

## INSIDE

- UK Church leaders speak out against broad conversion therapy ban
- Stormont votes against abortion protections for disabled babies
- Challenge to Ashers ruling dismissed by European Court

# Gospel freedom at risk

The UK has protected free speech and religious liberty for centuries. It is a blessing of God's common grace and one that we cannot take for granted.

The Online Safety Bill, a broad 'conversion therapy' ban and measures to tackle so called hate crimes all have worrying implications for gospel freedom. Mainstream Christian teaching is at risk – in the public square, in churches and now online. We need to remain vigilant.

Sometimes standing for biblical

truth requires legal action. That's why we took the now famous Ashers 'gay cake' case back in 2014. We thank God that after more than seven years it has finally concluded. The European Court refused to even hear the appeal against the UK Supreme Court's unanimous verdict in favour of the family-run bakery.

It is one of the many battles that, in his strength, we have won over the last 30 years. Sadly, this year there are more battles to come.

# Online Safety Bill risks censorship of mainstream Christian teaching

The Christian Institute is warning that gospel freedom is threatened by the UK Government's push to clamp down on online content deemed 'harmful'.

The upcoming Online Safety Bill is set to bring in much tougher internet regulation. The 'harmful' content to be restricted will be defined by the Government, Ofcom and the commercial interests of tech giants such as Google and Facebook.

The Institute has welcomed the attempts to curtail content promoting violence, drugs, self-harm and suicide. It also called the requirement for



online porn sites to prevent access to children, 'great news – if overdue'.

But it is concerned that the Bill's vague wording could leave mainstream Christian teaching on sexual and medical ethics, gender, marriage and parenting, vulnerable to censorship

by 'Big Tech'.

Institute Director Colin Hart noted that the Bill contains only a "very weak and

ineffective" free speech duty. He said: "The Bill must be amended to include a presumption in favour of free speech. What is free to say on 'the street' must also remain free to say online."

Billionaire tech entrepreneur Peter Rex has warned that Big Tech "has little room for devout believers".

He told The Wall Street Journal the pressure means that many hide their beliefs, "fearing retaliation or blacklisting".



➤ Read our leaflet on the Online Safety Bill

🔗 [the.ci/linesafetybriefing](https://the.ci/linesafetybriefing)

# 2,500 church leaders oppose broad 'conversion therapy' ban

In February, church leaders from around Britain presented a letter to Downing Street urging the Government not to include everyday church activities in its proposed UK-wide conversion therapy ban.

The signatories warned the Government that they are prepared to be criminalised if an overly broad ban covering preaching, prayer and pastoral care is introduced.

The letter was signed by more than 2,500 Christian ministers and pastoral workers.

In response, LGBT activists publicly shared their names and church details on social media, and warned people not to attend those churches, claiming they could be "unsafe".

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) also spoke out



Representatives of 2,500 church leaders at 10 Downing Street

against a broad ban, saying it could leave churches vulnerable to "unreasonable government interference" in everyday church life.

In its response to the Government's consultation, the PCI said any legislation that hindered the ordinary work of churches "ought to be rejected".

It explained that same-sex

attracted people who want to live in accordance with the biblical understanding of human relationships "may wish to receive pastoral care and support as they seek to live in this way".

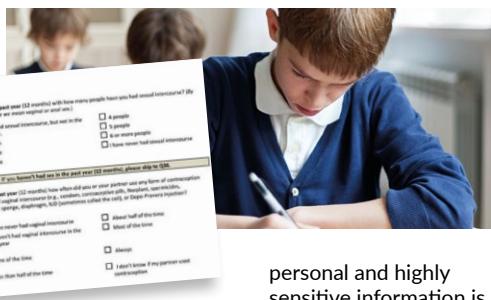
In May 2021, The Christian Institute wrote to the Stormont Executive, pledging to judicially review its planned 'conversion therapy' ban if it outlaws 'the wrong kind of prayer'.



## CI slams Scot Govt's explicit teen sex census

The Christian Institute has criticised the Scottish Government for asking 15-year-old children explicit questions about their sexual experiences.

The 'Health and Wellbeing Census' asks pupils in years S4 and above about the number of people they have had sex with and whether they have engaged in a list of sex acts. Primary children are asked different intrusive questions about their home life.



Answers are traceable, despite being billed as confidential by the Government.

The Institute's Ciarán Kelly, said: "Parents are rightly appalled. Detailed,

personal and highly sensitive information is being harvested about the sex lives and family experiences of many thousands of children while parents are being left in the dark."

Many local authorities have

refused to roll out the survey and Scotland's Children and Young People's Commissioner has also called on the Scottish Government to pull back due to privacy concerns.

However, despite the widespread opposition, Holyrood officials have refused to withdraw the material.

Pupils are not required to take part in the survey, which also includes questions such as "How often do you enjoy being with the people you live with?"

# Hate crime proposals threaten religious freedom

The Stormont Executive is currently considering changes to Northern Ireland's hate crime legislation that could profoundly restrict religious liberty and free speech.

Proposals in the two-part Department of Justice consultation are based on recommendations from the 'Marrinan Review'. Judge Desmond Marrinan's 997-page report was published in December 2020.

Part one of the consultation closed recently. Among other issues, it considers removing the existing law's crucial 'dwelling defence', which ensures conversations in the home are protected. Part two, expected later this year, will cover the scope of any new offences in more detail.

The Institute's Callum Webster warned: "Hate crime laws have been used against Christians, both in the UK and around the world. Judge Marrinan's recommendations, particularly on 'stirring up hatred' offences, could easily impact our freedom to proclaim

Christ as the only way of salvation, or to call people to repent of sin."

◀ Judge Marrinan

# Stonewall handed £2m in public money



Controversial lobby group Stonewall received almost £2m in Government grants between September 2019 and March 2021 - £1 in every £6 of its total income for that period.

Fees for its discredited 'Diversity Champions' scheme and 'LGBT-friendly training' were

not detailed in its accounts, meaning the actual amount public bodies paid to Stonewall was even higher.

In February, the House of Lords became the latest high-profile organisation to withdraw from the embattled scheme.

Peers reportedly became aware that

Stonewall advised organisations to replace the word 'mother' with 'parent who has given birth'.

More than 400 nurses and midwives have also urged the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council to quit the programme and abandon Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index.

# Anti-smacking MLAs fail in attempt to hijack Justice Bill

In February, activist MLAs failed in their plan to criminalise loving parents who occasionally give their children a mild smack.

MLAs from the SDLP, Sinn Féin, Greens and Alliance parties tabled amendments to the

Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill in an attempt to abolish the defence of reasonable chastisement.

Justice Minister Naomi Long had changed the long title of the Bill, in an apparent attempt to broaden the legislation. But the amendments were ruled out of scope.

The controversial law removing the legal defence of reasonable chastisement in Wales came into effect on 21 March. Wales followed Scotland in bringing in a law to criminalise parents who smack their children.





following Jesus in  
every area of life



Buy now from  
[thegoodbook.co.uk](http://thegoodbook.co.uk) or  
[livingchristianity.org.uk](http://livingchristianity.org.uk)



[livingchristianity.org.uk](http://livingchristianity.org.uk)

# Abortion safeguards for disabled unborn rejected



MLAs have voted not to protect unborn children diagnosed with a disability from late-term abortion.

The Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill would have prevented babies in the womb with conditions such as Down's syndrome and cleft palate



being aborted after the 24-week limit that applies to able-bodied children.

It had been tabled by Paul Givan

and was initially well supported. But wrecking amendments were introduced at the Consideration Stage, and in late December MLAs narrowly voted to abandon the life-saving change.

The late DUP MLA Christopher Stalford said the vote sent "an awful message".

## 'From harm to hope': Government sets out strategy to tackle drugs

The UK Government has published its ten-year drugs strategy 'From harm to hope'.

The plan focuses on breaking drug supply chains, reducing demand for illegal drugs and investing a further £780 million into treatment services.

One commitment involves replacing the prescribing of methadone for heroin addiction in prisons with "abstinence-based methods" to assist recovery.

Minister for Crime and Policing Kit Malthouse said: "We want to see a generational shift in our society's attitude towards drugs".

New research has found that teenagers who smoke cannabis are six times more likely to develop schizophrenia than their non-cannabis smoking peers.

In Scotland, hospital admissions resulting from using the Class B drug reached an all-time high in 2021.



living  
CHRISTIANITY

youth  
edition

Coming soon...



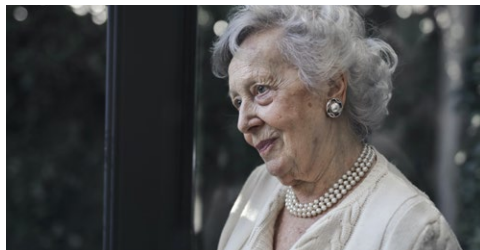


# Assisted suicide: Right to die quickly becomes a duty to die

The Christian Institute has warned politicians not to give in to pressure to legalise assisted suicide.

Baroness Meacher's assisted suicide Bill – which impacts England and Wales – is currently in the House of Lords. Holyrood is set to consider Liam McArthur MSP's proposals in the coming months.

The choice to die very quickly becomes a duty to die. So-called safeguards in other jurisdictions have evaporated, often staggeringly quickly. And the drugs given



to people to kill themselves can cause intense suffering.

Writing in The Times, Lord McColl hit out at the "growing obsession with death as a solution" for "those who are fighting to live". Palliative care expert Baroness Finlay of Llandaff highlighted

that legalising assisted suicide would hinder proper care.

In February the Government paid tribute to Lady Finlay's work, as it announced its backing for her Health and Care Bill amendment requiring every part of England to provide specialist palliative

care. In March, the House of Lords rejected Lord Forsyth's amendment to require the Government to bring forward a draft assisted suicide Bill within twelve months.

In Scotland, the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care said the term 'assisted dying' in Liam McArthur's Bill confuses palliative care with assisted suicide.

More than 30 junior doctors also signed a letter telling MSPs that they would refuse to participate in the practice if the law was changed.

## Meet the CI



Callum Webster,  
Northern Ireland Officer

We have over 60,000 supporters and visit over 300 churches a year to talk about our work.

If you would like your church to be one of them, email us at: [sandra.mackay@christian.org.uk](mailto:sandra.mackay@christian.org.uk)

## Women still at risk from DIY abortion scheme in England

England and Wales have made permanent their 'emergency' schemes for unsupervised DIY abortions. Both schemes had originally been set to end in March.

The Welsh Government announced the change in February. The Westminster Government planned to let 'pills by post' continue until 29 August,

but, following lobbying from pro-abortion activists, Parliament voted for it to continue indefinitely.

Since March 2020, at least 10,000 women from around the UK are estimated to have attended hospital suffering

from serious side effects.

In Northern Ireland, one of the pills mifepristone must be taken under supervision. The Department of Health has warned women they are putting themselves at risk if they have abortions at home.



# Challenge to Ashers ruling dismissed by European Court

The European Court of Human Rights has thrown out an attempt to challenge the landmark ruling on Ashers Baking Company.

In 2018, the UK Supreme Court agreed unanimously that Ashers should not be required to promote political views its owners disagree with.

Lawyers for Gareth Lee, the LGBT campaigner who took the family-run bakery to court, tried to argue that this decision interfered with his human rights.



The case was taken against the UK, rather than the McArthur family who own and run the bakery. However, both they and The Christian Institute were given permission to present submissions to Strasbourg.

The Court accepted the substance of those arguments and ruled Mr Lee's legal challenge "inadmissible". It said that Lee was asking the Court "to usurp the role of the domestic courts".

The decision is final. The Institute's Simon

## "good news for Christians"

Calvert, called it "the right result".

"I'm surprised anyone would want to overturn a ruling that protects gay business owners from being forced to promote views they don't share, just as much as it protects Christian business owners.

"This is good news for free speech, good news for Christians, and good news for the McArthurs."

## How to give to the work of the CI

None of our work would be possible without the generosity of our supporters.

### Give regularly

 [christian.org.uk/donate](https://christian.org.uk/donate)

### Leave a legacy

 [christian.org.uk/legacy](https://christian.org.uk/legacy)

### Or call

 0191 281 5664



## Christian CEO thanks God after battle with The Robertson Trust

The Christian CEO unfairly dismissed by Scotland's largest grant-making trust over his church's opposition to same-sex marriage has expressed his gratitude to God for helping him through the ordeal.

Kenneth Ferguson had been CEO of The

Robertson Trust for almost ten years. He was sacked after its Chairwoman objected to Stirling Free Church, where he is an elder, renting Trust premises.

Backed by The Christian Institute, he successfully sued for wrongful dismissal. He later

said: "Praise God for the way that he has enabled me to really hold fast to the truth that is in his Scriptures. To say 'Don't worry, this battle is not yours. Stand and you will see the deliverance of the Lord.'"

### WATCH

 [the.ci/ferguson](https://the.ci/ferguson)



## THE LATEST NEWS AND RESOURCES: CHRISTIAN.ORG.UK



CHRISTIANINSTITUTE



@CHRISTIANORGUK



CHRISTIANORGUK



CHRISTIANORGUK

Registered office: The Christian Institute, Wilberforce House, 4 Park Road, Gosforth Business Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8DG  
Tel: 0191 281 5664 | Email: [info@christian.org.uk](mailto:info@christian.org.uk) | Website: [christian.org.uk](https://christian.org.uk) | Published in March 2022  
Registered in England as a charity Charity No. 100 4774 Company No. 263 4440. A charity registered in Scotland Charity No. SC039220