

Dear Rev Robertson

Thank you for your letter of 12th April. You ask a series of important questions and I want to thank you for taking the time to get in touch.

Please find my response on behalf of the Scottish Labour party to your questions in turn.

Q1. Are Christians and those of other faiths welcome to become members in your party, to participate within them and in the political process, without discrimination?

Yes, Christians and people of all faiths and none are welcome in the Labour Party, Indeed many people of faith occupy prominent roles in our party and serve at all levels including as candidates and office bearers.

Q2. Would your party support another cross-party group on religious freedom in Scotland at the Scottish Parliament?

Yes, Scottish Labour members of the Scottish Parliament would participate in such a cross party group.

Q3. Do you think that Christianity has a role in the public square, especially in politics, education and the media?

Yes, Christianity has been a positive influence in many facets of the public life over many years.

Q4. How will your party ensure Scotland has a strong influence protecting the rights of persecuted Christians around the world?

Many Scots are engaged in efforts to protect the rights of Christians and freedom from persecution. The UK leads on such efforts through the Foreign and Commonwealth office and through the Department for International Development. This includes raising individual cases and calling for changes in discriminatory practices and laws in countries where freedom of religion is curtailed. Scottish Labour supports those efforts.

Q5. What is your party's position on state-funded faith schools, whether they be Christian or Muslim?

Scottish Labour has no plans to change the arrangements for state funding of schools.

Q6. We believe a diversity of schools would create a healthy competition of ideas and outcomes and improve educational standards across the nation. Should Scotland lead the way by democratising our education system by allocating vouchers to parents to produce financial support for faith schools?

Scottish Labour do not support the introduction of vouchers, and believe that school education is best delivered by properly funded local authorities.

Q7. As the state education system becomes increasingly secular and removed from its Christian roots and values, if the Free Church were to set up its own schools, open to all, would you support this?

Scottish Labour do not support the creation of new schools outwith the state system.

Q8. Do you agree that children being bullied and taunted at school because they go to church should also be included in new anti-bullying advice being prepared by the Scottish Government?

Labour support anti-bullying initiatives and any new advice on bullying or taunting should include consideration of faith based bullying.

Q9. Do you agree that sex education should be inclusive of a wide variety of opinions and views on the nature of sex and sexuality?

Yes.

Q10. Will your party support moves to reconsider the Sunday trading issue in Scotland so that we can move towards a more continental approach?

Scottish Labour do not propose any change to Sunday trading laws. We will support the protection of Christmas Day and New Year's Day to stop large retailers from opening on those days.

Q11. Given that babies can survive at 24 weeks outside the womb, and that France, Germany and Italy have 12-week limits, is there any scientific or logical reason not to reduce the age limit on abortion in Scotland? Would you support a reduction in the time limit?

Scottish Labour do not support a change to the time limit.

Q12. Do you agree that the named person scheme needs to be refined, and if so, in what way?

Scottish Labour will pause the process and ask the Children's Commissioner to carry out a full review of implementation.

Q13. What are your proposals to alleviate poverty in Scotland? How do you think that Government can work together with the churches on this?

A Labour Scottish Government will implement all 15 recommendations of the recent report of the Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality through an Anti-Poverty Bill. We will report to Parliament on an annual basis on the progress towards implementing the 15 recommendations and how they are helping to alleviate poverty in Scotland. Alleviation of poverty will be a major focus for Labour and will work with all interested stakeholders.

Q14. Do you believe that we should accept more refugees in Scotland?

Yes, Scottish Labour support the rights of refugees to settle here in Scotland we will introduce a Refugee Integration (Scotland) Bill.

Q15. Do you think that children have the ability to choose their own gender? How many genders do you think there are?

Scottish Labour support people to determine their own gender identity.

Yours sincerely.

*Kezia Dugdale
Leader of the Scottish Labour Party*