

July 2009

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Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
LONDON  
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**Submission from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church to the Free-to-Air Events Review**

Dear Sir,

I am writing, on behalf of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church<sup>i</sup>, in response to your consultation about 'free to air' broadcast programs.

**Q2. Do you think that events other than sporting events should be listed? If so, please give your reason. You will have an opportunity to suggest appropriate events at a later stage in this consultation document and do not need to do so now.**

It is our belief that we should follow the lead of our European partners and widen the range of protected events beyond sporting events. Primarily, we would wish to see the introduction of key events in religious life in any new list.

The increasing importance of religious worship in the life of the country has been shown by the 2001 census figures. These figures clearly indicated the majority of the nation positively identify with a religion. This is backed up by the wide variety of ways, from the many annual carol services to the Birmingham Eid Mela, that the life of the nation is enriched by public celebrations of key moments in religious' life.

We would argue that there are certain acts of worship in the Christian calendar which have a special national resonance and provide a unifying focus for the many Christian believers in Britain. We are also open to the idea that there are events of significant to other faiths which whilst not currently having the same national resonance are an important symbol and means through which our multi-faith identity is affirmed and celebrated.

**Q4. If your answer to Q2 was that non-sporting events should also be considered for listing, what might an essential criterion be?**

It is our understanding that the ethos behind the current list is to ensure key uniting moments in the sporting life of the nation are protected to enable widest participation. These points of national unity are only part of a year's timetabled events for this sport, but provide a time when many can enjoy something they rarely have the chance to watch or participate in.

Our suggestion of widening listing to include acts of religious significance stems from an understanding that certain times of the Christian year have an impact and interest well beyond regular attendees. This is illustrated, in part, through statistics issued by the Church of England which demonstrate a clear increase in attendance for Christmas.

Therefore, it is our belief that the current criteria, with suitable amended wording, would be suitable.

**Q11. Please suggest which non-sporting events you would like to see listed and why.**

Christmas and Easter are clearly the major festival for Christians, and so we would propose that regular events such as Carols from Kings College should be included and perhaps a specific act of worship on Christmas Day and Easter Day. We are aware that the broadcast of live worship is to some extent covered by the Public Service Broadcasting requirement. However we feel that events such as Carols from Kings and festival services are of such importance to the nation beyond those who would watch a weekly service therefore deserve recognition as such, and protection from being sold off to niche broadcasting markets when their importance is for national celebration and reflection.

The Panel may also wish to consider listing key moments in international church life (e.g.the installation of Archbishop of Canterbury or a new Pope).

Beyond events of significance to the Christian churches we would wish the Panel to take into account events of importance for other faiths, and would encourage the Panel to consult more widely with other faith groups.

I hope these responses will assist you with your deliberations. Should you require further information on any of the points above, do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours Sincerely

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Researcher

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<sup>i</sup> The **Joint Public Issues Team**, created in September 2006, combines the expertise of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church in the area of public issues. Through close collaboration, the churches aim to increase the effectiveness of their engagement in public life and parliamentary affairs. [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk).

The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) is the Baptist family in England and Wales (there is also the Baptist Union of Wales). It is made up of churches, regional associations, the national resource centre and Baptist colleges. The Union works with others in mission locally, regionally and internationally. There are some 150,000 members of Baptist churches associated with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk).

The Methodist Church has about 265,000 members and 800,000 people are connected with the Church. It has about 5,800 churches in Great Britain, and also maintains links with other Methodist churches totalling a worldwide membership of 70 million. [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk).

The United Reformed Church comprises 100,000 people in 1600 congregations. It has brought together English Presbyterians, English, Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists and members of the Churches of Christ. Worldwide, more than 70 million Christians are members of the Reformed family of churches, the largest Protestant tradition. The name 'Reformed' is used because the churches began to emerge with reform movements in the sixteenth century. [www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk).

The three denominations are the largest of the Free Churches in Britain.