

THE 2006 ANNUAL CONFERENCE 'COMING UNDER THE CHARITY COMMISSION'S WING'

Dr Ken Ashford

In his address Dr Ken Ashford, Principal Accountant with the Charity Commission, summarised the effect of the Charities Bill, which is currently before Parliament and is expected to receive the Royal Assent by the end of the year.

He described the changes resulting from the proposal to end the status of excepted charities from October 2007, which will lead to a requirement for all churches to be entered on the Charities Register (those with income over £100,000 first). This promotes accountability, since the register entry is available for public scrutiny, as will be the accounts of charities with income over £25,000. However it gives benefits in terms of proper recognition of charitable status. It does not alter the legal position, since excepted charities are currently under the jurisdiction of the Charity Commission.

Once registered, churches will need to ensure that the register entry is kept up to date, ensure that their Governing Documents are in order, ensure that they are aware of all funds for which the church is responsible and (if income is over £10,000) produce a Trustees Annual Report. The registration process is currently being designed.

Dr Ashford also outlined the proposed changes to thresholds, particularly the new secondary threshold for audits, the principles of the Charity SORP, and the basis for the Trustees Annual Report (which may vary depending on the size of the charity). He also told us something about what the Commission does, about how it is changing and in particular about the key areas, which it is still developing. And all of that in a session, which lasted for 45 minutes and included time for questions! All of this information, and more, can be found on the Charity Commission's website. www.charitycommission.gov.uk

ACAT NEWSLETTER is published by the Association of Church Accountants and Treasurers. Information contained in the newsletter is prepared carefully from the information available, but ACAT accepts no responsibility for its complete accuracy; members should always consult their professional or Church advisors. Contributions and letters for future publication, requests for information or assistance, or membership applications should be directed to: admin@acat.uk.com or to any of the officers below:

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ASSOCIATION OF CHURCH ACCOUNTANTS AND TREASURERS

President: The Bishop of London

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Newsletter

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ACAT NEWS

Membership - It is with considerable satisfaction that we reproduce the following extract from a press release distributed by ACAT on Friday 4th August.

“ACAT takes pleasure in announcing that a grant from the Baptist Insurance Company (BIC) will fund a block membership enabling a significant number of Baptist church treasurers to become members of ACAT. This will double the Association's size to over 5,000 members.

Membership will be offered to treasurers in all Baptist Union of Great Britain churches in England and Wales, and all Baptist Union of Scotland churches, reflecting BIC's wide membership in Scotland, and 300 churches that are insured by BIC but not in any Union - an estimated 2,600 in total.”

The full text of the press release can be viewed on the ACAT website.

The Annual Conference - This year's conference, attended by nearly 100 members, was again a great success. The feedback survey completed by attendees at the end of the conference sought marking of 18 points of feedback over 5 categories from very poor up to excellent; 80% of the response was in the top “Good” and “Excellent” categories.

On page 4 a resume of one of the presentations has been contributed by Committee member Chris Linford.

The slide presentations used by the some of the main speakers can be viewed on a new “2006 Conference” page of the ACAT website. We hope to add more as we obtain permission and to publish further resumes later.



THE CHARITIES BILL

The House of Commons Committee stage of the Charities Bill was duly completed on 13 July. The Hansard record of the Committee's proceedings, over eight sittings is at:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmschar.htm

A number of amendments were made to the Bill in Committee, though none of them changed the Bill in any fundamental way. A new version of the Bill, as amended in Committee, will appear shortly at:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/pabills/200506/charities.htm

The next stage in the Parliamentary process will be the report stage in the House of Commons. There will not

be time to fit this in before Parliament's summer break, which runs from 25 July to 9 October. The Cabinet Office expect the Report stage to take place in October and the remaining brief stages after that to be completed before the end of this current Parliamentary session in November.

In October the Cabinet Office will be able to announce the plans for implementation. The new Act will not take effect immediately after it has been passed by Parliament. Instead the Government will bring the various parts of it in to force in sequence starting about two months after it has been passed. The whole process of implementation is likely to take 18 to 24 months.

LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP GRANT SCHEME

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget on 22 March 2006 that the grant scheme is extended until 31 March 2011. The main criteria remain the same. However the grant was extended to include professional fees and expenditure on repairs to certain fixtures and fittings, incurred since 22 March 2006. The details of the additional expenditure now allowable has now been published on the Grant Scheme website as follows:

- Pipe Organ repairs (mechanism, casing, blowing plant, re-leathering. Also, re-tuning and re-voicing if

following a repair)

- Fitted pews (inc upholstery, stripping, french polishing)
- Bell Frame, bells and ropes
- Clocks (inc. face, mechanism)
- Investigative works / surveys (only where leads to eligible repairs)
- Professional fees (inc. architects, surveyors, planning supervisors, H&S advisors, archaeologists, professional fundraisers - all must relate to eligible repairs)

For full details see the website: www.lpwscheme.org.uk

NEW FIRE SAFETY RULES

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 comes into force on 1st October 2006. The rules cover all non-domestic premises in England and Wales including churches, church hall and other meeting places. The new law makes it the responsibility of those persons or bodies who have some level of control in premises to ensure the safety of all people who use the premises, and in the immediate vicinity, by taking reasonable steps to reduce the risk of fire and ensure that people can safely escape if there is a fire. Fire certificates will no longer apply.

To comply with the order, the body responsible for the premises must make sure a fire-risk assessment (see the table above) is carried out, although the tasks can be performed by some other competent person or body. However, the responsibility, in law, for meeting the order cannot be delegated. There is a difference from previous legislation in that everyone who might be on the premises must be considered, whether they are employees, visitors or members of the public. Particular attention should be paid to people who may have a disability or anyone who may need special help. The order specifies that the responsible body must manage any fire-risk in the premises. Fire authorities no longer issue fire certificates and those previously in force will have no legal status.

Guides can be downloaded free from <http://www.communities.gov.uk>

Fire safety risk assessment

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| 1 | Identify fire hazards:
Identify ignition sources
Identify fuel sources
Identify oxygen source |
| 2 | Identify people at risk:
In and around the premises
Those especially at risk |
| 3 | Evaluate, remove or reduce and protect from risk
Evaluate risk of fire starting
Evaluate risk to people
Remove/ reduce fire hazards
Remove/ reduce risk to people
Protect people by providing fire precautions |
| 4 | Record, plan, inform, instruct, and train
Record major findings and action taken
Discuss and work with other responsible people
Prepare emergency plan
Inform and instruct relevant people
Provide training |
| 5 | Review
Review assessment regularly
Change as necessary |

For smaller premises (under 300 attendees): "Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Small and Medium Places of Assembly"-ISBN: 978 1 85112 820 4; For larger premises, "Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Large Places of Assembly"-ISBN: 978 1 85112 821 1; Alternatively they can be ordered (cost £12) from Fire Safety Guides, PO Box 236, Wetherby LS23 7NB, Tel: 0870 830 7099. Quote ISBN when ordering.