Pray for marriage

Christians in Scotland face many profound challenges in the public square. These include ongoing threats to religious liberty, another attempt to legalise assisted suicide and the Scottish Government’s plans to redefine marriage. You can find out more in this newsletter.

The Christian Institute has been working hard to protect family, faith and freedom in Scotland. The recent inclusion of a robust free speech clause in the religious hatred law was a great answer to prayer. Many people in Scotland are concerned about the Scottish Government’s plans to create same-sex marriage. Redefining marriage in law would obscure the true definition of marriage and drastically undermine its importance for adults and children alike.

Christians know how important marriage is. The Institute is doing everything it can to encourage people to stand up for marriage. We are asking Christians to make the protection of marriage a matter for urgent and sustained prayer.

Scotland for Marriage launched

A campaign group to stop marriage being redefined in Scotland was launched on St Andrew’s Day outside the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

Scotland for Marriage is backed by The Christian Institute and other religious and non-religious groups. The campaign aims to mobilise concerned citizens throughout Scotland to oppose redefining marriage.

The Scotland for Marriage website www.scotlandformarriage.org features an online petition calling for a referendum on the issue and pointing to the far-reaching implications of redefining marriage.

Same-sex marriage is a profoundly important issue which would affect generations to come. The new definition of marriage would become the standard one promoted by public bodies, including schools.

The Scottish Government’s consultation on redefining marriage closed in December and received around 70,000 responses – the largest ever recorded in Scotland.

The Christian Institute has been holding meetings throughout Scotland to promote biblical teaching on marriage and to encourage Bible-believing Christians to pray for the protection of marriage. This follows the very successful autumn 2011 tour which was attended by over 1,100 people.

In February a separate organisation, the Coalition for Marriage, was launched in London. The aim of the Coalition is to stop the Westminster Government redefining marriage in England and Wales. MPs in Scotland would vote on this proposal.
MSP launches second bid to legalise assisted suicide

Margo MacDonald has re-launched her controversial campaign to legalise assisted suicide in Scotland.

It is the Independent MSP’s second attempt to overturn the law against assisted suicide, after her last Bill suffered a resounding defeat in the Scottish Parliament at the end of 2010.

Margo MacDonald’s previous End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill was blocked by 85 MSPs to 16 in a free vote. The Lothians MSP, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, has now launched a consultation on a new Bill which would allow those suffering from a terminal illness to receive lethal drugs to end their life.

According to the proposals, a patient would sign a declaration stating that they want assistance to end their life and then make a formal request for an assisted suicide to their doctor.

The patient would then need to make a second request, between two to four weeks after their first formal request, at which point they would be given a prescription for lethal drugs.

But the British Medical Association Scotland, which represents doctors in Scotland, remains opposed to any liberalisation of the law on assisted suicide.

Margo MacDonald’s previous attempt to change the law faced widespread criticism from medics, disability groups, politicians and various faith groups.

Bill to tackle discrimination by Sharia courts attracts widespread support

A Bill which aims to tackle the problem of Sharia courts has received the backing of a number of Muslim women’s groups.

Muslim Women’s Network-UK, Muslim women’s rights group ‘Inspire’ and the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation have all voiced their support.

Prominent Muslim campaigner Tehmina Kazi has welcomed the Bill as a “pioneering proposal” and supported the move to criminalise Sharia courts which falsely claim legal status.¹

Baroness Cox’s Bill was introduced to the House of Lords last year. It has also continued to attract widespread support in both the media and in Parliament.

¹ Harrow Observer Online, 12 January 2012
Atheist court case against council prayers backfires

In February a High Court decision on council prayers caused a high-profile debate about the role of Christianity in public life.

Mr Justice Ouseley ruled that local councils in England and Wales had no lawful power to hold prayers during official business.

The extraordinary ruling came about because the National Secular Society (NSS) and an atheist ex-councillor sued Bideford Town Council in Devon.

The NSS said that the ruling should act as a warning to Scottish councils.

But the High Court rejected the principal claims of the NSS that the saying of prayers during formal council meetings discriminates against, or breaches the human rights of, atheist councillors.

The Christian Institute’s Legal Defence Fund backed the Council.

The ruling provoked widespread criticism, with a Labour MP branding it “utterly preposterous”.

Bideford Town Council was sued for saying prayers in formal meetings.

Since the decision the Westminster Government has written to all local councils in England, telling them that the new Localism Act restores their power to hold prayers at official meetings if they want to.

Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles MP said: “We are striking a blow for localism over central interference, for freedom to worship over intolerant secularism, for Parliamentary sovereignty over judicial activism, and for long-standing British liberties over modern-day political correctness.”

Christian demoted for Facebook comment on civil partnerships

A Christian has been demoted and subjected to a 40 per cent pay cut over comments he made about civil partnerships on Facebook.

Adrian Smith was disciplined by Trafford Housing Trust for using his personal Facebook page to post the comment “an equality too far” with a link to an article on the registration of civil partnerships in churches.

The homosexual activist Peter Tatchell is among a number of critics who have challenged the Trust’s actions. He has made clear that while he does not agree with Mr Smith’s opinions, he defends his freedom of speech.

Mr Smith is taking his employer to court, backed by The Christian Institute.

B&B owners lose appeal

Christian guesthouse owners Peter and Hazelmary Bull have lost their appeal against a ruling that their policy of restricting double rooms to married couples discriminated against a homosexual couple.

Last year a court ordered the Bulls to pay £3,600 in damages to Steven Preddy and Martyn Hall, the two men who were denied a double room at the Bulls’ guesthouse. The Chymorvah B&B, near Penzance in Cornwall, is also the Bulls’ own home.

The appeal was heard by three judges at the Court of Appeal in November. The judges upheld the previous ruling which found the policy to be discriminatory on grounds of sexual orientation – despite the fact that the policy was also applied to unmarried heterosexual couples.

However, the Court did say that a new intolerance should not take root against Christians because of their beliefs about sexual ethics.
Tesco distances itself from top employee’s ‘evil Christians’ barb

A senior Tesco employee has provoked great controversy after he described Christians who oppose the redefinition of marriage as “evil”.

Nick Lansley, the Head of Research and Development at Tesco.com, wrote the comments on his profile page on the photo-sharing website Flickr.com. He said: “I’m also campaigning against evil Christians (that’s not all Christians, just bad ones) who think that gay people should not lead happy lives and get married to their same-sex partners.”

As a result many Christians refused to shop at Tesco over the Christmas period.

Tesco subsequently moved to distance itself from Mr Lansley’s offensive comments, insisting that it abhors criticism of religion, and instructing him to remove the remarks.

Tesco has also recently restored its commitment to Cancer Research UK, making the charity its Charity of the Year from March 2012.

Scottish anti-sectarianism Bill passes with free speech clause

The Scottish Government’s controversial anti-sectarianism Bill was passed in December, but now includes a robust clause to protect freedom of speech.

Colin Hart, Director of The Christian Institute, welcomed the addition of a free speech clause to the new religious hatred law and thanked supporters following a huge letter writing campaign. He also expressed reservations about future changes to the legislation.

The aspects of the Bill which govern football matches always presented less of a threat to religious liberty than the religious hatred offence, which many feared could stifle free speech and restrict evangelism.

In June last year The Christian Institute played a pivotal role in slowing down the Scottish Government’s lightning-fast timetable for the anti-sectarianism Bill amidst concerns that it was being rushed.

The Christian Institute launched a legal action warning that the Bill could damage civil liberty and freedom of speech.