

Welsh Government registration and inspection of church youth work

June 2016

Joint statement and call to action



Christian
Concern



THE CHRISTIAN
INSTITUTE

Requiring churches in Wales to register before they are legally allowed to help children learn the Christian values our society was built on is an unjustified restriction of religious liberty. Whether the threshold is 6 hours in any week or higher, the principle of outlawing ‘unregistered churches’ from teaching children the gospel is an unacceptable overreach of the state.

The Welsh Government says churches will only be inspected for compliance with its “fundamental values” if there is a complaint. However, the scope for vexatious complaints is considerable, especially in the current climate of aggressive secularism and religious illiteracy. The experience of some Christian schools in England is that inspectors themselves can be ignorant of or hostile to Christian beliefs and practices.

We do not believe the Welsh Government should appoint a state regulator of religion. For an inspector to scrutinise a Sunday School class, Bible study, youth meeting or church weekend away would be highly intrusive. The prospect of inspectors questioning volunteer leaders and children (without their parents) is an unwarranted incursion into private religion and family life.

Christians are peace-loving, law-abiding citizens who respect authority and love their neighbours. They are a major source of volunteering. To require such people to submit to registration and inspection to ensure they are not engaged in “undesirable teaching” is profoundly misconceived.

Whilst Christians wholeheartedly support proper measures to safeguard children, these proposals will lead to a loss of civil liberties and create a large bureaucracy that will divert resources away from more effective safeguarding and anti-extremism measures. Those who are really putting children at risk will simply ignore or effortlessly circumvent the registration requirements. We urge the Welsh Government to drop these plans and consider how the Disclosure and Barring Service could be more effectively used.

We call on Christians, churches and affected organisations in Wales to contact their AMs and urge them to oppose these plans.

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