

CHURCHES' AGENCY ON SOCIAL ISSUES

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Churches' Agency on Social Issues (CASI) with its four participating Churches (Methodist, Associated Churches of Christ, Society of Friends and Presbyterian) has continued to develop its relationship with its Presbyterian and other congregations.
- While continuing to make submissions, it also encourage and supports people in local congregations to engage with social issues.
- CASI continues to produce Broadsheet bi-monthly, and study guides on topical issues.
- CASI believes CASI believes there are two vital issues facing New Zealand. One is the destructive impact of violence on society. The other is the fragile state of the ecosystem.
- CASI believes it is part of the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to take steps now to address these issues at local level, as well as at national level.

Recommendations

1.	That the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand urges Parliament to enact legislation that removes legal support for a parent, or person in place of a parent, to use force by way of correction towards a child.
2.	That this General Assembly urge congregations to take pro-active steps within their communities to foster non-violent values and behaviour.
3.	That this General Assembly urge congregations to be conscientious in ordering congregational life on sound principles of sustainability, and honour our responsibility to be God's stewards for Earth.
4.	That this General Assembly urge congregations to be pro-active in their local communities in challenging and educating people about sustainable living.
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Report

1.0	REPEAL OF SECTION 59
1.1	CASI has thoroughly examined the issues around Section 59 of the Crimes Act and supports the Crimes (Abolition of Force as a Justification for Child Discipline) Amendment Bill, currently in the hands of the Justice and Electoral Committee of Parliament.

1.2	CASI asserts that repeal of Section 59 is necessary because current legislation frames public debate on any issue. In this case debate on appropriate discipline and guidance of children starts with the assumption that inflicting physical punishment on children is acceptable and the only point for discussion is whether force, when used, is reasonable.
1.3	CASI believes careful reading of the Bible as a whole supports the repeal of Section 59. God's justice aims at restoration and reconciliation rather than retribution.
1.4	Discipline is not to be confused with punishment. Discipline of a child requires encouragement and good example, correction and occasionally punishment.
1.5	CASI does not believe it is possible to define 'reasonable force' in any meaningful way.
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2.0	VIOLENCE
2.1	Violence is a huge topic and apparent in a wide range of situations. Christians are called to be peacemakers, helping people to become reconciled to God and to each other.
2.2	CASI urges each congregation to use its local knowledge and community links, together with members' available skills, time and resources, to plan action that offers peace and harmony to people suffering from, or perpetrating violence, in the local area.
2.3	Possible starting topics might be: prison visiting; interfaith dialogue; alcohol and drug abuse; women's refuge; youth development programmes; media and violence; Decade to Overcome Violence.
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3.0	SUSTAINABILITY
3.1	CASI believes there is overwhelming evidence that Earth's ecosystem is in crisis now.
3.2	CASI believes there is overwhelming evidence that human activity and greed have caused this crisis.
3.3	CASI believes the Bible calls Christians to care for God's creation and be responsible stewards of the ecosystem God has entrusted to us.
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4.0	TERMS OF REFERENCE
4.1	The proposed terms of reference for CASI were revised by Inter-Church consultation during 2003, taking into account Presbyterian concerns. However, Methodist Conference in 2003 did not accept these Terms of Reference. There has been no consultation process since.
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5.0	HISTORY AND FOCUS
5.1	The Churches' Agency on Social Issues (CASI) was established in 2000 by the Associated Churches of Christ, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to replace the former Joint Methodist Presbyterian Public Questions Committee. It has up to 16 members appointed by the four Churches.
5.2	CASI has continued to consolidate the focus on encouraging and resourcing people in local congregations to engage with social issues. CASI corresponds regularly with about 60 groups which focus on various social issues. CASI continues to make submissions, to produce resources and to advise church leaders about current topical social issues.
5.3	CASI is also represented at many community, interchurch and 'third sector' events. These include ANGOA (the Association of Non-Governmental Organisations of New Zealand), ECO (the Ecological and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand) and relevant conferences on children's well-being, welfare, bioethics, environmental issues, and justice.
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6.0	RESOURCING FAITH COMMUNITIES
6.1	Julia Stuart retired as CASI's part-time Research and Liaison Officer in December 2005. CASI records its appreciation of Julia's excellent work, as she effectively combined her skills of networking, journalism and research to establish the new role. Paul Thompson took up this role the same month, and we are appreciating his wisdom and experience.
6.2	Broadsheet is produced every two months and gets positive feedback. It is now available as a PDF file from the website or is posted direct to parishes and individuals.

6.3	Individual parishes and social issues groups regularly contact CASI seeking information about issues, and to let CASI know their views.
6.4	CASI has continued to work with the Human Rights Commission. In 2005 CASI, along with Catholic and Anglican social justice agencies, worked with the Human Rights Commission to hold a forum on Race Relations. The papers from this forum have been published as a book, which was CASI's contribution to the Human Rights Commission 'Diversity Action Programme' in August 2006. Copies are available at this General Assembly.
6.5	CASI's website continues to be an increasingly important point of contact. Paul Thompson keeps it very up-to-date, and has recently improved the section relating to the Interchurch Bioethics Council. All submissions and papers mentioned in this report, as well as earlier material, are available on the website www.casi.org.nz
6.6	CASI maintains a small and carefully selected library on social issues. This is available to be used for research by church members. Please e-mail CASI for a copy of the library catalogue.
6.7	CASI continues to produce resources to encourage in depth study of social issues. Since September 2004 CASI has published resources on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election 2005 • Race Relations • Discipline of Children • Violence
6.8	CASI continues to play a leading role in the Capital City Forum, alongside the Catholic and Anglican social justice agencies. The 2005 Forum was on Race Relations, the 2006 Forum was on Ethics and Health Care Policy.
6.9	CASI continues to work alongside the Inter Church Bioethics Council (ICBC), which is chaired by Dr Audrey Jarvis of Palmerston North. ICBC has an educational role providing opportunities for consultation and dialogue with church members and the community generally; as well as making submissions and comments to the Government-appointed NZ Bioethics Council and other relevant bodies. The CASI Research and Liaison Officer attends ICBC meetings and maintains effective contact between ICBC and CASI.
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7.0	STATEMENTS AND REPRESENTATIONS
7.1	Making submissions and representations continues to be an important part of CASI's work. CASI has adopted the following guidelines to ensure we respond to the most appropriate issues within our limited resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have anything important and distinctive to say from a Christian perspective? • Do we need to speak out, or will other Christians do so in ways we cannot? • What have we said in the past on a particular subject, and do we need to continue to speak out? • Do we have the time and resources necessary to prepare a considered and helpful contribution to debate on the issue?
7.2	The Christian basis of CASI's work remains the Theological Rationale for the Churches' Concern with Social Issues, formulated in 2001. This is

	available on the website.
7.3	Over the last two years CASI has made 9 submissions on a variety of subjects including Shop Trading, Youth Offending, Section 59 Repeal, New Zealand Day, Sale of Liquor, Terrorism, Social Services, Oaths, and Identity and Citizenship.
7.4	Most of the issues addressed by CASI require a quick response which will not wait for Councils or Assemblies. Thus CASI makes submissions in its own name. Any other Church group is at liberty to make its own submission or statement if they so wish. However, CASI is composed of members officially appointed by the four participating churches, so its statements carry considerable weight.
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8.0	FINANCE, STAFFING AND MEMBERSHIP
8.1	CASI's funding is by way of grants from the member churches. In 2005/06, the Associated Churches of Christ Contributed \$500, The Rreligious society of Friends \$3,000, the Methodist Church \$11,000 and the Presbyterian Church \$35,5000.
8.2	About two thirds of CASI's income is used to employ it's part-time Research and Liaison Officer, and about half the rest on producing resources.
8.3	CASI records its gratitude to David Simmers, the first Presbyterian Convener of CASI, who resigned from CASI in October 2004. David gave valuable leadership and great depth of theological perception to issues he tackled. CASI is hopeful of having a full complement of 6 Presbyterian members in the coming year.

Lesley Shaw
Presbyterian Convener