

# CLARIFYING THE PURPOSE

of Inclusive Church - February 2016



In the autumn of 2015 trustees called for greater clarity about the purpose of IC. Is it a campaigning organisation, with specific aims; or is it a support group for partner organisations and individuals tackling specific exclusion issues?

This is a very important issue, and this statement has emerged from discussions amongst the trustees and partner organisations that took place during the winter of 2015/16. The trustees of Inclusive Church agreed this statement as the position of the charity at their meeting in February 2016.

A starting point is to consider the constitution of IC. This states that the objects are:

- a) To advance the Christian Faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Statement of Belief\* appearing in the schedule;
- b) To advance the education of the public in understanding the practice and effects of the Statement of Belief appearing in the schedule.

*\*this appears on our basic information leaflets*

From this it must be recognised that IC is essentially an educational organisation, promoting an inclusive interpretation of the Gospel. Were it to be a campaigning or lobbying organisation it would forfeit its status as a registered charity. So how does IC choose to 'advance the Christian Faith' and 'advance the education of the public'?

There are two general ideas that underlie the things that IC does. The **FIRST** is that the process of discrimination within the church as an institution, causing suffering to those discriminated against, is essentially the same whatever the reason for the discrimination. In other words, the processes and feelings engendered by discrimination are experienced by those discriminated against in similar ways whether the discrimination is on grounds of race, gender, sexuality, illness, disability, poverty, or anything else for that matter. IC's unique interest and expertise is in recognising the experience of being 'outside' because of the process of discrimination. IC is sometimes referred to as an 'umbrella' organisation, under which many single issue organisations and individuals can find encouragement and support. IC can reasonably claim to be an organisation that confronts the generic problem of discrimination within the Church. It does this by promoting an inclusive view of the Scriptures, and by appealing to the values of social justice.

The **SECOND** fundamental idea that underpins the IC approach is that there is strength in working together with partner organisations. This bias in favour of partnership working is reflected in the constitution that requires the Partner Organisations to be identified and approved at each AGM, and further requires Partner Organisations to appoint some of IC's trustees. The partnership work of IC is thriving. Several new partnerships are emerging, and the recent 'Partnership Day' saw representatives of 14 organisations working together - six of them being there for the first time.

## CONCLUSIONS

- a) IC is an educational body promoting an inclusive interpretation of the Scriptures, and commending the values of social justice.
- b) IC would risk its charitable status were it to concentrate on campaigning and lobbying. One way of handling this issue is to work as a member of a consortium where a campaign is needed. E.g. the current LGBTI Mission run by a group of organisations.
- c) IC's defining characteristic is that it seeks to challenge discriminatory processes in all their manifestations.
- d) IC has a strong bias towards working with partner organisations, since there is combined strength in working together, and it often produces greater insight.
- e) Whilst IC can provide support to partner organisations, the main reason for working together is the increased learning and influence that comes from the different perspectives at partnership events.