

WHAT ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT — either inside or outside the Church?

If the URC is to be a faithful witness of the gospel in our communities, our churches need to be aware of the issues that Christians are grappling with in our society. Many of our churches will have individuals who are dedicating time and energy to bringing Christian values to bear on their engagement with society. Often this is being done outside church structures. Our churches need to hear their often prophetic voices and to affirm them and to act on what they have to say.

Here are some of the issues, in no particular order.

- Poverty in Britain
- Housing issues
- Climate change
- World poverty
- Animal welfare
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Peace and disarmament
- Media standards
- Criminal justice

The list could go on! So, do you or anyone in your church have a passionate interest in any of these issues or other aspects of our society? We would love to hear from them and discuss how their expertise and enthusiasm could be used in the life of our Synod. That could mean attending our Synod Church & Society Group, which meets up to four times a year, or helping our group to bring concerns to the attention of Synod.

Your church/cluster may have a group which is already taking up these issues. We would like to hear from them too, so that we can develop a network of interested people who can support each other. In time we could send out a Synod email newsletter on these topics.

Interested? Then please contact:

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PEACEMAKING

– A CHRISTIAN VOCATION

From the third century CE Christians have been divided over whether it is ever right to take up arms to kill people in war. Before then the historical record is that Christians refused to participate in war and many were martyred for this reason. However, once the Church became part of state structures from the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine, Christians began to take less literally the teaching of Jesus. In the following centuries up to our time they have justified and taken part in bloody wars which have shamed the Christian religion.

Of course thoughtful Christians have always realised there was an awful chasm between the gospel of the Prince of Peace and the brutal reality of war, and the doctrine of the Just War was developed to try to curb the worst excesses of war making: War should only be declared by a legitimate authority, the cause must be just, war must be the last resort, and was likely to do more good than harm. Are these criteria relevant today and indeed can they ever be satisfied?

Since 9/11 and the war on Iraq many feel that our world has become more violent. An opportunity at the end of the Cold War for the abolition of nuclear weapons was lost. Majority decisions of the United Nations have been ignored. The “war on terror” seems to be bringing ever more retaliation. Armed “humanitarian” intervention in Kosovo, Rwanda, and Darfur bring more dilemmas. The dire effect of modern war on the environment has never been acknowledged.

To help us to think through the issues, and to give us some hope, this joint report by the URC and the Methodist Church has come at the right time. It develops some ethical principles based on what the bible says about peace and war, considers the relevance of non-violent strategies, and proposes some practical ways for Christian peacemaking. The Synod Executive urges all churches to read this report. It comes with a study guide so it can be used for a short series of group discussions. Will you and your church make Christian peacemaking a priority this year and always?

Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation ISBN 1-85852-323-0 £3.99 from the URC Bookshop, Tel: 020 7916 8629, bookshop@urc.org.uk

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