encourage a simplistic picture of events, budgets, about which policies are subsequently spun, and the low priority of fishing in a Westminster department where agricultural interests are paramount. We were delighted in the last year therefore when the Kirk's Church and Nation Committee invited our convener to join it and in particular to join the working party which was drafting that part of its report relating to fishing. It produced an excellent report which drew on various sources and contacts, and examined the recent reports of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The North Sea Advisory Council is also welcomed as a first step toward subsidiarity in a matter that is decided by all of the EU states while only affecting a few. The report provides a helpful overview of the fishing industry and a helpful reference document for the next few years. The document follows as appendix 3 to this report, and we are grateful for permission to reproduce it.

Theology of Marriage and Family Law

Past consultations from the Scottish Executive and from members' bills led us last year to seek the assistance of the General Assembly's Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee on a Theology of Marriage. We are assured this is still to come and look forward to some guidance, but the subject has continued to recur. The importance of the family has become a mantra in certain quarters whenever sexuality, sexual health, divorce, co-habitation, family law, parental rights and responsibilities have been mentioned, and it is obvious that not everyone means the same thing when using the same words. Last year we responded to an Executive consultation on Family Law Reform, and this spring the secretary and convener attended a consultation of church representatives with officials at the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office on what the Executive now propose to include in legislation. When the Justice 2 Committee of the Parliament was scrutinising the proposals they agreed to take oral evidence from some churches and a group comprising the Catholic Bishops' Parliamentary Officer, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, a very senior officer of the Salvation Army in Scotland, and our Synod's C&S Convener Alan Paterson who was the only one still active in the pastoral ministry. The proposals are largely child-centred and as such they are welcome. Uncontested divorce would have a minimum waiting time of a year (rather than the present three) and contested divorce would drop from five years to a minimum of two. Grandparents would not have automatic rights of access to grandchildren whose parents had divorced, but the Executive is looking to other ways to recognise the crucial role often played by grandparents in giving support and stability to children whose parents are divorcing. The proposals try to protect the vulnerable when a cohabiting relationship breaks up, and unmarried fathers included in the registration of a birth acquire parental responsibilities and rights under the proposals. Thoughts offered to the committee included

- the premise that marriage should stand on its merits and not be dependent on a package of privileges,
- that extending to people in cohabiting situations some of the rights, which are currently exclusive to marriage, in order to protect the vulnerable would not undermine marriage
- that for a long period in history a woman's rights in law assumed her dependency on a husband, curtailed independence, and effectively coerced women into marrying and remaining in marriage,
- that fifty-plus years ago cohabitantes, divorcees and children of unmarried parents were stigmatised and some people chose marriage because cohabitation was not socially acceptable and some remained married because divorce was not socially acceptable
- that today, perhaps for the first time opting to marry is a real choice from a wide menu and uninfluenced by pressure from society, peers or parents,
- that when parents divorce, though the grandparents should not have an automatic right of access, perhaps they should have a right to be considered for access, and the children should be consulted if the legislation is to be consistent in its child-centred focus.
- that fifty-plus years ago the Church in its public pronouncements had rarely considered children as much more than chattels of their parents and that its pastoral experience had subsequently informed its attitude,
- that to a nine-year old child the five year waiting time in a contested divorce, on top of any acrimony preceding that decision, means there is little memory of a time without hostility, and in these circumstances keeping a family together in a bad relationship is harmful
- that the *status quo* for one divorcing couple - before the expiry of five years - meant they had between them used sixteen lawyers and were on their third sheriff,

The Executive has begun a consultation on proposed changes to adoption and fostering procedures, and we expect claims and counter-claims around 'the family' to continue.

Bicentennial celebrations of abolition of the slave trade

We have heard through the General Assembly Church & Society Committee that discussions have begun on the forthcoming bicentenary of the abolition of Slavery. These we welcome but wish to keep a watching brief on what events are planned. We would be deeply unhappy were the message to come out that the evil of slavery was eliminated two hundred years ago. An historical argument is often made that the commercial efficiencies of the Industrial Revolution were as responsible for the abolition of slavery as the humanitarian endeavours of the anti-slavery campaigners. More importantly in this Twenty-first Century old-fashioned slavery is still rife and sex slavery is growing between eastern and western Europe with a continuous human trafficking. In the material which has come out of the debt campaigns and which poured out of the 'Make Poverty History' campaign around the G8 summit in Gleneagles, an economic slavery – more subtle and impersonal, but equally dehumanising – has evolved which must overshadow any celebrations of two hundred years ago.

Questionnaire

Last year the Church & Society Committee circulated a questionnaire to the churches. Its purpose was to take a snap-shot of what involvement our churches had in rural affairs. Other questions were included to map the presence of uniformed youth organisations in our churches for the Synod Scout Chaplain and to provide a picture of local ecumenical involvement for the Synod Ecumenical Officer. We very much appreciate the prompt replies from so many churches. The work of collating and tabulating the results was more time consuming than anticipated and was only completed this Spring. The number of Questionnaires that failed to get back to us is so few that we hope to telephone survey the remaining churches and go for a 100% return.

Scottish Churches Rural Group

Last year we reported on our involvement with the ecumenical Rural Focus Group led by the Scottish Episcopal Church and mentioned that ways were being explored to have it owned by ACTS while at the same time letting the leadership shown by the SEC continue. Subsequently ACTS held a day seminar on the Church and Rural Issues. Personnel from the 'Churches' Rural Group' in England attended and informed the meeting and participants made the decision to set up a 'Scottish Churches' Rural Group' under the ACTS umbrella. Its first convener is retired bishop

Mike Henley who convened the SEC's Rural Focus Group, while for the first year ACTS Assistant General Secretary, Rev Lindsey Sanderson, will be its secretary. A constitution has been agreed and participant churches are appointing their representatives. Our PPR Reference Committee has agreed that our two representatives should be Alan Paterson and one other from a rural/agricultural background, to be identified by the C&S Committee possibly through the responses from the Questionnaire.

Gaelic Language Bill

In the past year a bill has gone through the Scottish Parliament giving legal status in Scotland to the Gaelic language. In European Union league tables the language is regarded as endangered. The Bill provides for the establishment of Bòrd na Gàighlig (a national Gaelic Board) to develop the use of Gaelic with the aim of securing it as an official language of Scotland which commands equal respect with English. The aim is to increase the number of people able to use and speak Gaelic, to encourage the use of the language and make the language and culture more accessible. The Bòrd is charged with producing a five year Gaelic plan for Scotland and with requiring and overseeing similar plans for Gaelic from public authorities in Scotland as well as cross-border organisations. The history of Gaelic policy in Scotland was for centuries one of persecution, marginalisation and neglect, from policies of James I in 1428, through the Statutes of Iona in 1609, an act of Privy Council in 1616, punitive Westminster legislation after the '45, the ethnic cleansing of the clearances in the Nineteenth Century and the neglect of the Education Act of 1872. Many of the efforts to help Gaelic in the Twentieth Century have concentrated on 'Gaelic Speaking Areas', but there is now recognition that ghettoising Gaelic to the Western seaboard and the Isles fails to recognise that Gaelic belongs virtually to the whole of Scotland with Gaelic place names extending to the border and beyond, a Gaelic Diaspora throughout much of Scotland, and new learners from play-group to tertiary education stretching from the Solway northwards. Underlying the thinking is that if the new Scotland cannot right the wrongs of history, neither should it perpetuate them, but more than that the new multicultural Scotland would be incomplete if it failed to affirm and promote the language and culture of its own indigenous ethnic minority.

The Scottish Executive and Parliament along with the Church & Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland have used an English/Gaelic bilingual letterhead for years. Recently when revision of the Synod's letterhead was mentioned at the PPR Committee Alan Paterson made a plea for the Synod to follow suite and the C&S Committee has backed this suggestion. We are grateful to the Rev Roderick MacFarlane for his researches in translation.

Make Poverty History and the G8 summit at Gleneagles

The 'Make Poverty History' rally and march in Edinburgh on 2nd July was a spectacular event. The organisers had hoped for a hundred thousand participants and got nearly two hundred and fifty thousand, breaking all records for a demonstration in Scotland. Helen Warmington the URC 'Make Poverty History' coordinator, Anne Martin the URC Commitment for Life coordinator, with Paul Jupp, the Synod's C for L advocate and various others were tapping into a number of networks as the whole event developed, evolved and took on a life and momentum of its own. Many URC people were marching with different organisations, but Kathleen Ziffo's banner gave the rest of us a rallying place at Muster Point M where kent faces made things easier for those who do not habitually go on demonstrations.

Speaking for the Synod

At the committee meeting in January, John Wylie reported that he had been contacted through the Scottish Racial Justice network and invited to join in a lobbying by the churches of the Westminster minister, Des Brown, against the threatened deportation of a Christian pastor in Glasgow whose work was highly regarded. With the Moderator unavailable and no Synod Clerk in post, John, on his own initiative, had faxed a letter on behalf of the Synod. As a committee we readily endorsed his action, but furthermore we authorised him to use his initiative should similar circumstances recur. We recognise that the Synod is happy for the Committee to speak for it on certain occasions, and felt that at times this authorisation should extend to the Racial Justice coordinator. We understand that this raises questions of policy for which we have a Policy, Planning and Resources Committee, and so we have raised there the general question of "Who speaks for the Synod?" and the desirability of a Synod policy.

Christmas Day & New Year's Day Trading in Scotland

Karen Whitfield MSP produced in January a consultation paper with the support of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW). Her concern was that Christmas and New Year's Day were the two days left in the calendar when only essential services need to be available. Recent moves by Debenhams to open some of their stores on these days led USDAW to believe that a revision of the Law in Scotland was necessary to limit the extent of Christmas Day and New Year's Day trading. Many shops operate within shopping Malls and USDAW feared that a cartel often operated whereby one trader expanded its opening times, others then would follow on the grounds of needing to compete and soon the shop staff, distribution drivers, warehouse personnel and a whole chain of people were required to work. The consultation paper proposed that shops with over 250 square metres of floor space should be prohibited from opening on these days. We concluded from a sabbatical (rather than sabbatarian) view that employees were more than cogs in the corporate machine, but rather made in the image of God and deserving of refreshment and recreation, that the days in question were not just bank holidays but traditional family days for the whole population. Considered against a case in recent years where Argos employees in Aberdeen were sacked for declining to work on Sundays, we gave the proposal our approval.

Being Outside

'Being Outside' is the title of the first report of an expert working party on prostitution, set up by the Scottish Executive. When Margo MacDonald MSP had a bill before the parliament some years ago the proposal was officially to sanction local authorities setting up Prostitution Tolerance Zones. This practice had operated unofficially in part of Edinburgh for some years, and was intended to create a safer working environment for street prostitutes, where health support was available and routes out of prostitution could become possible. The policy had recognised that the vast majority of prostitutes were working on the streets as a consequence of drug addiction, alcohol problems or mental health problems, that they were as much victims as criminals, and that compared to unmanaged illegal street prostitution, the 'Zones' proposal was the lesser of the two evils. Margo MacDonald's Bill failed, and one of the voices opposing it had been that of Glasgow Council, who favoured the route of targeting the market for prostitutes, and making criminal the purchase of their services. The Expert Group has proposed a third way of dealing with the matter. Currently the crime is not in the sex but in the soliciting. Glasgow wanted to criminalize the purchasing men. The group suggests a new crime of offensive behaviour whereby either or both parties could be charged, but selling or buying sex would not be the crime. We generally welcome this report for its even-handedness, but will continue to watch the situation. The report is the first of three reports, and next year the group will make recommendations about indoor prostitution ('saunas', brothels, etc.) while in two years they are due to report on Male prostitution. We noted that there seem to have been no studies consulted on the market for prostitution and why men use them. We also noted that there was no reference to the sex-slave industry and trafficked women, but suspect that they will be included in next year's report.

Evolution of the Committee / diagram / young person / Churches' Social Inclusion Network

The convener prepared a paper for the Glasgow Resolution Working Group on how the committee's work had developed and evolved since its first meeting. Endorsed by the committee, it recognises that on top of a fairly simple but general, original remit, we now have responsibility within the fields of Racial Justice, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, Scottish Churches' Housing Action, Scottish Churches' Rural Group and ACTS Church and Society network. Indeed we were charged to make nominations for the post of Synod Racial Justice Coordinator, to appoint a representative for the Synod to Eco-Congregations Scotland, and in recognition of the ties with parliamentary business it has been agreed that Synod C&S Committee be the body to appoint the Synod's representative on the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office. We feel we have more of a grip on what we exist for and that having the confidence of Synod we are in a position to act more autonomously. A diagram was prepared for a report on the Synod's C&S work to the General Assembly's Church and Society Committee. It illustrates the network of relationships to which we are party and follows this report as appendix 1. We have long regretted having no representation on the Churches Social Inclusion Network. Fiona Bennet has expressed an

interest in taking this up on our behalf and we hope this will be possible. Along with other Synod Committees we should have a young person on the committee. We originally failed to find one and subsequently let the matter slip from our priorities. We are now committed to pursuing the matter urgently.

Scottish Civic Forum

The Scottish Civic Forum has its roots in the Scottish Constitutional convention and the Consultative Steering Group arising from it. The Consultative Steering Group indeed called for the Civic Forum to be set up as part of the architecture of the new Scotland, and it exists to provide a continuing civic engagement with the parliament, and to provide non-partisan support to a host of small civic organisations who cannot afford political or lobbying consultants. From its inception the Forum has received core funding from the Scottish Parliamentary Body, the cross-party neutral body looking after the affairs of the Parliament as opposed to the Executive. This year the Forum was told that the Parliamentary Body was now of the opinion that it should not be funding the Forum and that the funding therefore was being halved for this year and cut off thereafter. As a committee we had never fully engaged with the Forum, but we have always recognised its importance and wished to associate with it. We have written to the Presiding Officer adding our voice to the others who are urging a restoration of the funding as recognition that the work of the Forum is invaluable for the life of civic Scotland and the promotion of participation and comment as civic Scotland engages with its Parliament.

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office

Dr Graham Blount along with his administrator and researcher continue to offer invaluable assistance to the Scottish churches. The briefings, updates and consultations have continued to open up possibilities for the churches to engage with the Executive, officials and Parliament. Although the Officer's post is ecumenical, Graham is employed and managed by the Church of Scotland and this year the Kirk's restructuring left some question marks hanging over the Office. In a new clustering or grouping of the Kirk's departments, SCPO has been grouped with the Society, Religion & Technology Project, and comes under a Church and Society Council which will combine the remits of the former Church & Nation Committee, the Education Department and some of the work of the old Board for Social Responsibility. Staffing of SCPO has however been left secure, but with an extended remit to monitor Westminster matters as they affect Scottish churches. The URC General Assembly Committee normally makes an annual contribution to the funds of the SCPO, and although this failed to happen last year the shortfall created has since been made good. The SCPO Report for 2004 follows as appendix 2.

General Assembly Church & Society Committee

At a United Kingdom level there are a number of uncertainties around how the United Reformed Church will operate in the future in the sphere of Church and Society. The Secretary, Andrew Bradstock, resigned early this year to take on another job, and with the no staff contracts extending beyond 2007 his replacement can only have a short term contract, with all the limitations that involves. The General Assembly C&S Committee learned somehow through the process that negotiations had begun with the Methodist and the Baptist Union of Great Britain to work towards forming an ecumenical, 'Public Issues Team'. The model for this team is that currently operated by the Methodist church which works with a Generalist in overall charge and three Specialist staff members but no committee representing the broader church. There has been no indication whether the URC will continue to have a C&S Committee at U.K. level if this comes about, and initial job descriptions offered by the Staffing Advisory Group seemed to suggest that working to bring about this team was to take precedence over the role played by all previous C&S Secretaries, even although this work has not been approved by any council of the church. Amidst all this uncertainty the U.K. Committee had expressed to the Nominations Committee its need to have representation from the two national synods. Alan Paterson's term on the U.K. Committee concluded in July, but Nominations Committee was unable to appoint another person from Scotland, and the U.K. Committee invited our Synod Committee to nominate someone they could co-opt in his place. Given the tangled web of events around the future of the U.K. Committee we decided to nominate Alan Paterson as the person from Scotland who best knew the situation at General Assembly Committee level. Given that the Baptist Union of Great Britain has

barely any presence in Scotland, and the Methodist Church has no equivalent body to the Synod C&S Committee, the whole question of how we operate in this field as a church-in-three-nations will prove fascinating as time goes by.

Eco-congregations

When Lindsey Sanderson became assistant General Secretary for ACTS and demitted various posts in which she had served the Synod, we found we needed to appoint someone to the steering group for Eco-Congregations Scotland. The task was given by the Synod to the C&S Committee and it took us a while to find someone with knowledge of environmental issues, a commitment to helping churches bring about change and a willingness to do the job. We are pleased to say that Jen Wilson, a student at Herriot Watt University has agreed to fill the place. Eco-Congregations is a scheme that educates church groups in environmental issues, gives them help and choices in addressing their local needs and encourages a more systematic approach to how the churches live in their own environment. The material is available in packs focussing on particular facets of the environment, and can be taken up by congregations as a whole, by youth groups, by elders, Women's Union groups or any other parts of the church.

Creation-tide

Many ministers groan or shrug when a new special Sunday is announced for the churches, and there is a feeling at large that creating a special Sunday to raise awareness of a particular issue or cause has become the easy answer for every campaigning and special pleading group in Christendom; but still we want to add one more special day. The Idea of a Creation Day has come from the 5th Assembly of the European Christian Environment Network. Meeting in Basel, Switzerland, the Network considered the findings of their Creationtide working group and recognised that global climate change poses a bigger threat to the world's population than terrorism, and that the Christian Church, acknowledging in creed and worship that this is God's creation, has no place to mark Creation in its Christian Calendar. When Europe was a more agrarian society events like Rogation Sunday and Harvest Thanksgiving punctuated church life as the seasons punctuated the working life, but the Industrial Revolution, the industrialisation of farming, and all-year world supply of foodstuffs to European markets has distanced urban Europeans from the seasons and the environment. The Network has identified 1st September as Creation Day with the period following to early October as Creationtide. This takes in the feast of St Francis of Assisi and harvest time. David Coaker represented the United Reformed Church at the meeting while Donald Bruce of the Church of Scotland's 'Society, Religion and Technology Project' was there along with Eleanor Todd from 'Eco-Congregations Scotland'.

'About what we are'

In February we sent Kathleen Ziffo to Perth, to an ecumenical conference on Disability in Society and in the Church. The conference was organised by Sheilagh Kesting, the Church of Scotland Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, and was led by Eric Cramb and John Miller, with Dr Graham Monteith and Dr Alan Falconer also participating. These last two had been contributors to the World Council of Churches Interim Statement 2003 'A Church of all and for all'. The Interim statement is available on the World Council of Churches website and Kathleen's report forms appendix 4 to this report.

Thanks

As ever, warm thanks are due to the Synod staff who cheerfully deal with our impossible demands, facilitate our work, but regrettably supply only a moderate amount of chocolate biscuits.

Alan GM Paterson Convener
John A Young Secretary

**Appendix 1
Diagram of Church & Society Committee relationships**



Supports
Represented on
Briefed & assisted by
Responds to consultations by
Seeks opinions of
Liases with
Accountable to

Appendix 2

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office Annual Report 2004

The move from the General Assembly Hall over the summer and the formal opening of the new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood in October 2004 were the most significant events of the past year for the SCPO.

Entry into the new Parliamentary campus – more a village than a single building – brought a determination, both within the Parliament and from outside, that the Parliament should "up its game" in its new setting. Certainly, all those involved have had to learn some new ways of working. For SCPO, that has meant a greater amount of time (and energy!) commuting up and down the Royal Mile. That apart, we are – like most of those involved – enjoying using the new complex, which is an exciting place to be.

Three significant acts of worship also marked the year. In March, we celebrated the fifth anniversary of the SCPO in an ecumenical service at St Columba's by the Castle, at which Cardinal O'Brien preached. The anniversary was also marked by the first annual SCPO lecture, delivered by Deputy First Minister and Kirk Elder Jim Wallace on "Making All Things New (or a Blast from the Past)? – Faith and Politics in Scotland 2004". We are looking forward to the second SCPO lecture to be delivered by Professor Kathleen Marshall, Children's Commissioner, in March 2005.

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer was also invited to give a joint lecture with Rev Aled Edwards (his Welsh counterpart), similarly marking a fifth anniversary, in Cardiff; this joint reflection on the lessons of devolution was published as a booklet entitled "Ystryried Gwathaniathau A Gobeithion" ("Considering Contrasts and Futures: A Faith Reflection on Devolution").

An inter-faith service was held in the Canongate Kirk on the eve of the opening of the Parliament, organised by the Presiding Officer, SCPO and the Minister of the Canongate. That link with the Canongate was also reflected in the Carol Service held in the Garden Lobby of Parliament in December, which also featured an impromptu Parliamentary orchestra of staff and MSPs; a congregation of over 200 attended what looks like becoming an annual event. To restore our closeness to the Parliament, the SCPO also hopes to move, to the refurbished Netherbow, in 2005.

There was one staffing change during 2004. Following the departure of Vanessa Taylor, our research assistant – now policy and equality officer with the Scottish Inter Faith Council – Hazel MacIver was appointed research officer jointly to the SCPO and Church and Nation Committee. This joint appointment may be a sign of things to come, as changes within the Church of Scotland bring the Parliamentary Office into a closer "cluster" with other parts of the Kirk's relationship with public issues.

Along with the Evangelical Alliance and Catholic Church Parliamentary Officers, the SCPO represents the churches on the new "Core Liaison Group" between faith communities and the Scottish Executive. We have welcomed this as an important recognition of the role of churches and other faith communities, with the aim of improving dialogue with the Executive. The SCPO circulates widely information on the Group's discussions and feeds in comments from the churches.

The churches continue to have lively engagement with Parliament and Executive across a wide range of issues: asylum and refugees, criminal justice, debt, drugs and alcohol (notably Licensing Law reform), education, family and sexuality (including registration of civil partnerships and sexual health strategy), housing and homelessness (on which SCPO works closely with Scottish Churches Housing Action), land reform, poverty and social justice, and voluntary sector issues (from charity law to water charges).

The SCPO continues to service the Scottish Churches Social Inclusion Network, the Scottish Churches Land Reform Reference Group, its own Advisory Group, and the Scottish arm of the "Debt on our Doorstep" campaign; the Office is also involved in other ecumenical groups, including the ACTS and CTBI Church and Society Networks, the Scottish Churches Committee and the Joint Faiths Advisory Board on Criminal Justice. Churches are also involved in several of the Cross

Party Groups in the Parliament, including those on children, human rights, sexual health, international development, debt, and refugees and asylum seekers. The Parliamentary Officer is secretary of the last two of these.

Monthly updates and briefing papers are circulated to a wide mailing list of nearly 700 people, many of whom use the material locally as a basis for discussion or informed prayer. Further information on receiving these - or on lobbying the Parliament - is available from the Office (email graham@actsparl.org).

Graham K Blount

Appendix 3

Extract from the Report of the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland to its General Assembly in May 2005 reproduced with permission

FISHING

1. The Decline of the Fishing Industry

1.1 Many UK communities are highly dependent on fishing. The PMSU Report, discussed below, reminds us that in some areas of Scotland 25% of total employment (40% of private sector employment) depends on fishing. Although Scotland has only 8.6% of the UK population 62% of total fish (by weight) or 54% (by value) is landed here. Fish landed at Scottish ports is bound not only for the rest of the UK but also many areas of mainland Europe.

1.2 The fishing industry can be compared to any other long-established industry facing the consequences of decline. Those who have lost their job and who are too old to get another, either locally or elsewhere, can begin to lose their sense of worth. Because every day on the dole is the same, unemployment very often leads to loss of stimulation. Domestic life is threatened not just by loss of income but also by loss of self-respect. The loss of "the major employer" in the area leads to a lack of incentive for the young at school, especially as leaving age approaches. Those with "get up and go" do precisely that, with a resultant loss of young folk in a community. Failure breeds failure just as success breeds success, collectively and personally, and a spiral of decline readily sets in.

1.3 Many communities have a strong sense of pride in the industry long associated with them; it shapes their identity and its loss damages their morale. In spite of this, industrial decline can pull a community together to react and change. They will seek help or justice from the government; but, if this is not successful, spirit and impetus are hard to maintain, people move away, population declines, public services decline, and quality of life decreases.

1.4 There can be particular problems in redundancy for fishermen. Many fishing communities, such as Kinlochbervie and Westray, provide the economic lifeblood of fragile rural communities. There is little if any alternative employment in a reasonable "travel to work area". It has been said that Fraserburgh is more like an "island economy", since there is no railway and poor road access, and this results in great difficulty in any attempts to diversify. Further, almost all fishermen will have been "self employed"; they are not wage earners as such, but rather they share in the payment for the catch. This means that they may have problems qualifying for Job Seekers Allowance. Any compensation paid under decommissioning will be paid to the boat's owner, or indeed to the bank in the case of a newer boat not yet paid for. There is no requirement that any sums received be passed on to the crew.

2. Previous Statements

2.1 The General Assembly of 1997 called "upon all involved in the fishing industry worldwide to make clear their commitment to sustainability both of fish stocks and of those communities presently dependent on fishing." The Assembly also called "upon HMG to recognise the relatively

greater importance of the fishing industry to the Scottish Economy than to the economies of the other countries of the UK and to transfer the lead role in all negotiations to Scottish ministers.”

2.2 In June 2003, the then Vice-Convener, now Convener of the Church and Nation Committee, on behalf of the Church of Scotland, was one of the signatories of the Geiranger Declaration on Responsible Stewardship of the Resources of the North Sea. Representatives of churches in countries around the North Sea produced this document prior to the 12th General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches. Taking account of the views of scientists, the fishing industry, the oil industry, local coastal communities, and politicians, a call was made for “responsible stewardship to protect the complex ecosystem of the North Sea, thereby to sustain the development of life and culture along its coasts.” Calls were made for further dialogue between the churches on the stewardship of creation and for the EU to “improve the CFP by applying the ecosystem approach to ensure recovery of depleted stocks – sustainable harvesting of marine resources and equitable access to fish stocks”. (Details can be found at <http://www.kirken.n/English/news.cfm?artid=12429>).

2.3 In the Committee’s report to the 2004 General Assembly, it was stated that, “the committee has always sought to approach the subject of fishing with a genuine concern both for the sustainability and responsible stewardship of the earth’s resources and for the sustainability and care for those communities who depend on fishing for their livelihoods. These concerns cannot be approached separately - they stand or fall together.”

2.4 In July 2004 the UK signed up to the Scheveningen Declaration. The signatories also include Sweden, Denmark, Germany Belgium, France and the Netherlands, but not Spain. The aim of this group of nations is to achieve more effective and consistent implementation of EU fishing regulations. Both industry and governments had been calling for some time for more effective enforcement of the rules. An action plan was to be drawn up by 1st October 2004.

3. PMSU and RSE Reports

3.1 In January 2003 the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit (PMSU) was tasked with carrying out a review of options for a sustainable UK fishing industry in the medium to long term. This review was carried out from March to November 2003, and involved consultation with all parts of the UK fishing industry and other stakeholders. Visits were made to over 20 UK fishing communities. The report, published early in 2004, presented itself as “a set of recommendations to government, not as a statement of government policy. It is intended to form the basis for detailed discussion on future action.”

3.2 At much the same time, the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) was conducting its own inquiry into fishing, focusing on the particular problems for Scotland. “Given the differing views and disagreements among the various groups involved in the fishing crisis (including fishermen, fishery scientists, regional and government authorities and the European Commission) the RSE believed such an inquiry should be independent.” The RSE report was published in March 2004. The RSE report suggests that our government reviews “the arrangements for the use of Structural Funds in order to make the maximum use of funding from Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) and other funds for the economic diversification of fisheries dependent areas”.

Sustainability

3.3 Both these reports stress that, while many reports focus on the causes of the present fishing crisis, what is needed is to outline realistic options for developing fisheries which are genuinely sustainable and economically viable in the long term. Well-managed fish stocks would be of considerable economic benefit to the UK and, in particular, to the coastal fishing communities. However, to remain competitive, the industry will need to invest in vessels and gear while maintaining good quality of stocks and reliability of supply. The alternative is that for a fishery to be poorly managed and to go into decline.

Fish Stocks

3.4 The methods of assessing fish stocks could be better. There have always been doubts about the accuracy of scientific data. Logbooks are notoriously inaccurate (the SFPA Annual Report 2003/2004 records 732 written warnings being issued in this connection). ICES has declared that “substantial under reporting of catches of cod makes it difficult to get a true picture of the state of stocks.” The quantities of “black fish” being landed can only be guessed at, and discarded fish, a disgraceful waste, further confuse the matter. Both the RSE and PMSU recommend actions to improve fisheries science and increase the level of its acceptance by fishermen.

3.5 Their reports more or less agree in their comments on the exploitation of fish stocks:

- Both pelagic and nephrops stocks appear to be in a healthy state and are currently being fished at sustainable levels.
- Over-fishing of cod has taken stocks to below safe biological limits and an effective cod recovery programme is now needed to replace the current EU proposals.
- Demersal fishing should be reduced to a level much lower than the level over the past 15 years. It should be managed as a mixed fishery, using limits on effort coupled with the use of selective gear, protected areas and real-time area closures – aiming at the removal of less than a third of the stock each year.
- The impact of the current level of industrial fishing of sand eels through its by-catch is a cause for concern. The catch should be reduced and the impact of the fishery on the environment needs to be better understood.

Fleet Capacity

3.6 The RSE makes no comment on fleet size, though it talks around the problem of current lack of profitability in the demersal fleet and the need to reduce levels of fishing to allow stocks to recover. They do comment on the need to restructure the current financing of the fleet debts and the need for an alteration in the pattern of ownership if the fleet is to modernise:

The demersal fleet must not only be of the right size, but also modern and efficient if it is to be profitable and competitive. It will be for the industry to discuss with Ministers the further steps that are needed. Funds should be made available if any further reduction in the fleet on a voluntary basis proves necessary.

3.7 The PMSU are more direct:

To make adequate long run profits the UK fleet will need to reduce capacity in the whitefish sector under all future scenarios. Even if stocks recover strongly and prices remain broadly constant (giving increased overall revenues) a reduction of at least 13% will be needed. This rises to around 42% if prices continue to fall (figures include the 2003 decommissioning round which removed 8% of whitefish capacity).

3.8 Both RSE and PMSU agree (more or less) that:

- If the fleet is to remain competitive boats will need to continue to increase their ability to catch fish and to reduce their operating costs. If fish stocks are to be conserved, there will therefore be fewer boats and, consequently, a continuing reduction in the overall numbers of fishermen.
- To continue to invest in new a more efficient fleet will require a profitable fishing industry. For the white fish sector, this requires stocks to recover and fewer boats to operate – and then to make a good living.
- A successful home fleet will reduce the likelihood of quota being bought by non-UK owners. It will also be profitable without illegal fishing.

Management Systems

3.9 Both the RSE and the PMSU studies agree on the need for a greatly altered management of fishing, the need for the involvement of the industry in the assessment of stocks, the level of fishing effort and the mechanisms for ensuring compliance with the final agreements. Both go into some detail on the methods that they suggest to achieve this.

3.10 PMSU suggest that since the current systems of management will not ensure sustainability continuing reform of the CFP is essential - decentralisation of control, better information gathering and enforcement procedures, but “inside a reformed and regionalised CFP”. It is stressed that neither Governments nor industry can succeed alone so closer partnership/trust is essential. The RSE broadly agrees; noting that conservation of marine biological resources is “an exclusive competence”. This leads to most important decisions about the CFP being taken by the Council of Ministers, making the CFP too centralised, too remote from those affected by it. The authors urge that subsidiarity should be relevant in this area; they comment that the areas of Regional Advisory Councils (RAC), eg the North Sea, are too large for efficient management but offer “the opportunity to begin the process of decentralisation and greater involvement of fishermen”.

3.11 The RSE argue that there is an absence of long-term goals. “The political horse trading approach leads to non-transparency, and distortion of rational policies.” They argue for the ending of a quota-based system, because of high discards and black fish, replacing this with a firm days-at-sea policy. They also recommend a new body governed by a board appointed by the Scottish Fisheries Minister with members drawn from the industry – this would take over FRS and SFPA duties and advise the minister on policy and management issues

4. EU Fisheries Council

On the 22nd December 2004 the EU Fisheries Council reached an agreement on fish conservation measures for 2005, with the Fisheries Commissioner, Joe Borg, announcing afterwards that the “result is less fishing, more protection for the stocks that most need it and greater respect for the rules”:

- **Less fishing:** The number of fishing days for white fish vessels in the North Sea has been reduced by one day, with a two day reduction in the West of Scotland. However, in order to encourage the use of more selective gear, vessels that use a mesh net size of 120mm will receive one extra fishing day (subject to conditions for each Member State’s government). The Scottish Executive believe that in combination with the existing credits in respect of decommissioning, the “net effect should be neutral for most of the Scottish whitefish fleet”.
- **Protection of stocks:** In order to protect vulnerable fish stocks, significant quota cuts were agreed for mackerel, haddock and sand eels (although the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation believe that despite the TAC reduction, the removal of the permit restriction will actually mean that there will be a similar volume of haddock but of higher quality). On the basis of scientific advice, the total allowable catch for monkfish, herring and nephrops has been *increased* due to their sustainable stocks. There was no change in the total allowable catch for North Sea cod, although the European Commission will present “as soon as possible” proposals to improve control measures for the cod recovery plan.
- **Respect for the rules:** Measures (such as developing the use of issuing and withdrawing licences) will be taken to enforce Common Fisheries Policy rules for any vessels that are caught breaching them.

The Scottish Fishermen’s Federation remarked that the “final outcome of the Council was broadly favourable to the industry.”

5. Scottish Executive

The Scottish Executive consultation period on the new European Fisheries Fund has just concluded. This fund, which aims at encouraging more sustainable fishing and greater diversification in fishing communities, is to be introduced in 2007 as a successor to the FIGG scheme. It is to have 6 key aims:

- Support the CFP to ensure sustainable exploitation of resources;
- Promote a sustainable balance between resources and fleet capacity;
- Strengthen the competitiveness of economically viable enterprises;
- Encourage protection of the environment and natural resources;
- Encourage sustainable development and the improvement of the quality of life in marine lake and coastal areas affected by fishing and aquaculture activities;
- Promote equality between women and men in the development of the sector and coastal fishing areas.

6. Subsidiarity

6.1 The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) released a report in October 2004 urging the European Commission and governments to reduce fishing in the North Sea, Irish Sea and West of Scotland grounds. Cod stocks were particularly depleted and this body urges a total ban on cod fishing for 2005. Haddock stocks, however, are well over the recommended minimum so haddock fishing could continue. The problem is that there is some doubt as to whether haddock can indeed be caught without also catching cod. The value of any such by catch is greatly enhanced because of scarcity.

6.2 Most Scottish fishermen engaged in the white fish sector do so in mixed fishery areas. Their representatives have for several years been trying to persuade SEERAD, DEFRA, and the EC that haddock (their main catch) can indeed be caught with little or no impact on cod stocks. This is because of the areas in which they fish and the mesh size they use. They are prepared to settle for around 5% cod as by-catch. Off the English coast and in the English Channel vessels use smaller mesh size and catch huge amounts of immature cod, which would, if left alone, migrate to colder waters as they matured. The difficulty is therefore that of having one policy in the North Sea and another elsewhere. There is therefore much to be said for a more regional approach to the application of the CFP, which the Church of Scotland is not alone in having advocated for some considerable time.

6.3 The recent formation of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (RAC) is welcome. At present they have only an advisory role but the European Commission is required to heed (although not necessarily follow) any advice offered. The RAC can be asked to investigate particular issues, such as the question of whether it is possible to catch haddock without adverse effects on cod. Such councils were intended to provide an official voice for communities that depend on North Sea Fishing. Membership of the 24 person panel is shared among Scotland, England, 7 other North Sea Baltic countries plus international industry organisations and environmental NGOs. The aim is that this body will influence decisions about stock management by advising the Council of Ministers.

6.4 While we recognise the value of inter-governmental co-operation on environmental issues, the insistence on "exclusive competence" poses its own problems. The final discussions on quotas and other matters take place in private, and there is the suspicion that non-fishing issues can intrude. A spirit of give and take has left fisherman feeling that they have had to "give" in order that other UK interests can "take". There is much to be said for applying the principle of subsidiarity in this area in some measure.

6.5 A development of the RAC system would seem to be better than the much maligned "horse trading" on quotas and days at sea which was an annual feature of the CFP. The power of decision-making remains in Brussels, but this gives some scope for local input and possibly, as these bodies develop, some measure of local control.

6.6 The principle of subsidiarity cannot, however, simply be used by us to control our fishing areas. It brings with it the recognition that others have similar rights. Decline of fishing stocks in European waters has led inevitably to EU vessels seeking fishing grounds elsewhere and the UN Environment Programme has reported that EU fishing fleets are endangering poor fishing communities off the coast of West Africa. Because the EU boats use industrial trawling techniques whereas local fishermen use smaller boats and more sustainable fishing techniques involving either small nets or line fishing, environmental NGOs say that fish stocks are being depleted to the detriment of local fishermen's livelihoods, perhaps even their lives. There have also been allegations of thousands of tonnes of unwanted fish being dumped overboard. Even where restrictive catch agreements with the EU exist the developing countries often don't have indigenous technical advice when negotiating, simply relying on EU technical advisors, and are unlikely to be able to afford to police the agreements adequately. While much of this industrial fishing is carried out by Spanish boats, a few Scottish boats are also involved. An example of an aquaculture shellfish operation started by a Scottish fisherman, locally based in a West African

country, employing local people is the type of operation likely to be more environmentally sustainable and of more benefit to a developing country

7. Conclusions

There has been considerable progress since 1997. In particular over the last couple of years a consensus has been built up on the many difficult and contentious issues. There is still a need for longer term planning, if for no other reason than that fishermen are businessmen who need to plan and make long-term investments. The annual bargaining sessions in late December were no way either to ensure conservation or run a business. There is a need for real transparent implementation and a better observance of the rules, and for the CFP to be more obviously common. While we can accept that there is a case for the present "exclusive competence" for environmental reasons this must be balanced by the principle of subsidiarity to allow local control and ownership of the decision-making. There is a need for all parties to co-operate and we believe that the RAC system may well be the first step towards this, particularly if they can be given more power. Not least this process ought to result in a more reliable ingathering of data that restores trust between fishermen and scientists. It ought also to help government to find better ways to give help to those whose livelihood is threatened or lost as a result of decisions made. The views expressed by the General Assembly in 1997 remain as valid as ever.

8. Postscript: Aquaculture

The fish farming and shellfish cultivation industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world food economy, not least in Scotland where the Scottish Executive say that it is worth about £500 million a year to the economy.

8.1 Legislation

At present the industry works under at least seven different pieces of UK and Scottish legislation, most of which was designed for other purposes (e.g. Diseases of Fish Act 1937, Coast Protection Act 1949). Then, as well as complying with overall European strategy, in 2005 it comes under the local authority planning rules for the first time (presently approval has to be given by the Crown Estate Commissioners who 'own' the sea bed out to the 12-mile limit). The Scottish Executive intends to promote a Bill to create an all-encompassing regulatory system for aquaculture.

8.2 Application Process

Applications for fish farms producing more than 100 tonnes a year and those in sensitive areas must have an environmental impact assessment (EIA). Applications are sent to SEERAD, and for comment (and possible objection) to SEPA, SNH, and local salmon fishery boards; they may even involve the MOD. *'It can easily take a year at a cost of more than £20,000 and of course there's no way to claim a refund if your plan is thrown out.'* (AQCESS Study Spring 2004).

8.3 Employment

In 2002 salmon and smolt production accounted for 1,711 jobs, of which approximately 18% were part-time. A further 5,665 full and part time Scottish jobs were associated with processing, of which 2,456 were located in the Highlands and Islands and, allowing multiplier effects, the total was estimated to be 10,073 jobs (8,625 full-time equivalent). (*Scottish Economic Report, March 2004*). Employment in the industry has remained remarkably steady over the period 1988-2002 (contrasting with a 19% reduction in sea fishing employment over a similar period) and this has been achieved by major increases in productivity through use of larger cages, feed barges, and other innovative technology resulting in increased breeding success. The reduced costs of production have been passed on to customers in lower prices in the shops, thus increasing the demand for the product. Economies of scale have also been achieved by the reduction, through takeovers, in the numbers of companies operating in the field. Larger companies may be able to afford more investment in research and development, and may be able to negotiate better terms with the supermarkets. It is therefore increasingly difficult for small businesses producing less than 1000 tonnes per annum to enter and continue in the industry.

8.4 Wages

While Scottish Aquaculture wages cannot be segregated from the official statistics of the wider agriculture and fisheries sector, a survey carried out by AQCESS in the Mallaig and Kyle of Lochalsh area indicated that pay on a fish farm is less than on the boats and considerably less than the all-industry weekly average. Aquaculture can, however, provide a source of regular employment for local people in areas such as the North West Highlands where other employment opportunity is limited, allowing people to stay in their own communities.

8.5 Sea Lice

Data supplied to the Scottish Executive on sea lice infestation of salmon and sea trout is not published on grounds of commercial confidentiality, but it remains a problem. In addition, the spread of sea lice to wild salmon where farmed and wild interact is asserted to be a cause of the decline of the latter. Some of the chemicals used to control lice are highly toxic and wash into the surrounding waters where they are alleged to cause further environmental problems. New, less toxic medicines are in the process of development. AQCESS state 'there is no magic bullet to tackle the lice problem'.

8.6 Fishmeal

Fishmeal is processed principally from millions of tonnes of small fish such as sand eels, sprats and anchovies. These fish also form part of the food chain for predators such as larger fish, birds and marine mammals. AQCESS has likened the process to 'hoovering up life on the seabed to turn it into food pellets for salmon farms'. It is alleged that, worldwide, one in four fish goes for non-human consumption, and of the 6.2 million tonnes of fishmeal produced globally salmon farming alone is estimated to use 13%. It has been estimated that, for every kilogram of farmed salmon produced, 3.16 kilograms of wild fish are required to be turned into fishmeal (*Issues in Ecology, Winter 2001*). Scientists argue that this net loss of fish is severely limiting the potential contribution of aquaculture to world food supplies.

In recent years the Danish fleet, which dominates the North Sea industrial sand eel fishery, has been unable to reach its total allowable catch allocation; in 2003 it was allocated a catch limit of nearly one million tonnes but could only catch 300,000 tonnes. EU ministers went against scientific advice and allocated a total allowable catch for 2004 of 826,000 tonnes. A ban on sand eel fishing from northeast Scotland to Northumberland has been in force since 2000, following disastrous effects on the breeding success and populations of internationally important colonies of main predator birds such as puffin and kittiwake. Since cod and mackerel also depend on sand eels, these fish may also benefit. Evidence of rising sea-temperatures in the North Sea may also be stunting recovery of the sand eel stock.

Some experimental work has been carried out using vegetable alternatives to fishmeal, but small fish are the natural diet of larger fish. Although success has been limited experiments continue with vegetable and fishmeal combinations. Both the RSE report and environmental NGOs are calling for more research into interactions between industrial fisheries and the marine environment.

8.7 Future Prospects

The proposed Aquaculture Bill and the Code of Best Practice to be introduced by the Scottish Executive in 2005 are eagerly awaited by both industry and environmental NGOs.

Over-supply from Norway and other salmon producing countries outside the European Union is a continuing cause of concern to the industry but the EU is drawing up proposals to protect the Scottish Industry from unfair competition.

Demand for oysters and mussels in Europe is said to be increasing and these shellfish, along with cod and haddock already farmed in a small way in Scotland, may be suitable candidates for an expanded industry in the future. Whether the two finfish could be farmed in sufficient quantity to replace wild caught quantities completely remains debatable, but diversification in species farmed may give opportunities for new business starts.

<u>Word/ Abbreviation</u>	<u>GLOSSARY</u>
ACFM	Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management (part of ICES)
AQCESS	Aquaculture & Coastal Economic & Social Sustainability
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
Demersal	Bottom feeding fish such as cod, haddock, halibut, ling, whiting, monkfish (anglerfish)
DLP	Designated Landing Port
FIFG	Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance
Flatfish	Plaice & sole
FRS	Fisheries Research Survey
FTEs	Full time equivalents
Gurnard	Scorpaenoid fish with armoured head and finger-like pectoral fins
Hague Preference	Right of UK & Ireland to a better share of stocks when quotas are low
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Seas
Industrial fisheries	Sand-eel, Norway pout, sprat
Megrim	Flatfish of turbot family with translucent body up to 50cm (bycatch with angler)
NASCO	North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (to protect salmon in marine part of life cycle)
Nephrops	Scampi, langoustines, Dublin Bay prawns, Norway Lobsters
Pelagic	Herring, Mackerel, Horse Mackerel, Blue Whiting
RACs	Regional Advisory Councils (eg North Sea RAC)
Roundfish	Cod, haddock whiting (as opposed to flatfish such as plaice or dabs)
SEERAD	Scottish Executive Environmental & Rural Affairs Department
SEL	Scottish Environment Link
SFF	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
SFPA	Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency
Shellfish	Norway Lobster, Scallops
SPICe	Scottish Parliamentary Information Centre
SSB	Spawning Stock Biomass
SSGA	Scottish Salmon Growers Assocn.
STECF	Scientific & Technical & Economic Committee on Fisheries (an EC body)
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
Whitefish	Fish with white flesh <i>ie</i> mixed demersal (<i>qv</i>)

Appendix 4

REPORT ON DISABILITY CONFERENCE 'ABOUT WHAT WE ARE'

I was asked to represent the Church and Society Committee in attending an Ecumenical conference on Disability in Society and in the Church. This was in February. The day was entitled "About What We Are" and was based on the WCC Interim Statement, from September 2003 – entitled "A Church of All and for All".

The day was organised by Sheilagh Kesting of the Church of Scotland Ecumenical Relations dept. About 80 people attended - from various churches (mostly C of S I think) and groups like Capability Scotland – and a number of what we would call "disabled" people attended and contributed. The day was led by Rev Eric Cramb with Rev John Miller. Two contributors to that WCC statement took part – Rev Dr Alan Falconer and Rev Dr W Graham Monteith. -

One of the most thought provoking contributions was in fact from Graham Monteith who was interviewed by John Miller about his life, and how he had been able to accomplish much, but also

about how he had encountered difficulties in society generally and amongst church people also, because of his disabilities. You might know that Graham Monteith was born with severe Cerebral Palsy and is now totally confined to a powered wheelchair. His speech is difficult (for us to follow) but his intellectual ability is great – he has just published another book, this one aimed at a theologically literate audience, in which he outlines an understanding of how theology may impact on disability. This book is called “Deconstructing Miracles”- From thoughtless indifference to honouring disabled people. It is really mind-boggling to realise that even in this day and age – and even within some churches, where surely people “should know better” Graham Monteith found real hostility that he should be candidating for Ministry, and he encountered discrimination from some Elders and members when he was appointed Minister to a Parish. (This was when Graham was younger, less disabled than he is now and before the Discrimination Act came in.)

(I paraphrase the following from the Interim Statement – 13-21)

Gospel stories about Jesus healing people with different diseases and disabilities were traditionally interpreted as illustrating how human beings are liberated and empowered to a richer life. (I.e. people with disabilities are seen as weak and needing care) Eventually this view led to those people being recipients of charity – those who received what others gave. People were therefore not on equal terms, and eventually people were regarded as somehow less than fully human. Punishment for sins, lack of faith or a demonic activity (though all denied by Christ himself) were often thought to be the causes of a person’s disability. This often led to oppression of disabled people. In that respect, churches’ attitudes have reflected attitudes in society. Despite new understanding in society and new theological ways of understanding in churches and the ecumenical movement the churches have lagged behind society, (and often reluctantly caught up at that) - and have not been a prophetic voice against oppression and discrimination. With recognition of human rights, have come new interpretations and questions, and a gradual realisation has emerged that living with a disability can be about living with other abilities (gifts from God?) - as well as being “limited” or experiencing “loss”. Nevertheless the ambiguity of disability displayed in both the God-given good of creation and in its brokenness is all part of human life for all of us. We all have limitations and are all “imperfect” in many senses.

I should say here that before I attended the conference I had also read Helen Mee’s excellent and eye-opening Dissertation on the attitudes of society and the churches to people with learning disability, and other material which she lent me. As a Physiotherapist I have encountered many people with disabilities though mainly physical disabilities – either acquired or with which they were born. At the conference, (and in Helen’s dissertation) we were encouraged to think, not so much of a Medical model of disability – where people have something abnormal, (whether physical, mental or emotional – from birth, or acquired in later life) requiring “fixing” or “mending”; but of a Societal model, where the “problem” is of society’s making and not of the person with the particular (dis)ability – where society needs the “fixing” and “mending” - where society should be able to incorporate people of all abilities without excluding some – where we see the person rather than the disability.

From a Christian point of view also, belonging to the Body of Christ, where each member of the body (organ, limb, etc) is not only required but is essential before the whole can be complete, is a very compelling metaphor of what God wants.

We were reminded, or rather informed, that we should be very careful with our vocabulary, when speaking of, and to, people with disabilities. Even when we are neither uncaring nor thoughtless, we can still be condescending or inappropriate, resulting in hurt and discrimination of others.

Sheilagh Kesting said that the day proved to be a truly enriching experience and a significant step forwards. I would add that my experience would have been less without Helen’s prior input and information. My hope is that some of what was learned may be spread as widely as possible so that a significant step forwards is achieved.

I have attached a copy of a power point presentation on “Talking about Disability” shown at the conference which are useful pointers to better understanding and communication.

Kathleen Ziffo.