

Our debaptism certificate causes international stir

For many years the NSS has been providing a free download of a jokey "debaptism" certificate, the brain child of former President Barbara Smoker. It was clear from the statistics that it was one of the most popular items on our website.

But then the BBC suddenly took an interest in it, and also in John Hunt, who, with the help of the NSS, was trying to get himself officially debaptised by the Church of England.

When the BBC featured this – on TV, radio and on-line – the certificate became the focus of worldwide attention. The Press Association then took up the story and within days it was in media around the world. President Terry Sanderson was interviewed on

American radio and on TV and radio in Britain.

When we launched an attractive new certificate printed on parchment paper, available for a modest cost, the office struggled to keep up with demand. Then *Time* magazine also took up the story, which became the most read article on its website for several days. This sparked another wave of interest to the point that the Macmillan Dictionary website made "debaptism" its word of the week.

Especially in the USA, Christian bloggers and commentators saw debaptism as another sign of an increasingly secularised Europe. Britain's Premier Christian Radio even felt the need to start a rival campaign calling on Christians to sign up to make a declaration of their faith.

While some are concerned that the certificate implicitly imbues baptism with unwarranted significance, others value it as a symbol of their personal

rejection of the church.

The Church of England insists that it does not use baptismal figures as a basis for membership statistics, but *The Times'* Ruth Gledhill has established that the CoFE has submitted these figures to

Hospital chaplain research starts national debate

With the help of nearly forty volunteers from around the country, NSS member Dennis Penaluna used Freedom of Information legislation to discover how much the National Health Service is spending on its chaplaincy services.

The final annual salary cost of £32 million is equivalent to around £40 million when all the associated expenses are taken into account – sufficient to pay a further 1,500 nurses or 2,300 cleaners. Especially in times of stringency, the priority must be front line services.

The churches should pay for whatever level of chaplain provision they wish; or they may decide it is more economical to send local priests to hospitals on request.

Terry Sanderson and Keith Porteous Wood took part in dozens of broadcasts, including the *Today* programme, about the findings. This caused the Church of England, who supply most of the chaplains, to go into maximum defence mode, arguing that chaplains are "essential" and "irreplaceable".

As we have come to expect however, the BBC deliberately gave the impression that the NSS was calling for an end to the chaplaincy service, when we were solely questioning: "should the NHS be paying for them?" The dice were

1500 debaptised in just one week

By Toby Cohen

FIFTEEN HUNDRED people paid to be 'debaptised' last week alone, as a new trend threatens to undermine the Church. The National Secular Society (NSS) has provided a 'certificate of debaptism' on its website for five years which has been downloaded by more than 100,000 people. They have recently introduced a new parchment copy for £3 which has proved incredibly popular, but the Church is refusing to recognize a need for the procedure.

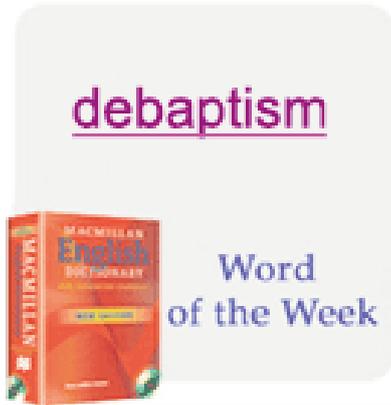
Church of England Newspaper top story from March 27 2009

continues on page 2, col 1 ►

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◀ “Debaptism” continued

secure extra places on the World Council of Churches. Also, in 2000, the “Wakeham” Royal Commission report included a disingenuous claim that the CofE had nearly 25 million members in the UK (based on baptism) in an attempt to justify the retention of bishops in the House of Lords.



As seen on the Macmillan website

◀ “Hospital chaplains” continued

further loaded by the BBC coming to the aid of chaplains in several programmes, while conspicuously avoiding any dissenting voices.

As with debaptism, this story started a national debate; many people were surprised that it was the NHS rather than the churches paying the clergy’s wages. They had been under the impression that chaplains were simply local vicars and priests who came into hospitals as part of their normal duties. The viciousness of comment in the religious press and the extent to which we have been misrepresented suggests we have struck a nerve once more.

Nurses are not pastors

The NSS was the only organisation to support the right of North Somerset Primary Care Trust to discipline Nurse Caroline Petrie for asking a patient in their own home if they would like to pray. The Trust faced a barrage of condemnation from Christian groups and even the Justice Secretary. The controversy gave rise to countless media interviews and significant press coverage for the Society.

ARE YOU GETTING IT EVERY WEEK?

Newsline’s editor Terry Sanderson hopes you are all receiving our weekly email newsletter. There have been some email distribution problems which can be overcome if you contact us. If you would like Newsline but are not receiving it, please contact the office.

Tribute paid to our Human Rights work

Attacks on freedom of expression and attempts to undermine individual universal Human Rights are becoming commonplace at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

This is why the NSS has teamed up with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) to do whatever we can to assist their courageous efforts to stop the erosion of free expression and other Human Rights. The IHEU team at the UNHRC is led by NSS Member Roy Brown.

Most of the attempts to undermine Human Rights come from countries that are part of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Other countries vote with the OIC out of self-interest, forming a bloc that can command a majority at the UNHRC.

Repeated resolutions are being passed by this voting bloc proposing the outlawing of what they term “defamation of religion”. The clear intention is to create some kind of super blasphemy law that would apply internationally to prevent any criticism of Islam, the only religion specifically mentioned in the resolutions.

Keith Porteous Wood requested a meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the First Secretary

responsible for Human Rights, and her team. Gratifyingly, she paid tribute to IHEU’s work both on the floor of the UNHRC, and to the way it had raised the international profile of concerns over freedom of expression and the disturbing direction the UNHRC is taking.

The First Secretary agreed with Keith Wood’s analysis of the complex challenges facing both the Council and Western Governments steadfastly committed to upholding Human Rights. Further regular meetings are planned.

Keith was accompanied at the meeting by an MP on the Foreign Affairs Committee that oversees the Foreign Office’s work. The meeting was set up following a conversation between Keith and Mark (now Lord) Malloch Brown. He is now a Foreign Office minister but is the previous Deputy Director General of the United Nations.

Keith later attended a diplomatic reception at Lancaster House to mark the launch of the Foreign Office’s Human Rights Report for 2008. The NSS made a detailed [submission](#) about the 2007 Report suggesting that the problems at Geneva should be given a great deal more analysis and prominence in the next Report. We are pleased that they have been.

Royal Marriages and Succession to the Crown (Prevention of Discrimination) Bill

Over the Christmas break, Keith carried out some detailed research for Evan Harris MP on the above topic on the very outside chance that Evan would win a private members’ ballot to table a bill about it. Against the odds, Evan won a place in the ballot. The Bill he

introduced sought to eliminate both religious and sex discrimination from the line of succession. The Queen had to be consulted before the Bill could be debated. Due to the level of public interest, the Prime Minister commented about it on the *Today* programme, even

though he was in South America. Keith was in the Commons Chamber for the five-hour [debate](#). Justice Secretary Jack Straw wound up for the Government accepting the validity of the aims of the Bill and indicating that Government would consider taking them forward.

Equality Bill

A new Equality Bill has started its passage through Parliament, replacing existing piecemeal legislation. It applies to England, Scotland and Wales. Some time before its publication, NSS Vice President Anna Behan and Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood met with the senior civil servant responsible for drafting the Bill. While one recommendation they made has been incorporated, other important ones have not. The NSS was advised by a top civil servant about the broad content of the Bill in advance of its publication. Keith was invited to the reception given by the minister responsible, the Rt Hon. Harriet Harman MP, to mark the introduction of the Bill to Parliament. The Society will obviously be doing everything it can to influence this Bill.



Anna Behan

NSS meets community minister Sadiq Khan

The NSS was invited to set out its concerns to Sadiq Khan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government in a private meeting. The meeting was attended by Vice President Anna Behan and council member Peter Vlachos as well as the Executive Director. The NSS set out its philosophies and broad concerns.

The greatest of these concerns relates to the excessive attention paid by Government to religious groups, and especially their leaders. To us this appears to go beyond merely reaching out to vulnerable sectors of the community: it extends to giving them privileged input into Government policy. Similarly, the Government has set up a Faith Communities Unit, despite the fact that the majority of the population has little or no time for religion.

A stumbling block was the extent to which publicly-funded services should respond to religious demands, for example, for religious circumcision on the NHS.

There was clearly much more common ground over the plight of those in minority ethnic/religious families whose basic liberties were denied, and the growing pressure being brought to bear on Muslims – especially women – to use Sharia “remedies”.



Sadiq Khan

Wilders: NSS only protestors

The Government took the extraordinary step of refusing entry to Britain to Geert Wilders, a Dutch parliamentarian who, as far as we are aware, has not been found guilty of any criminal offence. Mr Wilders was coming to a screening of his controversial film *Fitna* at the Palace of Westminster.

This refusal was almost certainly because of Muslim objections. According to the *Pakistan Daily Times*: “The decision to cancel the showing was taken when Lord Nazir Ahmed held a meeting with the Government”

In fact, the film was screened, once for parliamentarians and later as part of an international press conference. Keith Porteous Wood spoke at both screenings. He criticised the Government for caving in to pressure rather than standing up for freedom of expression. It was irrelevant whether or not we agreed with Wilder’s views.

Keith’s comments at the press conference were broadcast live on national television just minutes after Terry Sanderson, who had been taking part in a studio discussion on the same topic.

The NSS was the only organisation protesting at either event in Parliament.

The President wrote to the Home Secretary protesting about the decision to deny access to Geert Wilders and asking her to reconsider this. Article 19 later issued a press statement in a similar tone.



Geert Wilders



Title sequence from the film

NSS in Europe

A tough assignment was taken on by **Elizabeth O’Casey**, representing the NSS at the European Parliament’s Religion & Politics Working Group meeting on Religion and Democracy in Europe. Her criticism of the costs of chaplains in hospitals being met from public funds (following on from the NSS study reported on pages 1 and 2) proved to be controversial.

She also spoke on a panel at the UNISON National Black Members’ Conference about faith and cohesion in the workplace. She attended a WAFE (International Federation of Women Against Fundamentalism and for Equality) meeting on Sharia Law and made a comment from the floor.



Elizabeth O’Casey

EDUCATION

Government minister challenged on schools

The NSS made its presence felt at the Fabian Society Winter Conference when, in a packed plenary session, Keith Porteous Wood challenged Government minister Ed Miliband about "faith schools". Keith pointed to the outrageous legalised discrimination in religious schools against non-religious employees and pupils. He also attacked the lack of integrity of the consultation process on new religious schools, where even overwhelming opposition by the local community is disregarded. Keith's contribution drew warm applause, to the obvious embarrassment of the Minister.

Meanwhile NSS President Terry Sanderson was on hand throughout the conference to discuss secular issues with speakers and delegates at our stall.



Ed Miliband

General Teaching Council Code of Conduct

NSS President Terry Sanderson wrote to the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) to counter what appeared to be an orchestrated campaign by the Christian Institute opposing aspects of a new GTC Code of Conduct that aimed to protect gay children from bullying by prejudiced teachers. He congratulated the GTC on a humane and balanced code and urged them not to be swayed by the special pleading of religious groups who argue that Christian teachers should retain the right to make life difficult for children who may be struggling with their sexuality.

INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

We're always happy to try to support members who wish to become involved in local education campaigns. However, it is far more effective for local people themselves to voice their objections on school issues affecting their area. Occasionally though, local issues arise which have potential national consequences. Two such cases have arisen recently:

Swanage: faceless men in grey suits from the diocese

Dorset County Council has proposed the closure of the well-regarded Swanage First School, the only community primary school in this remote area of Dorset, which would leave the area with only faith schools.

Keith Porteous Wood attacked the County's proposals roundly on television. He was up against an official who was clearly taken aback by the strength of opposition. Keith has also taken the matter up forcefully with the County Council. He has made it clear to them that the scale of discrimination is sufficient to constitute a Human Rights issue, something he has even raised in Parliament and at the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. There is little doubt that the County is astonished by the vehemence of the opposition and are thinking again. If you live in Hampshire and want to complain, please call the office.

So what motivated this reorganisation so detrimental to the non-religious? A local spy tells us that two men in suits, unknown even to the headteacher, attended one of the reorganisation meetings. When asked to identify themselves, they were reluctant to declare who they represented. Only under pressure did they admit they were from the diocese.

Swindon

A bid was made by an Islamic foundation with no appropriate educational experience to take over a primary school being built in a residential neighbourhood in Swindon with few Muslims.

Clearly we objected in principle to the opening of another religious school, as well as to the implications for community cohesion. An additional disturbing factor was that the bid appeared not to have been prepared by those who proposed to run the school, and gave unconvincing "text book" answers to every question.

We wrote a letter to the local Council detailing numerous reasons why the bid should not be accepted. We are pleased to say that it was eventually turned down.

(Please also see our story in the Scotland section opposite on our support for a change in the law for discrimination against non-Catholic teachers.)

Muslim bid for non-believers

Islamic charity competing with a local authority for a new primary says half the places would be for local pupils

By David Marley

A MUSLIM charity is bidding to run the first Islamic faith school for children who are not followers of the religion. The TES has learned.

The Al Habbab Islamic Education and Cultural Centre said that 50 per cent of places at a new primary school, which serves a predominantly non-Muslim area, would be for local pupils.

The plan marks a significant development for minority faith schools, which have traditionally been set up to deal with overwhelming demand from pupils from one religion.

The Al Habbab charity has put in a bid to run a 420-pupil primary school in Swindon, Wiltshire, due to be built at a cost of £7 million. The charity says there is demand

for the school from the Muslim community in the Swindon area. It is also claims there will be demand from non-Muslim families in the school's immediate catchment area.

If it goes ahead, an hour of the timetable each day would be dedicated to studying Arabic and the Koran. Non-Muslim pupils would be able to be exempted from the lessons, but it is hoped that the majority would choose to stay in class to gain more "insight" into the religion, an Al Habbab spokesman said.

"The school will follow the national curriculum and have teachers from different faiths," the spokesman said.

"We will be there to provide guidance in religious teaching, but we want pupils to understand about all faiths, not just Islam. It

would run in a very similar way to other faith schools."

A number of private Islamic schools have now joined the state sector. These include Madani High School in Leicester, which became a state school last year, and the Iqra Primary School in Brixton, south London, which joined the state sector earlier this term.

Al Habbab is using competition rules to go head-to-head with Swindon Council over who should run a new school.

The local authority says that all of the places are needed for children in its immediate vicinity, not for Muslim pupils from further away.

Garry Perkins, the Conservative cabinet member for children services at Swindon borough council, said the number of Muslim families living around the proposed school

was in single figures. Council figures estimate there are only 163 primary-aged Muslim pupils in the whole of Swindon.

"I do not believe there is even strong demand for the school from the Muslim community in Swindon," said Mr Perkins. "Many are happy with our already diverse schools."

The area where the school is proposed has grown significantly with new housing. Mr Perkins said that demand was so high for a school there that non-Muslim parents would send their children there if that was their only option.

Keith Porteous Wood, the director of the National Secular Society, criticised the plans, saying the school would be a "sluiceway" for community cohesion.

"If successful, there will be pres-

sure on Muslim children, who are contributing to diversity in other schools, to go there," he said.

"I have great sympathy for local parents. A lot of them would not want a Christian school and far less a Muslim one."

"The fact Al Habbab are even bidding for this school sets a worrying precedent," he added.

The Government passed the way for an expansion in minority faith schools last year, when it published its Faith in the Future document. This praised the impact of faith schools and acknowledged that there were small numbers of minority faith schools compared to the total population.

The Swindon case has now been referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, which expects to make a final decision in January.

The Times Educational Supplement
Friday December 12, 2008
www.tes.co.uk

NUT sidesteps religious schools issue

NUT delegates tabled motions at their AGM for action against religious schools. One called for the Executive to “Campaign actively against the opening of any future schools that are controlled or sponsored by religious organisations.”

The Society’s support for these and similar motions was reported in the press, but as we feared, they were placed so far towards the end of the order paper that they were not even voted on. We remain convinced that a significant majority of their members would support the above amendment, given the chance.

LibDem Education

The Society was pleased to be able to provide technical and drafting assistance to the Humanist & Secularist Liberal Democrats in connection with [secularising amendments](#) to the Party’s education policy which were debated at their conference in Harrogate in March. The amendments were not as successful as we had hoped, but this did not stop the *Church Times* from claiming that the LibDems have drifted towards militant Secularism. Nevertheless, the Libdems’ [education policy](#) remains the least discriminatory and secular of all three major parties.

NSS in Scotland

Stop discrimination against teachers by RC schools – The NSS has supported a call for the Scottish Government to change the law to force Catholic schools to employ staff of different religions or none. The call comes in the form of a motion tabled for the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS) AGM in Perth in June. EIS is the largest teaching union in Scotland.

President Terry Sanderson’s support was quoted in the *Express on Sunday*: “I think it is absolutely disgraceful that this kind of discrimination is being funded by public money. It would be illegal in other fields to say we will only employ a person of a particular religion, but schools are exempt from equality legislation. When are we going to bridge the gap between different faiths if we carry on with this type of discrimination?”

The crude discrimination which led to the creation of Catholic schools in Scotland is no longer current. We are looking for a completely secular education system, where all kids mix together in the playground every day.”

Strathclyde should not have caved in – The Society condemned Strathclyde Fire and Rescue service’s out-of-court settlement to a Catholic firefighter disciplined for discriminating against homosexuals. He had refused to hand out safety leaflets at a gay pride march, claiming it would contradict his religious beliefs. Historically, the Catholic Church has a significant

influence over public bodies in this part of Scotland. Our opposition was covered in the press.

NSS in Wales

Welsh Assembly Member Lorraine Barrett hit the news when she took former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, to task over his suggestion that religious leaders had a “vital role to play in holding politicians to account” and there was a “critical as well as creative relationship” between faith and politics. Identified as an Honorary Associate of the Society, she was quoted in the *Western Mail*: “I think a church leader calling on the Prime Minister to apologise is totally out of order and overstepping his jurisdiction. He’s clearly not speaking for me”. For good measure, she added that she did not think bishops should retain their right to seats in the Lords.



Vice President Carla Revere represented the Society at a debate at Lampeter University on whether a secular state can legislate for religious citizens, and was heavily out-numbered in this remote religious setting.

She was taken aback when the chief legal advisor to the Welsh Assembly argued that there was no need for Human Rights and anti-discrimination law because it was all covered by the age-old principles of the Courts of Equity.

Out and about

The Society has been involved in the following external activities recently:



One Law For All (drawing attention to concerns about Sharia law) – Terry Sanderson was one of the speakers at a rally in Trafalgar Square followed by a march to Red Lion Square and a meeting in Conway Hall where Vice President Carla Revere spoke.

The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies – We were delighted to take part in the launch of this organisation at Conway Hall in London where Tessa Kendall and Stephen Evans ran a stall. It was addressed by Honorary Associates Professor Richard Dawkins, Professor A C Grayling and

Polly Toynbee – and Mary Honeyball MEP also came. Keith Porteous Wood formally represented the Society. We wish them well.

March for Secular Europe (expressing concerns about growing Vatican influence in Europe). The NSS took part in this protest which concluded outside the Italian embassy in London’s Grosvenor Square where Terry Sanderson was one of the speakers.

Modern Liberties Convention – this was an encouragingly well-attended convention of people from all walks of life and a wide coalition of groups concerned about our liberties. It proved to be a good opportunity for awareness-raising about the NSS. Council members Anna Behan, Terry Sanderson and Peter Vlachos ran a stall together with Keith Porteous Wood.

Secularist of the Year a great success

The 2009 Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year was won jointly by Dr Evan Harris MP and Lord Avebury for their work in bringing about the abolition of the blasphemy laws.

At a splendid party in London – at which 200 guests enjoyed a great lunch – the prizes were presented by Professor Richard Dawkins. The long-time sponsor of the £5,000 annual award, Dr Michael Irwin, was warmly applauded for his generosity. On this occasion however, the recipients – being honourable politicians –

declined the cash prize and were presented with a plaque and trophy representing a golden ammonite.

Also in attendance were fellow Honorary Associates, Lord (Dick) Taverne, Baroness Turner of Camden and Martin Rowson. We were also delighted to be celebrating with the former BBC newsreader Anna Ford, scientist and writer Simon Singh, Dr Ben Goldacre and comedian Robin Ince. A special prize was awarded to Ariane Sherine for her excellent “atheist bus” campaign. Barry Thorpe and Stewart

Ware were lauded as volunteers of the year.

As the party was also a celebration of the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth, the entertainment recreated the famous debate between Thomas Huxley, performed by Derek Lennard, and the then Bishop of Oxford, “Soapy Sam” Wilberforce, performed by NSS President Terry Sanderson.

You can watch the presentations and acceptance speeches on [YouTube](#) and see more photos on [Flickr](#).



Worthy winners: Dr Evan Harris MP (seated) and Lord Avebury



Richard Dawkins



Vice President Carla Revere



It was a full house!



Bishop/President Sanderson



Derek Lennard



Ariane Sherine



Simon Singh

NSS secures Parliamentary debate about West Midlands Police and *Undercover Mosque*

The West Midlands Police sought to prosecute the makers of a Channel 4 programme revealing extremism in mosques, rather than prosecute the extremists themselves. Having failed to prosecute the production company, the Police then made a series of complaints to OFCOM, all of which were rejected. Several complaints by the NSS to the police and regulatory authorities about police conduct were judged inadmissible because we were not personally involved. Subsequently, the Police and Crown Prosecution Service issued a joint apology and compensation was paid.

The NSS wanted more done to expose this example of justice going into reverse, apparently to appease religious extremists, and to remind the authorities of their duty to protect freedom of expression. We are most grateful to the LibDems for assisting us to pursue these issues so effectively in Parliament.

NSS Honorary Associate Paul Holmes MP raised a long list of concerns with the Justice Secretary, Rt Hon Jack Straw MP, following a comprehensive briefing from the Executive Director. Apart from a multiple exchange of letters, we know from independent evidence that Jack Straw took this issue very seriously indeed.

The LibDems' Justice spokesperson in the House of Lords, Lord Thomas of Gresford, considered the matter sufficiently disturbing to make it the subject of a [debate](#) in its own right. This took place on 20 April 2009, with Stephen Evans of the NSS attending. The Government clearly thought the matter important as the Government Minister selected to respond was no less than the Attorney General herself, Baroness Scotland of Asthal. And we expect that they were glad that they did. For Lord Thomas and Lord Dholakia really laid into the Government mercilessly, as did a cross bencher



A scene from *Undercover Mosque*

and, from the Conservative benches, Baroness Warsi.

Unusually, the Government came very close to saying "it's a fair cop".

Lady Scotland said, in summary, "I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Thomas of Gresford, that we absolutely understand the importance of freedom of speech. It is fundamental to our liberty and our democracy and forms part of the standards that we apply when looking at all matters.

"... the implications and effects of the Human Rights legislation must be considered in all cases. I am very happy to look at any further ways in which we can reinforce that"

"It is a sad thing to say that mistakes happen; I assure the House that this was one of them. It was a bad one, and it was one for which both the police and the CPS apologised. ... It is a lesson from which they will learn and have learnt.

"... the Crown Prosecution Service and the police together will continue to do their duty without fear or favour ... and I hope that I have been able to explain ... with due humility, the mistakes that were made and the fact that everyone has learnt from them."

The NSS has been the only campaigning organisation opposing the actions of the Police and CPS over the *Undercover Mosque* programme.

MEDIA

Since the last *Bulletin* we have had numerous stories covered by the newswire services, principally The Press Association and Agence France Presse (the oldest and one of the largest news agencies in the world) which ensures they are sent around the globe.

We have had stories (often multiple mentions) in: **International/political opinion formers** – *The Economist*, *New Statesman* and *Time magazine*, **Nationals** – *Daily Express*, *Daily Star*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Mail*, *Morning Star*, *Scotland on Sunday*, *Scotsman*, *Sunday Times*, *The Times* – and *Times Educational Supplement*. There were many more local, regional and international mentions. (The debaptism story was covered in: France, Denmark, Italy, Poland, Pakistan, India, Singapore, Taiwan, Province of China, Macau, Australia and the USA.)

Radio and TV

BBC Radio 4, 5 Live, Wales and Northern Ireland; BBC Asian Network, ten local stations and the BBC Website.



Dr Evan Harris on BBC1's *Breakfast*

On the cost of chaplains, Honorary Associate Dr Evan Harris kindly appeared for us on the BBC1 *Breakfast* programme while Terry Sanderson was being interviewed on the Jeremy Vine Show on R2 and Keith Porteous Wood was speaking on another radio programme. Terry Sanderson was also interviewed on the *Today* programme and the Vanessa Feltz programme on BBC London.

International: Dutch national radio and TV, Laura Ingraham show in America

The Secular Medical Forum

The SMF campaigns for a secular approach to medical and health care practices. It seeks, for example, an end to religious interference with people's bodies, working with partners including the Lawyers' Secular Society to end religiously-motivated surgery on children's genitalia. They continue to work towards decriminalising assisted dying in accordance with the majority UK population view, but against the wishes of the bishops in the Lords.



In March, the Pope inaccurately claimed that condoms increase the problems of HIV/AIDS infection. Such factual distortion highlights the need for policy-makers to guard against unfounded faith-based views being granted undeserved privilege – sometimes with serious adverse consequences.

For further information or speaker requests please visit the website www.secularmedicalforum.org.uk where SMF documents are now accessible. Alternatively contact the SMF Co-ordinator Dr Antony Lempert, by email antony@secularmedicalforum.org.uk or phone the NSS office.

DONATIONS

We would like to thank all of our members who have made donations, particularly one of £2,500 and two of £1,000. The NSS is also grateful to members and supporters who remember us in their wills; we have received several generous legacies, including one of £95,000.

The NSS Council and Executive Director are grateful for all the donations received, of whatever size. They wish to place on record their especial thanks to the growing number of members who have started standing orders, as this gives us a firm basis on which to make plans for the future.

If you would like to make a donation, start a standing order or include us in your will so that the NSS can carry on its vital work into the future, please click the Donate button on our website. Or, if you prefer, please contact the office for details.

VOLUNTEERS

The NSS Council would like to thank the following people for their much-appreciated time and effort:

BRAD DAVIS of WhiteLight, designer of the *Bulletin*, Annual Report, leaflets and much more.

SEAN CLARK and ANTHONY DICKENS at cuttlefish.com for hosting and serving our website, and distributing *Newsline*.

BARRY THORPE for his excellent research work.

NICK LANSLEY for his visual services at our events.

CLAUDINE BAXTER and ALISTAIR BANTON for their tireless work in the office and at our events

JAMES DOESER for assisting with consultations.

RODNEY BREEN for assistance on information gathering.

NICK PULLAR and NIKOLAI SEGURA for representing the NSS in debates.

GERARD PHILLIPS and RAY NEWTON for assistance in planning.

DENIS PENALUNA, RODNEY BREEN, ALAN ROGERS and DES MOORE for their magnificent work collating the research for our report on hospital chaplains, ably assisted in this major undertaking by 40 other volunteers.

The Lawyers' Secular Society

The Lawyers' Secular Society has launched its new website at www.lawyerssecularsociety.org.

Membership is open to all lawyers, practising and non-practising, and to students and academics.

Membership forms are available on the website. The LSS offers a wealth of information and research resources on many issues relating to religious discrimination. Since its launch in 2008, the LSS has worked with many related organisations and individuals to assist them with the legal aspects of anti-discrimination claims. For example, it is working with the Southall Black Sisters in a project to advise on the way courts deal with consent orders in family cases where there has been religious mediation/arbitration. It also works with the Secular Medical Forum giving lectures on topics such as whether religious conscience should be accommodated in UK law and advising on the legal aspects of their campaign to outlaw non-medically required religious genital mutilation. These exciting projects have brought together groups of solicitors, barristers and academics, all of whom provide their expertise free of charge. To join the LSS or request advice, please log on to the website or email the LSS at admin@lawyerssecularsociety.org.



national secular **Bulletin** society

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NSS President Terry Sanderson gave two sell-out performances of his popular Marlene Dietrich retrospective in February, raising almost £2,000 for NSS funds. He also gave a talk on secularism at Leicester Secular Society, which can be seen on YouTube.