



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES**

**Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. Return to [committee.communities@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.communities@niassembly.gov.uk) by Wednesday 19 October 2016.**

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**Organisation: (if applicable) Methodist Church in Ireland - Council on Social Responsibility**

**Date: 19/10/16**

Methodist Church in Ireland – Council on Social Responsibility

**Response to the consultation on Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill**

The Methodist Church in Ireland has 156 congregations in Northern Ireland. Our mission has always been to seek God and to seek God's blessing on the society around. We have sought to do this through our various ministries which have included outreach to the poor and marginalized, and by a long and proud history of engagement with society on social issues. We have 4 City Missions in Northern Ireland and much of their time is spent in dealing with those who have problems arising from alcohol abuse. Acceptance, compassion, guidance, help and prayer are offered on a daily basis. Our belief is that theology must be rooted in the Bible but expressed in the public square.

With this concern for society and the individual the Methodist Church in Ireland has a long tradition of warning about the dangers of alcohol abuse while at the same time offering pastoral care to people and families affected by such misuse.

The main area of concern for us has been the ready availability of cheap alcohol from off-licences and supermarkets which is consumed (often to excess) at home, or in parks and on the streets (particularly by young people). So we continue to advocate for a minimum pricing policy on alcohol as the most effective political way of dealing

with some of the problems society faces as a result of alcohol misuse.

We recognise that this present consultation is dealing with a somewhat different area. We warmly welcome some aspects of the proposed legislation, such as the restrictions on alcohol advertising in supermarkets. We have concerns about the various extensions to opening times but recognise that these are relatively limited. We might presume that the 'drinks industry' would want the government to change the legislation much more radically, so whilst not welcoming any extensions to opening hours, we recognise that the proposed changes are limited. A similar comment could be made about the opening hours at Easter.

#### Section 1

Easter.

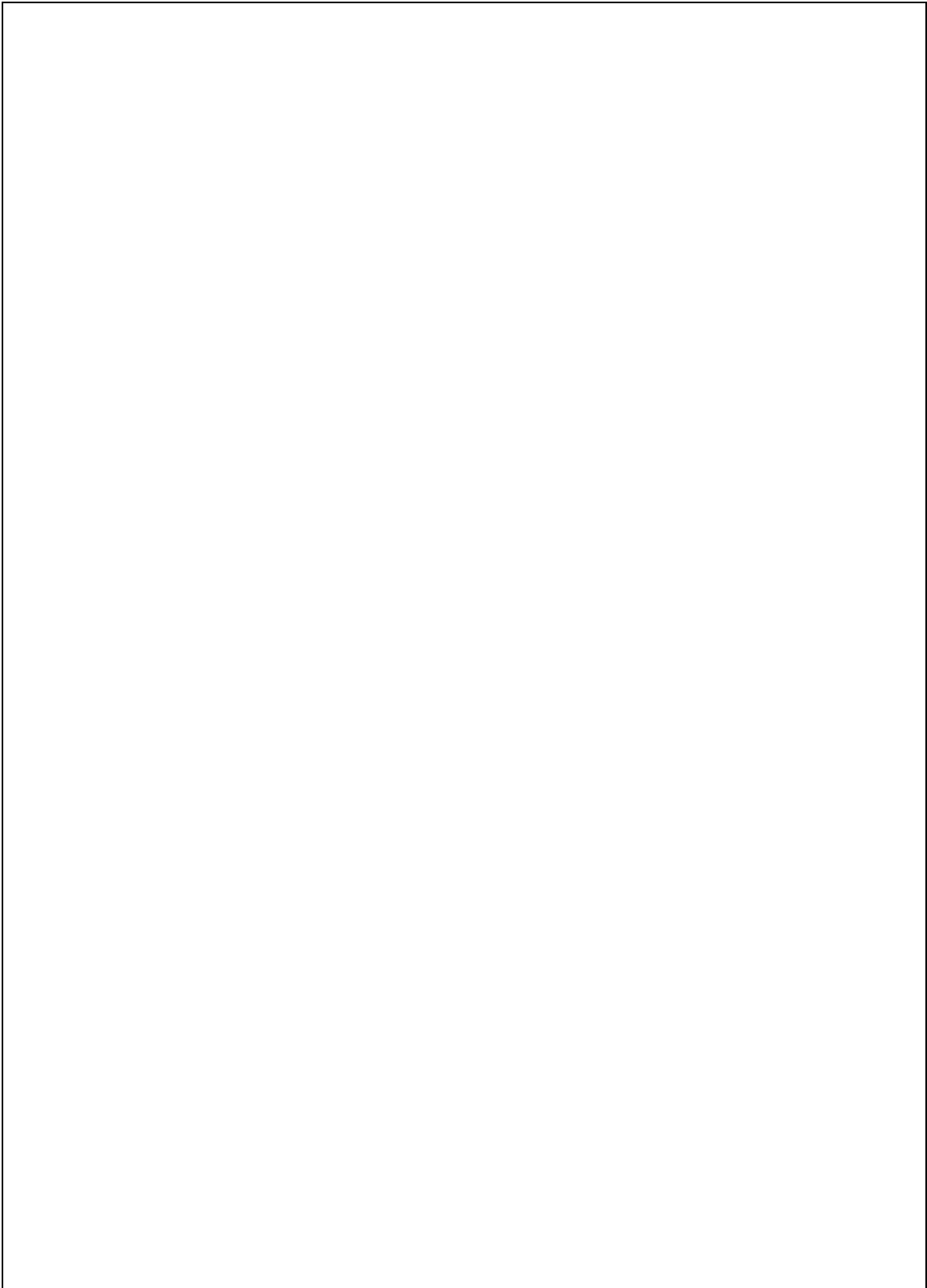
Whilst we do not welcome the extension of the opening hours at Easter we do recognise that the proposed changes are limited and that the Department may well come under further pressure to extend them further. We call for any such pressure to be resisted. The two main Christian festivals that still have a central place in our society are Christmas and Easter. Sadly, we all recognise that that the Christmas season is very much associated with the misuse of alcohol and it will probably be impossible to row back from that situation. This gives all the more reason to do as much as possible to retain some sense of sacredness with regard to the Easter festival and Good Friday in particular, so we welcome the fact that some restrictions of opening hours will remain.

#### Section 12

Supermarket advertising.

We have previously called for minimum unit pricing for alcohol as the best way of reducing the overall consumption of alcohol and so the harmful health impact on the individual and some of the effects of anti-social behaviour in the community. Given that this is still some way off we welcome the proposals to limit the ways in which supermarkets and off-sales can advertise alcohol.

Rev Dr David Clements



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