

## **Church reps to stay on Scottish education committees**

**The Scottish  
Government  
has backed  
religious  
representation  
on local  
authority**



**education committees, despite calls from secularists to remove them.**

A petition was submitted to the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood by Mr Colin Emerson on behalf of the Edinburgh Secular Society.

It asked Parliament to rescind the current law that requires three external religious nominees to be appointed to every Scottish local education committee.

The petition, which received 1,700 signatures, declared that: "To afford a particular section of society a privileged position within the decision making process of local government, based solely on their particular and personal religious beliefs, is profoundly and inherently undemocratic, unfair and discriminatory. It strikes against those specific virtues of justice and integrity underpinning our society and which lie at the heart of the Scottish Parliament."

Highland MSP John Finnie also proposed a member's bill seeking to take away voting rights from representatives of parents, teachers, young people and the Church who sit on these committees.

His proposal was criticised as "short-sighted secularism" by the Scottish Evangelical Alliance, which argued that such a bill would result in a weaker democratic system.

"Communities must be at the heart of all that government does, and religious groups are often at the heart of our communities. Education is too important to be left to the party politicians and it is important that community voices are heard," said Alliance spokesperson Kieran Turner.

"This is democracy in action. It is important that this secular agenda does not come at the expense of long-term community involvement."

A response from Parliament on the secularist petition made clear that there are no plans to change the status quo.

"Ministers support the involvement of religious representatives in the decision-making process by councils in relation to education," it reads.

Rev David Robertson, Free Church of Scotland minister in Dundee and director of the Solas Centre for Public Christianity welcomed the decision, saying: "We are delighted that the Scottish Government has refused to bow to the secularist agenda and continues to uphold the historic agreement between the churches and the state in Scottish schools.

"They clearly recognise the valuable part that the Churches have to play."

He concluded by noting the wider implications of the Church's role in education: "We hope to continue to have a major input into Scotland's education system - for the sake of Scotland's children."

## **Catholic archbishop slams UK welfare reform**

**The leader of the Roman Catholic church in England and Wales has called government cuts to welfare a "disgrace" and said they have left people facing hunger and destitution.**

Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols, who is due to be installed as a cardinal by Pope Francis later this month, told the Daily Telegraph newspaper

that the way social benefits are handed out "has become more and more punitive."

"For a country of our affluence, that quite frankly is a disgrace," he said in comments published Friday.



Britain's Conservative-led government has cut billions from public spending in a bid to curb the country's huge deficit. But its critics say reductions in the amount spent on unemployment, housing and disability benefits are disproportionately hitting the poor.

Nichols said people understood the need to "tighten our belts" and cut public expenditure. But he said "the basic safety net that was there to guarantee that people would not be left in hunger or in destitution has actually been torn apart."

"It no longer exists and that is a real, real dramatic crisis," he said.

Britain's Anglican leader, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, has also criticized the government's austerity measures.

The Department of Work and Pensions said it spent 94 billion pounds (\$157 billion) a year on benefits - not including pensions - "and the welfare system supports millions of people who are on low incomes or unemployed so they can meet their basic needs."

## **C of E reaches compromise over Guides' God pledge**

**The Church of England has backed a compromise agreement for Girl Guides who want to affirm their belief in God when making their Guide promise.**

Last week the General Synod discussed the Guides' new pledge to "be true to myself" which replaces a promise to "love my God".

Critics of the new pledge include commentator Melanie Phillips, who has accused the national Guides association of “dumping timeless values”.



A private member’s motion was put forward by Synod member Alison Ruoff, who said girls should be given a choice between the longstanding pledge and the new promise.

During the debate a compromise was put forward which suggested Guides could preface the new promise with: “In the presence of God I make my Guide Promise”.

Following the change, Ruoff and other Synod members overwhelmingly supported the motion.

The compromise was also backed by Girlguiding UK, who commented that they “remain committed to one promise for all”.

The group said many members had “welcomed” the new promise, and that the organisation had “taken on board the view of a minority of our members who struggle with the new wording”.

They added that “members can provide the context of their own belief if they wish before making our promise.

“This suggestion ensures the wording of our promise is unaltered and, rather than having an alternative, ensures we maintain our one promise for all that celebrates shared values and embraces all beliefs.”

The National Secular Society – which claimed that the Guides had been ‘bullied’ over the issue – also gave its support to the compromise.

“It is a good way to solve the problem, a way that should calm the protestors”, the group said.

Earlier last week it emerged that a Guide group in Newcastle who wanted to use the longstanding promise were no longer under the threat of expulsion from the national Guides association.

Last year commentator Melanie Phillips said the new pledge appeared to be “just a crude and shallow attempt by the Guiding establishment to rebrand itself as modern, by dumping timeless values”.

## **C of E House of Bishops guidance on same sex marriage**

**Following their meeting on February 13<sup>th</sup> 2014 the House of Bishops of the Church of England have today issued a statement of Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage.**



The statement comes as an appendix to a pastoral letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York addressed to the clergy and people of the Church of England.

### **To the Clergy and People of the Church of England**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

We write as fellow disciples of Jesus Christ who are called to love one another as Christ has loved us. Our vocation as disciples of Christ in God's world is to hold out the offer of life in all its fullness. God delights always to give good gifts to his children.

The gospel of the love of God made known to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest of these gifts. The call of the gospel demands that we all listen, speak and act with integrity, self discipline and grace, acknowledging that as yet our knowledge and understanding are partial.

As members of the Body of Christ we are aware that there will be a range of responses across the Church of England to the introduction of same sex marriage. As bishops we have reflected and prayed together about these developments. As our statement of 27<sup>th</sup> January indicated, we are not all in agreement about every aspect of the Church's response. However we are all in agreement that the Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman remains unchanged.

We are conscious that within both Church and society there are men and women seeking to live faithfully in covenanted same sex relationships. As we said in our response to the consultation prior to the same sex marriage

legislation, "the proposition that same sex relationships can embody crucial social virtues is not in dispute. Same sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity...., two of the virtues which the Book of Common Prayer uses to commend marriage. The Church of England seeks to see those virtues maximised in society".

We have already committed ourselves to a process of facilitated conversations across the whole Church of England in the light of the Pilling Report. These conversations will involve ecumenical and interfaith partners and particularly the wider Anglican Communion to whom we rejoice to be bound by our inheritance of faith and mutual affection. They will include profound reflection on the meaning, interpretation and application of scripture to which we all seek to be faithful. They will involve particular attention to the lived experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. We believe that Christian understandings of sexuality have a vital contribution to make in our society's conversation about human flourishing.

The introduction of same sex marriage in our country is a new reality and has consequences for the life and discipline of the Church of England. We seek to model a distinctive and generous witness to Jesus Christ in our pastoral guidance to the Church at this time which is set out in the Appendix to this letter.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people in all times and situations. We continue to seek God's grace and the prayers of the whole Church as we seek to proclaim that faith afresh in this generation.

+ Justin Cantuar  
Eboracensis

+ Sentamu

On behalf of the House of Bishops of the Church of England

## Media digest

### Tel

Report that the Archbishop of Canterbury insists (in his speech at synod yesterday) it is not 'wishy-washy' to accommodate people with different views as the Church of England grapples with homosexuality and women bishops. Article is headlined 'Justin Welby says 'church viewed like racists over homosexuality'

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10633145/Welby-tells-Church-refusing-gay-blessings-will-be-viewed-like-racism.html>

### **Times/Ind**

Report that the Archbishop of Canterbury has acknowledged that the Church of England's stance on homosexuality is seen by many as "akin to racism" and is leading to fears of "irrelevance in a changing society".

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4003842.ece>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/welcome-samesex-couples-or-be-damned-as-bigots-archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby-tells-church-of-england-9124915.html>

### **Guard**

Report that the Church of England (during a debate on environmental issues at synod) has said that it will, as a last resort, pull its investments from companies that fail to do enough to fight the "great demon" of climate change and ignore the church's theological, moral and social priorities.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/12/church-climate-change-investment-great-demon-flooding>

### **Tel/Times**

Reports that Christian members of the Girl Guides will be allowed to mention God before they take the organisation's new pledge in a compromise backed by the Church of England's Synod which yesterday debated the issue through a Private Members Motion from Alison Ruoff

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4004248.ece>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10634672/Girl-Guides-offers-concession-to-Christians-in-row-over-dropping-God-from-pledge.html>

### **Tel**

Christina Odone on how the Big Society is working in the current flood hit climate saying that parish councillors are working with vicars and priests to convert church halls into temporary shelters for flood victims

<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/cristinaodone/100259298/emerging-from-the-flood-waters-the-big-society/>

### **Exp**

Report that the Church of Scotland has accused SNP ministers of diminishing the role of the family with its plans for state guardians for every child

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/459456/Church-of-Scotland-says-child-guardian-plan-would-diminish-the-family>

### **Eve Stand**

Editorial on what do the country's religious leaders make of the floods with ref

to Archbishop of Canterbury's address to General Synod

<http://www.standard.co.uk/news/londoners-diary/high-water-holy-silence-9126122.html>

### **Tel**

Chaplain Jemima Thackray says that 'an acutely embarrassing' Bible reading, scheduled for the day the Church of England Synod voted to fast track women bishops, should remind people not to take the 'Good Book' literally.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10635510/Women-bishops-We-Christians-need-to-face-up-to-facts-about-Bible.html>

### **Tel**

Report that Belgian's Parliament has voted to allow the euthanasia of terminally ill children

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/10636992/Belgian-MPs-vote-to-extend-euthanasia-to-children-of-all-ages.html>

### **Tel/BBC**

Reports on current storms and flooding across the country with articles referencing the relief effort being co-ordinated from churches, particularly in Egham, Surrey.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/weather/10636003/UK-floods-Ministers-condemn-councils-charging-flood-hit-residents-for-sandbags.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/weather/10635142/Floods-storms-and-weather-as-it-happened.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-26169252>

### **BBC**

Strong winds lifted off large parts of a Lincolnshire church's lead roofing and damaged the exterior walls. Some sections of the roofing were blown into the grounds of Peter's Church in Foston

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-26169265>

### **Mirror**

Report that Labour have won the Wythenshawe and Sale East parliamentary by-election (caused by death of Labour MP Paul Goggins) with the Tories pushed into third place by UKIP. The Tory candidate was Daniel Critchlow a 26-year-old vicar from the area.

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/manchester-by-election-labour-wins-tories-3143699#ixzz2tH8PYEEO>



## Tel

Will Rose Hudson Wilkin be the first woman bishop?

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10633672/Will-Rose-Hudson-Wilkin-be-the-first-woman-bishop.html>

## Blogs

**God and Politics** on same-sex marriage and a Christian voice on the debate, including references to General Synod and the presentation on Human Sexuality by Sir Joseph Pilling.

<http://godandpoliticsuk.org/2014/02/12/gay-marriage-culture-wars-and-a-church-that-needs-to-return-to-its-roots/>

**Psephizo** on a report originally in the Church Times and seen in the [Independent](#) about the difference in filling of vacancies between the North and South.

<http://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/vicars-are-a-bunch-of-self-interested-southern-softies/>

**Thinking Anglicans** carries statements made by WATCH and Forward in Faith on Tuesday's passing of legislation on Women in the Episcopate.

<http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/006441.html>

**Independent** - Tom Doran on the definition of marriage

<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2014/02/13/the-definition-of-marriage/>

**God and Politics** - Valentine's Day special - Canon J John on 'have we cheapened the essence of love?'

<http://godandpoliticsuk.org/2014/02/13/valentines-special-have-we-cheapened-the-essence-of-love/>

**Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans** - initial thoughts on Archbishop of Canterbury's Presidential Address to Synod

<http://fcasa.wordpress.com/2014/02/14/some-initial-reflections-on-the-archbishop-of-canterburys-presidential-address-to-general-synod/>

**Archbishop Cranmer** on 'Belgium to euthanize her children'

<http://archbishop-cranmer.blogspot.co.uk/>