



The Church of Scotland

Communications Department

GOOD NEWS GENERAL ASSEMBLY UPDATE:

TUESDAY 24TH MAY 2011

PRISON VISITOR CENTRES “SINGLE BEST INVESTMENT FOR REDUCING CRIME”



Above: Very Reverend Dr Andrew McLellan

THE former Chief Inspector for HM Prisons in Scotland has said prison visitor centres are “the single best investment for reducing crime”.

Speaking at the General Assembly during the Social Care Council (CrossReach) report this morning, Very Reverend Dr Andrew McLellan told commissioners that such facilities are “astonishingly outcome driven and productive”.

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PRISON VISITOR CENTRES “SINGLE BEST INVESTMENT FOR REDUCING CRIME”

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The former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland said: “There can hardly be one more stunning statistic in criminal justice, prisoners who are able to maintain family support during their imprisonment are six times less likely to reoffend than those who have no engagement with their family and no family support.

“If you want the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to make Scotland safer, the single best investment for reducing crime, is building more prison visitor centres in prisons.”

Dr McLellan said for many there was no more frightening a prospect than being at the front door of a prison for the first time, and that it was “immensely important” that the Church should be involved in meeting people at that most vulnerable stage.

He also spoke movingly about the treatment of prisoners’ children, and said Scotland should be “ashamed” for the amount of pain and stigma youngsters face.



Above: Reverend Syd Graham

The Church of Scotland’s social care arm CrossReach runs the visitor centre at HMP Perth, however only three of Scotland’s prisons currently have vital initiatives.

Earlier, convener Reverend Syd Graham thanked the Guild for their financial support which continues to make a substantial difference to the running of the Perth centre.

CONVENER LAMENTS RECENT SECTARIAN INCIDENTS



Above: Reverend Ian Galloway

THE convener of the Church and Society Council lamented the sectarian incidents around recent football matches in Scotland.

Reverend Ian Galloway, who is a Hearts supporter, said he was “particularly distressed” by the act of violence that took place at Tynecastle earlier this month when a job assaulted Celtic manager Neil Lennon.

Speaking as he presented the council’s report, the convener said: “In recent weeks the blight of sectarianism has been all too apparent.

“There is only one side to be on in this issue, which is the side that is determined to see an end now to discrimination and violence on religious grounds however spurious these grounds may be.”

Mr Galloway also praised the grassroots anti-sectarian projects, including the ecumenical walk of witness during Holy Week in Larkhall and a joint statement from Very Reverend John Christie and Cardinal Keith O’Brien.

Earlier in the day, the Assembly heard how a Greenock minister had been the victim of physical assault and verbal abuse whilst he was growing up as a Roman Catholic, and then even after becoming a protestant. Reverend Francis Murphy said he too hoped the recent events surrounding Scotland’s football clubs do not “set us back years”.

The Church and Society Council was later instructed to engage with the appropriate authorities to review the start times of football, and other sporting events, on a Sunday, and to discuss access to church buildings.

DISSENT RECORDED



Above: The Assembly votes on the matter

FOLLOWING yesterday's debate, commissioners had the opportunity to record their dissent about sections of the deliverance from the Special Commission's report on Same-Sex Relationships and the Ministry.

A total of 120 people recorded their dissent about section four of the deliverance, and the figure was 119 for section seven.

Section four, passed by 393 to 252 votes, allows ministers and deacons in same-sex relationships ordained before 2009 to be inducted into pastoral charges.

The Assembly chose option B and passed section 7 by 351 to 294, which means a move towards the acceptance for training, inclusion and ordination of those in same-sex relationships.

A theological commission will be set up to continue dialogue and bring recommendations to the 2013 General Assembly, as well as considering whether ministers should have freedom of conscience to bless civil partnerships and possible liturgy for such occasions.

As nothing has been formally enacted, the proposals do not need to consult the Kirk's 46 presbyteries under the Barrier Act, but it does mark a significant departure from the Church's traditional teaching, as acknowledged by the Commission's report.

A comprehensive list of those who recorded their dissent will be published in the daily papers on Thursday.

TOMORROW'S BUSINESS:

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