

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party

w: labour.org.uk/faith Issue 16, 2012



Ed Miliband: “Building a One Nation Society”

“As we approach Christmas this year we all know we are living in extraordinarily difficult times. The Government’s promise that the pain of cuts would be worth the gain of economic recovery has proved illusory. The prediction that debt would fall as a proportion of GDP has been proved wrong. Instead we are living with the first double dip recession in decades. Sadly the Government’s policies are having a devastating effect on people’s living standards in communities, parishes, and towns right across Britain.

“One of the most distressing effects has been the unprecedented rise in food banks in the UK. Most of them are run by the Trussell Trust, a Christian charity which was founded in Salisbury in 2000. By 2004, with the economy booming, they only ran two food banks. Today, there are more than 250. 130,000 people around the country rely on them to get by.

“I have nothing but admiration for those volunteers who respond to these tough times by choosing not to stay in the comfort of their houses—especially during these cold winter months—but to go out and volunteer to help strangers who do not have enough to eat. Their dedication and compassion is the best example of Christian values—and the values at the heart of our

Labour party.

“In my conference speech this year I said that I have a core belief which runs through my politics: that we must leave the world a better place than we found it. That means binding the country back together as One Nation and making sure that every single person has a stake in society.

“Foodbanks are just one example which show that thousands of volunteers are already doing this as a matter of course, every day in this country. My task as leader and our task as a party is to put those values back at the heart of public life in our country. I have every hope that we can do this together.

“I wish you and your families a happy and peaceful Christmas and all the best for 2013.”



A warm welcome to Archbishop Welby

“I am delighted to welcome the appointment of the Right Reverend Justin Welby as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, who will replace Dr Rowan Williams later this month.

“Rowan Williams has been an outstanding leader of the Church of England and in the wider Anglican Communion. He has played a vital role in building friendships across faiths and denominations. He has done what he said he would do which is to challenge the imagination of our country. He has not shied away from speaking truth to those in power and challenging the Tory-led coalition’s raft of unfair cuts to the public sector.

“I am confident that Bishop Welby will stand in a strong tradition of Archbishops of Canterbury striving for

social justice both here and abroad. He brings a wealth of experience to the post. His time in business equips him, along with his pastoral and theological expertise, to speak authoritatively and incisively about much-needed reform of our banking system. He has already brought this experience to bear on the recent Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards. I hope he will feel able to bring the same degree of frankness to the range of pressing social and moral issues that face us.

“The Labour Party and the Church of England share the same desires to serve all parts of our society, particularly the poorest, and I look forward to working with new Archbishop.

“I wish him all the very best in his new post.”

Harman urges an end to topless page 3 models

Labour Deputy Leader, Harriet Harman, has publically backed a campaign urging the Sun to stop putting topless models on Page 3. Harriet's comments followed questioning of the Sun editor, Dominic Mohan, at the Leveson Inquiry. Mohan was recalled a second time by Lord Justice Leveson to explain why the practice should continue. Mohan described Page 3 of the Sun as an "innocent staple of British life."

Speaking to the House Magazine, Harriet said: *"I don't think it is a question of banning it. I don't think Leveson or anybody else is going to get into the issue of banning content or making it unlawful. But I think that there's a new generation of younger women saying 'this is not on, we don't agree with this and you should stop doing it'."* Harriet described the practise of putting topless models on Page 3 as "anachronistic". She later went on to say that Page 3 was "completely backward-looking" adding "...it's time it was got rid of."



Harriet is one of a number of Labour MPs to have signed a new internet petition calling on the Sun to axe topless models on Page 3: *"I'm going to sign the petition and back up those women who've put this forward on Twitter."*

Stephen Timms: "Come and join us!"

A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour's Faith Envoy

I was delighted be elected Chair of the Christian Socialist Movement earlier this year after Alun Michael stepped down. Alun made a huge contribution to CSM in five years as Chair.

This is an exciting time for CSM, as its membership grows steadily. We have an important role as a voice for Christians on the left of politics, in building support within the churches for progressive policies and in helping to shape the values of the Labour Party. The Director, Andy Flannagan, has been doing a superb job, supported by an enthusiastic and committed Executive Committee. By working together in CSM – sharing ideas and resources – we can bring change to the communities we live in, be a significant voice in the Labour Party and help shape future policy.

We have been discussing changing CSM's name. The current name has a rich heritage and is well known at Westminster and in the Labour movement. However, it is not the best name for our current task: to win over a new generation of Christians. We want to be home to the growing number of young people whose starting point is faith in Christ, and who are dismayed by injustice and by the increasing poverty they see around them. A new name can help us. CSM members are being consulted on the principle of whether the name should be changed, with a deadline for responses of 31 December.

More and more people who believe in the Gospel are becoming active in their communities, working for progressive change. They are looking for a political outlet for their commitment. CSM must be a bridge for them into Labour.

If you are a Christian on the left, enthusiastic about the community you live in, and you believe in fairness for all, then come and join us! To do so, please visit www.thecsm.org.uk.



Dr Rowan Williams has led the Church of England through challenging times. He has done so with great humility, and brought immense intelligence to the task - building a welcome new intellectual self confidence in the Church.

The tributes to Rowan after he announced he was standing down were heartfelt and sincere. Many were from people who do not share his Christian faith, underlining the respect he has enjoyed from people of all faiths and none.

Rowan is passionate in reaching out to those in need. I recall hearing of his work with the homeless whilst he studied at Cambridge. I welcome his appointment as Chair of Christian Aid, and wish him and Jane well for the future.

Bill Esterson: “The battle against loan sharks”

The Labour MP for Sefton Central, Bill Esterson, has joined forces with a number of churches in his constituency to fight loan sharks.

Earlier this year, Bill signed a Parliamentary motion aimed at stopping people falling victim to extortionately high interest rates, whilst at the same time ensuring they had access to affordable loans when needed.

Bill has met with churches in Lydiate to discuss ways to help people in their communities—some have been forced to pay up to 278% in interest payments to loan sharks. With Bill's support, the churches are examining the possibility of setting up or joining a credit union.

Praising their action, Bill said: *“The churches are taking the lead locally in combating a problem which causes utter misery to far too many people in our community. These companies prey on folk when they are at their most vulnerable and essentially shackle them to years of debt and despair. That is why I have been working at Westminster to tackle this problem and I am delighted to support churches in Lydiate that have now decided to take this on locally.”*



Above: Bill with Fr. John Smith

Speaking about the possibility of setting up a local credit union, Bill said: *“I give my full backing to create a credit union in Sefton”*. He told his local newspaper, the Champion, *“They provide a vital service, helping people cope with financial difficulties and showing them how to manage their money sensibly. They provide an alternative to costly ‘pay-day’ loans which we see advertised in all our main High Streets.”*

News in brief

Labour offers free vote on gay marriage

The Labour Party has announced that it will be giving its MPs a free vote on the issue of 'equal marriage' when the Government brings forward legislation next year.

Statistics show failure of the Work Programme

Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, Liam Byrne MP, has criticised the Government's Work Programme. New figures show that only two in every hundred participants secured job outcomes in its first year. Before it started, officials said 5% would get into work if there was no programme at all. Liam said: *“The figures reveal the Work Programme is comprehensively failing. We were promised a welfare revolution and what we've got has been exposed as worse than doing nothing.”*

Labour MPs criticise Wonga sponsorship deal

Several Labour MP's have criticised Newcastle United's decision to enter into a sponsorship deal with payday loan company, Wonga. The deal, which was signed in October, is estimated to be worth around £24million over four seasons. Ian Lavery, the Labour MP for Wansbeck, branded the decision as *“an utter disgrace.”* Wonga has attracted criticism for its high-interest short-term loans, some of which charge an APR of 4,214%.

Labour MPs support persecuted church in Turkey

Labour MPs Joe Benton and Stephen Timms visited Turkey in August with ELAM Ministries, in order to meet with Christians who had experienced persecution in their native Iran. The trip provided material for a new report from the Christians in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group.

Death of Sir Stuart Bell

Senior Labour backbencher and Middlesbrough MP Sir Stuart Bell has died after a short battle with pancreatic cancer. Stuart, who was 74, had been an MP for almost 30 years. He served the House of Commons and the Church of England as the Church Commissioner, a position he held for 13 years. Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown paid tribute, praising Stuart's *“great enthusiasm for social justice.”*

CSM at the Labour Party Conference

The Christian Socialist Movement organised a full programme at this year's Party Conference in Manchester. Over two hundred people attended the annual church service and heard Joel Edwards, International Director of Micah Challenge. There was music from CSM Director, Andy Flannagan. CSM also ran a number of fringe debates. Before the Conference, CSM members helped out at a foodbank in the city centre.

Bringing churches together in West Lancashire



Rosie Cooper, Member of Parliament for West Lancashire, has chaired a roundtable discussion of church leaders in and around her constituency. She invited the Labour Party Faith Envoy, Stephen Timms.

The group spoke of their desire to see an increased role of faith groups in our communities. The discussions proved fruitful and unifying. All in attendance agreed that now is the time to strengthen community links and become more active in addressing societal needs.

Speaking after the roundtable, Rosie, who has been MP for the area since 2005, said: *"Sitting around a table with ministers of different denominations from across West Lancashire I was encouraged to hear their unity and shared purpose as they spoke of the challenges families and communities face. As times get more desperate, more and more people are turning to our Churches at a time when they are being*

deserted by this Government. It is the Churches that are offering material support and emotional comfort where it is needed. Churches setting up food banks and debt advice services are the result of people's faith and values in action. I will continue to do all I can working with faith leaders to support our communities."

Stephen added: *"I've always advocated that churches should get their hands dirty in helping their local communities flourish and so I was excited to hear church leaders here in West Lancashire doing just that. Whilst this government is abandoning the most vulnerable in society, the churches are stepping up and reaching out to those facing problems – be it with debt, addiction or social isolation – in ever more creative ways. The Labour Party must find ways to engage with and encourage church communities to play their part."*

The roundtable follows similar events which Stephen has attended, including in Devon and Glasgow.

We want to hear from you

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

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

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

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