



# Faith & Policy Watch

## Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent – this year falling on 18<sup>th</sup> February. The day is traditionally seen as a time for repentance and mourning. Some Christians choose to attend an Ash Wednesday service where their foreheads are marked with ashes as a symbol of death and sorrow for sin.

*In the past I knew only what others had told me, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. So I am ashamed of all I have said and repent in dust and ashes.*  
**Job 42:5-6**

In recent years there have been a number of public apologies made by governments, both in the UK and across the world, for historical wrongs and injustices. For example, in 2008 the Australian Government made a formal apology for the past wrongs caused by successive governments on the indigenous Aboriginal population. In 2009 the US Senate apologised for slavery. Prime Minister David Cameron, on behalf of the UK Government, has made various apologies including for the treatment of patients in Stafford hospital, and to those affected by the Hillsborough tragedy.

An apology is good but meaningless if not accompanied by change. The concept of repentance in the Bible includes not only sorrow and apology for wrongdoing, but an active rejection of it; a turning away from a former path and starting in a new direction. This is what we aim for not only in our own lives, but for many regimes and authorities in their handling of social justice issues.

Towards the end of the book of Job the revelation of God enables Job to put his situation in perspective. He shows his change of heart by repenting in *dust and ashes*. As the season of Lent approaches let us pray that through our campaigning and the revelation of God there will be a change of heart and direction amongst those who have the power to bring about justice and equality.



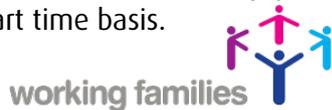
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## Working Families Policy Conference

The organisation Working Families held their annual conference on the 27<sup>th</sup> January, which the Mothers' Union attended. The event was used as a launch for the Working Families 2015 Manifesto "Making work actually work for all: A 'families and work' manifesto for 2015". Mothers' Union has signed up to the section on "Equality at work *and* at home" in the manifesto, which calls on the Government elected in 2015 to:

- 1) Increase statutory entitlement to paternity leave to six weeks on 90% of a fathers earnings and to make this a day one right for employees, And:
- 2) To simplify the legal framework around shared parental leave, open entitlement to fathers from day one of employment and allow statutory paid leave to be taken on a part time basis.



Speaking at the conference were Maria Miller (Conservative MP for Basingstoke), Jo Swinson (Lib Dem MP for East Dunbartonshire and Parliamentary Under Secretary for Women and Equalities) and Alison McGovern (Labour MP for Wirral South and Shadow Minister for Children and Families), who outlined their parties' perspectives on issues such as elder care, the affordability of childcare, tackling gender culture in workplaces and the home, the difficulties facing parents of disabled children in accessing appropriate childcare, in work poverty and zero hours and unstable contracts.

See: [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk) for more information about the conference and the 2015 manifesto.

## Shared Parental Leave Attitudes Survey

A law allowing new parents to share up to 50 weeks of leave from paid employment between them will come in to force from April 5<sup>th</sup> this year. Shared Parental Leave will allow parents of a new baby to divide a year's leave between them as they deem appropriate. To coincide with the creation of this new legislation, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills commissioned research into current attitudes towards shared parenting.

The survey of 2,138 adults from across the UK found that at present 64% of respondents were aware of the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and felt that they either fully or partially understood it, whereas 36% were either unaware or felt that they understood very little about it. 67% of respondents said that if Shared Parental Leave had been available when they'd had children they would have considered it, whilst 33% said that they would not have done so. When asked if they would consider taking Shared Parental Leave should a future child be born to them, 83% of respondents felt they would either definitely or possibly consider it, whereas 17% of respondents said that they would either probably not or definitely not consider taking it.

Male respondents reported that they felt the main benefits of taking Shared Parental Leave were that they would form a closer bond with their child, that it would be fairer to share the caring responsibilities of a partner, and that it would enable their partner to return to work sooner.

The survey can be found at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shared-parental-leave-public-attitudes>.



**Please pray for** parents considering taking Shared Parental Leave as it becomes possible from April.

## Marriage Week UK - 7<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> February 2015

Marriage Week UK will be held from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> February this year. The Week aims to provide a focus for married couples to pause and learn some new skills to help improve their marriages, as well as providing space for society in general to celebrate marriage and the benefits it brings. Take a look at their website: <http://marriage-week.org.uk/marriage-week-home/> to find out more about the week, and the events that will be running throughout this time.

**Marriage Week**   
CELEBRATING COMMITMENT

**Please thank God** for healthy marriages throughout this time, and pray for those who may find Marriage Week difficult.

## Evidence for Serious Crime Bill Committee

In January Mothers' Union responded to a Government call for written evidence from the Public Bill Committee considering the Serious Crime Bill. The Serious Crime Bill contains new legislation on a range of issues relating to criminal behaviour, and will create a new offence of "Coercive and Controlling behaviour" within intimate or family relationships. This aims to provide better protections and a stronger legal framework for those who have experienced domestic abuse, which usually involves coercive and controlling behaviour. Mothers' Union responded to last year's Home Office consultation "Strengthening the Law on Domestic Abuse", and supported proposals on the creation of the new offence. To view the Mothers' Union response, which has been circulated to politicians considering the new legislation please see: <http://tinyurl.com/kcks9a3>

For more information on the Serious Crime Bill please see:  
<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/seriouscrime.html>

We are also aware of a national consultation seeking feedback from the public to help determine what is known about stalking and what further help & support is needed. If you know someone who has been affected by stalking you can take part in this at: <https://www.scaredofsomeone.org/take-the-questionnaire>

**Please pray** for wisdom for the Government as they create this new law.

## Women Bishops to be Fast Tracked in to House of Lords



A new law is currently working its way through Parliament which will enable women bishops to be fast tracked into the House of Lords. The new proposals, which were debated in the House of Commons on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, received support from both the Government and the Opposition and will enable women who become bishops to take up the position of Lords Spiritual sooner than current legislation allows.

At present there are 26 places in the House of Lords reserved for bishops, with 5 places allocated to the two Archbishops, and the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester. The remaining 24 places are allocated to diocesan bishops in order of how long they have served in their role. As women have only been able to take up the position of bishop in recent weeks this means it would be many years before a female bishop would take up a role in the House of Lords without a change in the process. The temporary legislation will last for ten years, and will enable women who are bishops to bypass the current process of waiting to enter the Lords based on length of service.

**Please pray** for those who will be impacted by this transition and for God's heart to be shown through the Bishops in the House of Lords.

## Commercialisation, Sexualisation and Internet Safety

Our Bye Buy Childhood campaign was launched in 2010, highlighting our concerns that childhood has increasingly become a marketing opportunity; and that children are being targeted by and exposed to inappropriate sexualised media and marketing.

In 2013/14, Mothers' Union carried out an evaluation of the Bye Buy Childhood Campaign, along with further quantitative and qualitative research to ascertain whether parents feel things have changed since our previous research in 2010. Repeating the questions used in the 2010 research and a questionnaire to members, we found that there is still work to be done in valuing children as children and not consumers.

In March 2015 Mothers' Union will be launching the results of this research in a new Bye Buy Childhood report, supported by an engagement pack for members to help equip parents, carers and grandparents to not only respond practically to the commercial pressures facing children and young people, but also with ideas to help members join in our campaigning work. Do keep an eye on [www.byebuychildhood.org](http://www.byebuychildhood.org) for more information.

Our research shows that the evolving nature of technology sparks considerable concern among families, with many of those we spoke to making a strong link between commercialisation and technology and often understanding the two as intertwined.

**Safer Internet Day 2015** is taking place on Tuesday 10th February and will see hundreds of organisations get involved to help promote the safe, responsible and positive use of digital technology for children and young people. If you're interested in supporting this great day, there are lots of ways to take part including making your own pledge to make the internet a safer and better place:

[www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/2015/things-to-do/make-a-sid-promise](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/2015/things-to-do/make-a-sid-promise)

as well as lots of advice and resources for parents and carers such as how to set up parental controls on your computer and the safety tools available on popular services such as Facebook and YouTube.

[www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers)



**Please pray** for the ongoing work in the run up to the launch of the new Bye Buy Childhood report, and for hearts and minds to be prepared to engage in this important campaign.

## 59th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

As usual, governments will meet together at the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations headquarters in New York, this year from 9th - 20th March.

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA), one of the key global agreements and action plans for furthering gender equality and the empowerment of women, written at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; and this will be the theme of the 59th session of CSW. As the focus of the two weeks will be on progress (or lack thereof) made since 1995 in implementing the Declaration, the CSW will not be writing a set of agreements as usually happens. Instead, UN member states will sign up to a political declaration, which has already been drafted and will be nearly agreed upon come the start of CSW. This declaration will recommit countries to the Beijing Declaration and PFA; although as usual, negotiations will allow states the opportunity to negotiate strengthening or weakening their obligations.

Issues addressed by the Beijing Declaration and PFA:

1. Women and the environment
2. Women in power and decision-making
3. The girl child
4. Women and the economy
5. Women and poverty
6. Violence against women
7. Human rights of women
8. Education and training of women
9. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
10. Women and health
11. Women and the media
12. Women and armed conflict

A number of Mothers' Union members will be attending CSW with the Anglican Communion; however this year there will be no official representation from Mary Sumner House. To read the political declaration and for further details on CSW go to [www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015](http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015).

