

Presbytery of Aberdeen  
Church & Society Committee Report  
December 1st 2009

Deliverance

1 receive the Report

2 commend the Statement on the British National Party to congregations in the bounds

3 endorse the decisions taken by the Committee with regard to the closure of the Glencraft Workshops; regret deeply the closure and voice concern over the impact of the closure upon staff workers and families; commend to the prayers of the Presbytery all affected including Council Staff and the City Centre Chaplain; and support the organising of the Glencraft Christmas Party on Thursday 10th December at the Citadel, thanking all who have worked to make this happen.

4 agree to the dissemination of information concerning church and agency involvement within Aberdeen with a) elderly care, b) those with learning difficulties, and c) those affected by substance and alcohol abuse - to be given to NHS Grampian, Grampian Caredata, Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations and other interested groups; and commend to every congregation the information gathered, encouraging greater co-operation and support between congregations, across denominations and with Christian Agencies.

British National Party

The rise of interest in and support for the British National Party has caused great concern amongst faith groups and secular groups due to the perceived or implied discriminatory style and statements that raise for many the spectre of a fascism of the past. Prior to the European Elections of June 2009, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams and the Archbishop of York Dr John Sentamu spoke out forcibly to denounce the exploitation, as they saw it, of political parties to foster "fear and division within communities, especially between people of different faiths or racial background". **Rather, they went on,** "It is an opportunity for renewing the vision of a community united by mutual respect, high ethical standards and the pursuit of justice and peace." **The website of the British National Party portrayed them as the Christian Party that was constantly persecuted and maligned, including a picture of a poster posing the question "What Would Jesus Do?" The answer for them was VOTE BNP!**

The convener of your committee was asked to speak at a Public Meeting held on 29th May in Aberdeen and organised by "Unite Against Fascism". At that time, speaking for the Presbytery, he stated: "when fear and apprehension disrupts community and national life, it is fertile ground for fanatical and extreme individuals and groups to both feed that fear and breakdown respect and acceptance of those who are different from us. When we are told to see others as our enemies who are seeking to take our jobs, our rights, our homes or our futures away from us, we will be drawn to the loudest voices rather than to the voice of truth, integrity and hope that we can believe in and build on...**But he went on to say:** "the purpose of any party, organisation or protest group represented here is not simply to put down the BNP, but because they have positive policies - about integrity, honesty, and vision for communities that care and protect all its people and which promote values of justice, truth and compassion, enabling family life for the migrant worker as much as the indigenous community, that seeks to eradicate the atmosphere of fear and powerlessness and replace it with hope, life and vision - it is incumbent upon us all to speak about what we believe and not just about what we are against."

**It is the view of the Presbytery that whilst we may uphold the right to freedom of speech, we also uphold the worth of every person regardless of race, colour, creed or gender and that those who would voice views contrary to these Kingdom Principles, should be challenged and their falsehood exposed. The BNP's profession to speak as the Christian Party in Britain has no validity. Their tone and substance of intolerance, prejudice and racism has no place either in rhetoric or manifested in expressions of intimidation and victimisation. Presbytery therefore urges all within its bounds to see the BNP for what it is, and to choose to vote and support other Parties and Organisations that promote the values and principles akin to the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom, and those expressed in His life of compassion and grace towards all.**

### **Closure of Glencraft Workshops**

**51 workers were given letters on Friday 13th November 2009 intimating their dismissal from the working environment which many had enjoyed for over 25 years producing goods to a standard rightly admired with a Company with the Royal Seal of Approval. Their website states: Glencraft exists to provide factory based jobs and skills training for people with disabilities. Seventy percent of our employees have a disability and most of them would be seriously challenged to find and keep comparable jobs in the open workplace. Glencraft is, therefore, more than just an employer; it is a means by which people with disabilities can achieve and maintain comparatively independent lives through the dignity of work.**

**At a time of economic recession, we have seen companies and individuals lose their place in the commercial world, and many stories of hardship and despair have been written and read. Aberdeen has not been immune, and Glencraft has for some time limped along with temporary support and commitment, but its closure has affected some of the most vulnerable and needy members of our community. Alongside the intimation of the Closure of the Burnside Day Care Centre for Adults with Learning Difficulties earlier this year, it could be easily concluded that it has been the vulnerable and those who can least articulate their needs who have lost the most. The committee's convener wrote to the Chief Executive requesting a meeting to discuss these matters. At the time of writing no response has been forthcoming. The involvement of the City Centre Chaplain, Cate Adams, has been invaluable in giving support to staff and family who have had to walk away from a place that was their workplace, their community hub and their security. A few members of Aberdeen City Council have also stood beside these grieving individuals as they saw their livelihoods disappear with for most little prospect of re-employment.**

**Following consultation with the City Centre Chaplain, Trade Union Representatives, and former employees at Glencraft, it has been decided to provide a Glencraft Staff Christmas Party on Thursday 10th December to be held at the Citadel in Union Street for staff and carers. This will take place from 6pm - 8pm. The Salvation Army are providing the premises and catering. The invitation is from the Christian Community in Aberdeen as an expression of practical support and commitment to the immediate situation as well as the on-going uncertainty that will be faced. We therefore commend all those involved to the prayers of the Presbytery, particularly as Christmas approaches. It will be important that all within the City know that there is a Saviour to worship and adore.**

### **Church & Agency Involvement in the Community**

**Following consultation with the Joint Futures Manager of NHS Grampian, Sandy Reid, it was agreed to compile information gathered from each congregation of**

Presbytery and from as many other denominations and Christian Agencies working in the community who are providing facilities and support in three specific areas; elderly care, those with learning difficulties and those dealing with substance and alcohol abuse. We are grateful to all congregations who supplied these details and would hope that those contacts with members of the committee will be sustained.

The purpose of the information covers a number of aspects:

Firstly, to collate the information for our own purposes - to know and therefore to support congregations and their work;

Secondly, to disseminate this information amongst ourselves - for congregations to be aware of others who are working in similar areas, to network, hold joint events, training or share resources;

Thirdly, to make the wider Voluntary Sector aware of what the Faith Communities are offering, to liaise and build up support and become aware of other resources available - eg training, funding;

Fourthly, to make the public sector of NHS Grampian and Aberdeen City Council aware of facilities and opportunities particularly in an increasingly needy City with reducing economic resources.

This information would be stored and updated by Grampian Caredata -

[www.grampiancaredata.gov.uk](http://www.grampiancaredata.gov.uk) to be made more widely known and available to the general public as well as care practitioners looking for support groups in the local communities. It is hoped that keeping this information both up-to-date and accessible, will increase the opportunities given to congregations and agencies to serve their communities and the City.