

Economics Commission

The Church of Scotland has announced the membership of its newly created Commission on the Purposes of Economic Activity, which will spend two years exploring the fundamental ethical and moral questions underlying economic activity, many of which have been highlighted for society by the “credit crunch”.

The Commission will be chaired by Prof Charles Munn OBE, the recently retired Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland. The other 12 members of the Commission are drawn from a variety of backgrounds, with expertise in many spheres including politics, business and theology.

Economics Commission members:

- Linda de Caestecker, Director of Public Health for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council.
- Paul Chapman who was for ten years director of "The Employment Project" a church-supported organization working with unemployed men and women in the New York area,
- Rev. Doug Gay, Lecturer in Practical Theology at the University of Glasgow.
- Rev. Kathy Galloway, Head of Christian Aid in Scotland and former leader of the Iona Community.
- Janette Harkess, director of policy and research, Scottish Council for Development and Industry, formerly deputy editor of the Herald newspaper,
- Werner G. Jeanrond, Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow
- David Lonsdale, Assistant Director of CBI Scotland,
- John McFall, Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee from 2001 until he stepped down as an MP at the 2010 General Election.
- Jeremy Peat, Director of the David Hume Institute, former Senior Economic Adviser at the Scottish Office (1985 - 1993) and Group Chief Economist at RBS (1993 - 2005).
- Cathy McCormack, campaigner, member of the Poverty Truth Commission, and co author of “The Wee Yellow Butterfly”
- Grahame Smith, General Secretary of the STUC,
- Jim Spowart former managing director of Direct Line Financial Services and founder of Intelligent Finance (IF)

The Commission will take part in a number of meetings around the country organised through Presbyteries. There will also be meetings in Edinburgh, involving discussion with people with experience relevant to the Commission's work.

The Commission will primarily consider matters relating to the Scottish economy, and has identified two specific groups of problems, those relating to poverty and those relating to the use of wealth.

The Commission will seek to answer three large questions:

- How can the Church best offer Scottish society a new vision of what might be achievable in the economic, social and community life of the nation?
- How can the Church, at local and national level, be encouraged to become more engaged in transformative economics, linking values such as justice, cohesion and sustainability to economic success?
- How should inequality be addressed while ensuring that appropriate levels of choice are available to all?

Church and Society Council Convener Rev Ian Galloway, whose Council proposed the commission, said “This is a challenging time for many people, especially those who are, in their poverty, paying for the excesses of those who craved wealth. Yet it is also an opportunity for us as a church and a nation to step back and look into the very basis of our economic system to ask deeply human questions about what is acceptable and what should be the driving force of our economic relationships”

Charles Munn added: “The formation of the Special Commission gives the Kirk the opportunity to speak to its members and to the wider world about matters of great importance. That many parts of the economic system have broken so badly impacts all of our lives. It is important that the national church takes the time to reflect, and look at the ways in which the economic system can operate more efficiently and fairly, in order that the benefits of economic growth are shared more widely.”

The Commission will report to the General Assembly in 2012. Its report will touch on many important issues, including:

- a statement of connections between moral values and economic measures of success
- how changes in people's attitudes towards, and beliefs about, the economy might help to achieve wider social goals;
- how to provide the Church with direction about how it might best engage society with this vision of the purpose of economic activity;
- a report on the extent to which Church of Scotland congregations can initiate, support and enable economic development, both locally and further afield;
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of these efforts, identifying principles of good practice and making recommendations relating to the promotion of such development work within and beyond the Church of Scotland.

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Charity Number: SC011353



June 2010