

PE1487/MM

FAO – Mr David Stewart MSP
Convener, Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament

Dear Mr Stewart,

As previous contributors (30th Sept) in support of the SSS petition PE01487, we welcome the proposed change in designation from RO. to TfR as submitted by the joint CofS and HSS initiative. Time for Reflection speaks of openness and inclusion and should remove the bias in the current approach. Having said that, in practice, the change should not be semantic, as a means of simply removing pressure from the very sensitive subject area of inter faith/belief harmony and equality.

In a recent separate but related submission on the subject of the Children & Young People Bill, we claimed that its essential decrees would be compromised if they are not underpinned by mandatory adoption in all schools, of the most recent Government guidance on RME & RO. Further evidence, if that were needed, of the rationale for the joint submission.

However, there is a caveat. We see the joint initiative as well intentioned but it is sparse in detail and whereas the CofS guidelines are admirable, they could only be advisory, bringing potential issues of inequality through variability in their adoption and practice. Further. 5 key aspects.

1 If TfR in practice is all that for which we aspire, with no worship, prayer, hymns or confession, then neither **Opt out** or **Opt in** is relevant to the discourse and our concerns as regards the inadequate/ineffective application and availability of the **Opt out** option are removed. That is what drove the **Opt In** petition in the first place.

2 For TfR to deliver its stated objectives, it must be neutral and generic, embracing all faiths and none, imposing nothing from the many faith and belief traditions which prevail. Further, those who define and input to the focus or theme of a TfR event must always be so minded and it is not clear how, if at all, the Kirk's guidelines could be enforced in denominational schools, or in non-denominational schools, if the Head Teacher felt otherwise.

3 Chaplains, if involved, will have to leave their faith imperatives at the assembly hall door, as has been achieved in hospitals via the Spiritual Care policy of NHS Scotland, whereby NHS salaried chaplains are generic and are supported as required by nominated unpaid volunteer-specific faith and belief representatives.

4 We who affirm the non-religious life stance of humanism, often referring to ourselves as cultural Christians, share many of the essential imperatives held by religions, although we differ significantly on the basis for such. We welcome the various anniversaries/festivals including those evidence based which we observe, and attendance at any such communal events should not be compulsory.

5 In a recent combined SIFC/NHS Education project, published in March 2009 under the title 'Harmony', although there was agreement on all sorts of societal/faith/belief/morality/life etc considerations, the one and only one about which there was universal agreement was the Golden Rule. The link is as per:

<http://www.scottishinterfaithcouncil.org/resources/VALUES+IN+HARMONY.pdf>

In summary, we suggest that this matter is reviewed, concurrent with its legislative progress, in a much wider way with the involvement of those who not only seek equality but have actual experience in how this worthy initiative might be rolled out.

Yours sincerely

Ron McLaren

Convener Dundee & Tayside Humanist Group

January 26th 2014