



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

# Help and Advice Group

Northern Synod Office, 4 College Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8JJ (0191-232 1168)

## Bulletin 16: GENERAL UPDATE

The Help & Advice Group was set up by Synod in 2009, to support local churches in being informed and effective in their life and mission. The Group is made up of four members of local churches, together with administrative support from the Trust Officer. We are willing to try to provide specific advice or organise training days on particular topics. Please get in touch if you have questions or wish to suggest a training or discussion event.

This paper is part of a series of general updates for local churches. We also circulate articles giving an overview of particular subjects of interest from time to time. Bulletins will also be posted on the members' area of the website with direct links to other websites.

Where readers are directed to web-based resources, the Synod Office is willing to respond to reasonable requests for printed out information for readers without web access, although they may find it more satisfactory to follow up their interest through their local library's web access.

---

This month's general update includes brief details five items which may be of interest. Web links are provided for those wishing to follow up these items further.

### **Pre-Employment Checks**

The UK Border Agency has published updated guidance on preventing illegal working. Churches that employ any staff should consult this for advice on how to check that a new employee is permitted to work in the UK. It is important for churches to follow recommended procedures, as it is a criminal offence to break this law.

Summary guidance (154 KB):

[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/currentguidanceandcodes/summary-guidance.pdf?view=Binary](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/currentguidanceandcodes/summary-guidance.pdf?view=Binary)

Comprehensive guidance, including samples of authorised documents (2.8 MB):

[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/currentguidanceandcodes/comprehensiveguidancefeb08.pdf?view=Binary](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/currentguidanceandcodes/comprehensiveguidancefeb08.pdf?view=Binary)

### **Changes to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme**

As a result of the withdrawal of the zero-rate of VAT on alterations to listed buildings, VAT on these works may now be claimed back from the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme: [www.lpwscheme.org.uk](http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk).

## **Charitable Status**

The Government has extended churches' status as excepted charities until 31 March 2014. Currently, only churches with annual income over £100,000 may register with the Charity Commission. Thereafter, it is expected that the registration threshold will be lowered, so that eventually most large and medium-sized churches will be registered. Small churches, like other small charities, will not be required to register.

In the meantime, churches that are asked to give a charity number should explain that although they have charity status, they are not required to have one, by the Charities (Exception from Registration)(Amendment) Regulations 2012. Churches that reclaim tax on Gift Aided donations can also quote their HMRC charity number.

The regulations themselves can be found at:

[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/1734/made/data.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/1734/made/data.pdf).

## **Health & Safety**

The Churches' Legislation Advisory Service points out that two churches were prosecuted under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 in 2010, and fined £3,000 and £5,000. In the first case, a self-employed joiner had fallen 3 metres from a poorly-guarded balcony, leaving him paralysed. In the second, a volunteer had suffered spinal injury after falling from a bell tower. The church knew from a structural survey that the floor of the tower had been attacked by beetles, but it had not carried out recommended further surveys or remedial works.

The CLAS reminds churches that they should take sensible precautions with health & safety, and directs us to guidance provided by Ecclesiastical Insurance Group.

Guidance notes on health & safety (2.42 MB):

[www.ecclesiastical.com/ChurchMatters/Images/PDF%20-%20church%20insurance%20guidance%20notes%20-%20health%20and%20safety.pdf](http://www.ecclesiastical.com/ChurchMatters/Images/PDF%20-%20church%20insurance%20guidance%20notes%20-%20health%20and%20safety.pdf)

Church health & safety policy with guidance notes (519 KB):

[www.ecclesiastical.com/ChurchMatters/Images/Church%20insurance%20health%20and%20safety%20policy%20with%20guidance%20notes.pdf](http://www.ecclesiastical.com/ChurchMatters/Images/Church%20insurance%20health%20and%20safety%20policy%20with%20guidance%20notes.pdf)

The Health & Safety Executive guidance on the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (known as COSHH) may also be of use to churches, and can be downloaded from their website (901 KB): [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.pdf).

Churches may also wish to consider ensuring that there is a telephone on site (land line or mobile), so that emergency calls can be made quickly. Churches that have a land line could display their postcode prominently near to the telephone, as emergency services will need that information to enable them to respond promptly.

## **Civil Partnership Registration**

Churches wanting to know more about registration of civil partnerships, following the decision at General Assembly, can find information and guidance on the URC's website:

[www.urc.org.uk/resources/civil-partnership-registration.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/resources/civil-partnership-registration.html)

[andrew.atkinson@urc-northernsynod.org](mailto:andrew.atkinson@urc-northernsynod.org)