

# IV. REPORT

## OF THE

### WELFARE OF YOUTH & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

#### **Introduction**

The youth of our day are facing problems that some of us cannot even imagine. While most of us over 50 years of age have probably never faced the reality of being at the centre of a culture where God is marginalised and more often than not, given no place in our education system, or more tragically in the home, it is not so with the rising generation.

As a denomination, we are losing many of our young folk to the world and it is no comfort that many other Churches suffer likewise. Sadly the vast majority of those brought up within the pale of our denomination, under the sound of a clear and unambiguous Gospel, leave to seek satisfaction at a young age in the “broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

There are matters which we seek to highlight in this report, which, we feel, should be addressed by parents and any who have some influence over our children and youth.

#### **Education**

Plans are already afoot to have those who are School Chaplains submit the material they are to use at a School Assembly to the head teacher for approval. This is seen by some as a positive move that will keep children from being exposed to any teaching that may be deemed “extreme”. That, it would seem, will include any emphasis on sin or hell. While we must accept that different religious viewpoints will be taught by school chaplains, (now to be called “faith leaders”) depending on their affiliation, every effort must be made to ensure that the Truth is proclaimed at every opportunity.

We also need those who feel called to take up the profession of teaching to give prayerful consideration to being teachers of religious education and give them every support in the secular schools.

*A recent report in the Daily Telegraph stated that “Religious education is being undermined by a ‘crippling ambivalence’ towards the subject in state schools, according to research published today. Lessons are increasingly dying out because of a decline in the amount of time, money and resources devoted to the traditional discipline. James Conroy, professor of religious and philosophical education at Glasgow University, warned that RE was becoming less focused on issues of faith as schools ‘overburden’ the curriculum with everything from citizenship to sex and relationships. Nationally, as little as £1 per pupil is now spent on the subject, he said. ‘The problem goes much deeper than individual teachers or schools. It is symptomatic of a crippling ambivalence about RE which runs through British society, and infects educational policy,’ said the study. ‘What is happening to RE in our schools is a scandal for which we will have to pay a high price in years to come.’”*

Could it be that we need to be more active in support of Christian education?

#### **Substance Misuse**

Drug use and rehabilitation are big news in Britain, with reports continuously being generated about Government plans to tackle the problem of drug abuse. However, it seems that no matter what plans the Government can work out, individuals who are determined will always find a way around legal restraints.

National school age statistics on drugs use still show that a staggering 25% of the United Kingdom's children aged 11 to 15 have tried drugs – figures that are much higher than the European average – and 10% of them are regular drug users. The last comparable survey figures for European school children under 15 also showed the UK to have 13% of our under 13s having tried cannabis against a European average of 4%.

That is hard to believe and no doubt many parents will react with “not my child.” Thankfully that will be true of the majority, but it should not make any of us complacent. Although use of the school children's drug of choice, cannabis, appears to have now stabilized, their cocaine consumption has been rising – unheard of elsewhere in Europe.

The Government's mixed message about drugs has not helped – namely their explicit policy statements about the non-harmful nature of ‘recreational’ and casual drug use. The ‘informed choice’ idea has been a disaster for drug education as it has been for sex education.

Where does the problem lie? Can we just blame the Government of the day and our schools? Surely it has largely to do, although not exclusively, with the acceptance by so many parents, teachers and others in authority, that those are things that all young people get involved in and just a phase they will get through. Thankfully some do, but a greater number than ever seem to become addicted, even continuing into middle age. The appalling truth, as far as many adults are concerned, is that we seem to have surrendered to a sense of ‘inevitability’ about children's drug use.

As a Church we encourage all with influence to be more aware of the dangers and temptations that can come the way of our young in this particular area.

### **Social Networks**

Computers and mobile smart-phones are a way of life for the vast majority nowadays, and in themselves they provide a wonderful way of communicating and retrieving information and news. However, like so many inventions that begin well and are harmless in themselves, such technology in the hands of our children can lead to great problems unless carefully supervised. While we need to be aware of the importance of showing our young folk a good measure of trust, nevertheless no parent or supervising adult should be unaware of the dangers that go along with being part of the global ‘social network’. After all, our children are sinners as we are, and if we know anything of the corruption of our own hearts we should recognise that every effort must be made to ensure our children are not being drawn into what can be, if misused, the dark evil world of social networking.

MySpace, one of the web-sites most used by young folk, removed in one year 29,000 child sexual predators from its site. MySpace used lists of known sexual predators to find them. The predators had used their real names and information when getting an account with mspace.com. When you consider that MySpace has over 100 million users you cannot but wonder how many child sexual predators are in their database because they used fake names and personal information. Should not any parent be alarmed at such numbers and should not every parent who knows their offspring use this site regularly check what they are accessing? It seems every other week we read of children being ‘groomed’ by these deviants, but there can also be abuse carried out by those known to each other especially through the use of sexual images, personal and otherwise.

The trouble often is that the young are much more proficient in their use of computers and phones than adults. However there are a number of excellent “filtering software” products available to help protect our children.

The average user now says they are online for over 15 hours each week, five hours more than in 2005. With increasing popularity of smart-phones and better data plans, the U.K. has embraced the Internet on-the-go, and 79% of adults now go online on any device in any location. Two-thirds say they are visiting Facebook and

similar sites every day – up from one-third in 2007. Accessing social media on a weekly basis through a mobile phone has almost doubled in the last year. A quarter of social networkers in the United Kingdom say people they do not know can potentially see their personal information, such as date of birth or hometown. Furthermore, about one in six users of social-networking sites say they share their contact details with just about anyone.

Children, certainly those under the age of 16, should not be using the Internet without some form of parental supervision. Most social network web sites have a minimum age limit so that young children cannot make profiles. However, it is easy to fool these systems. Just as it is simple for a young child to fake their age online, it is easy for a potential predator to fake a profile claiming to have the same interests as, and be the same age as, your child.

Pray that the words of the Lord to Abraham would be true of us all, as we seek to give guidance to the beloved young ones He has given us. “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment” (Gen 18:19).

### **Sabbath School Exams**

13 children sat the Junior exam and 6 the Bible Class. It is disappointing that so few seem to be interested in sitting the exams although many more attend Sabbath Schools in various Congregations.

### **Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize.**

The Committee were pleased that this year 12 children were willing to learn portions of Scripture under the auspices of the Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize.

### **Youth Camp**

The camp was once again organised over the summer, returning to Badaguish near Aviemore. The Biblical theme for the camp week, tying in with the anniversary of the King James Version, was “The Bible in your hand: how it got there and how to use it.” The talks, led by Rev. Greg MacDonald, were well reinforced by the afternoon projects, run by Miss Flora MacLeod.

Mr (now Rev.) James MacInnes kept the campers active each day, with paintball, Landmark, boating and a special Badaguish Highland Games! Food was expertly prepared by Miss Joan Macintosh, and soon polished off by campers. Also ably assisting were Mrs S. Budgen and Miss E. Murray.

The 2011 camp was the best attended yet, with the Boys’ camp slowly catching up with the girls’ in numbers. A special thank you is expressed to the various Deacons’ Courts who subsidise campers, and to Stornoway Congregation for making the major contribution to the hire of a mini-bus. The same venue is booked once again for this summer. Please make these camps a matter of prayer. They are very enjoyable, but we aim at cementing spiritual lessons taught at home and in Congregations, as well as fostering friendship with others being raised under the promises of the Covenant.

### **All Age Holiday**

On the 9th - 16th of July 2011 the All Age Holiday was held at Carronvale House in Larbert. The main speaker was Rev. James Gracie who give a talk each night on Paul’s missionary Journey. Rev. James Clark was a guest speaker who spoke on Jeremiah the weeping prophet relating to our day and age. In the mornings a short address was given to the children, with a quiz at night and a memory verse.

This year there was a good mix of all ages. The all age holiday needs to be promoted in all our Congregations as it offers a Christian holiday in a relaxed and refreshing environment. The costs are very competitive for families. There were plenty of activities for the sport-minded and relaxation for those who like to take things more leisurely. Some of those there for the first time remarked that it was not what they had thought it would be

like but thoroughly enjoyed the holiday and have booked again. Families should be reminded that assistance could be available from their Congregation's Deacons' Courts.

### **Olivet Distance Learning**

Things in the Olivet Distance Learning continue to move slowly. There are now three active students. A series on Ephesians as well as the Gospel of Matthew is now available.

The Committee wish to record their thanks to the Clerk.

KENNETH MACDONALD, *Convener*

### **PROPOSED DELIVERANCE**

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the report of the Welfare of Youth & Education Committee and thank the Committee;
2. The General Assembly thank Mrs Isobel Ann MacLeod for her work as Clerk;
3. The General Assembly thank Mr Derick Gillies for his faithful work in organising the All-Age-Holiday and encourage him to continue with it;
4. The General Assembly thank Rev. Greg MacDonald for organising and running the Youth Camp and commend the camp to our young folk;
5. The General Assembly note that the Shorter Catechism with its revised layout is now being published and commend it to our Congregations and especially thank Rev. H.J.T. Woods for his work;
6. The General Assembly thank those who took part in the Welfare of Youth Exams and encourage them to continue to do so;
7. The General Assembly thank those who teach in the Sabbath Schools and who so freely give of their time;
8. The General Assembly thank those who set and mark the Sabbath School & Bible Class exam papers;
9. The General Assembly continue to encourage the spread of Christian Education, and encourage Christian teachers who teach in the secular schools;
10. The General Assembly encourage Rev. David Fraser in his work with the Olivet Course.

# APPENDIX

## Sabbath School and Bible Class Examinations 2011

The following is a list of all who took part in the examinations and prizewinners.

### **Bible Class Grade**

6 took part in the examination (a decrease of 2 from 2011).

**Prizewinner:** Isla G. Macdonald, *Stornoway*

**Leverburgh:** Sarah Campbell

**Stornoway:** Rachel Craig, Joanna Gillies, Jonathan Gillies, Isla Macdonald

**Tarbat:** Murdo D. MacLeod

### **Sabbath School Grade**

13 took part in the examination (an increase of 5 from 2011).

**Prizewinner:** Emma Craig, *Stornoway*

**Cross:** Hugh Murdo Macdonald, Calum Stuart Morrison, Iain Ruairidh Morrison, Kirsty Gillies Morrison

**Knock & Point:** Alexander MacLeod

**Leverburgh:** Rachel Campbell

**Stornoway:** Emma Craig, Lily Craig, Duncan Macdonald, Ross Morrison, Andrew Smith

**Tarbat:** Ethan MacLeod, Malcolm MacLeod

### **Maurine Murchison Memorial Prize**

**Stornoway:** Thomas Craig, Joanna Gillies, Iona Macdonald, Lydia Macdonald, Susanna Macdonald, Calvin Mackenzie, Mark Morrison, Ross Morrison, Andrew Smith, Eilidh Smith.

**Brora:** Sarah Jane Sinclair, Hannah Sinclair.