

# HALF-YEAR REPORT

January-June 1999



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The first six months of the campaign have been exciting. A start has been made, and the ground prepared for a stepped-up outreach in the autumn. This report rounds up some of the main news of our first six months. Please do all you can to make the message known – and send us any ideas you have.

Thank you! *Edward Peters, Campaign Chairman*

"A new Millennium, a new start, a clean slate. It makes sense!"

Sir Cliff Richard

## STORIES OF SLATE CLEANING

*The heart of the campaign is an invitation to us all to 'take at least one practical step during 1999 towards wiping our slates clean'. Here are some of the stories of practical action we have heard of.*

I had harboured a hurt for years against one old friend. I wrote a letter of apology. She phoned and asked me to forgive her. We talked for ages. The friendship that was dead came alive. (Anonymous, Edinburgh)

A shop assistant undercharged me several times. When I became aware of this, rather than rectifying the situation I continued to take advantage of it. On reading about the Clean Slate Campaign I decided to pay back the difference, as I had to admit that I would certainly have complained if I had been overcharged. (Anonymous, Liverpool)

I have signed the promise and my practical step is giving up smoking. After several attempts in the past and after more than 25 years of smoking, I have stopped. I am just completing my twelfth day... All I can say to those who have tried quitting and not succeeded is "Don't stop giving up. You have only failed when you stop trying." (Albert Burton, Sheffield)

Cleaning my slate has meant clearing my room! My very small bedroom is also my office. It has been swamped with piles of papers which get moved from desk to bed and back again daily.

Having filled four black refuse bags, renewed my filing system, written over twenty letters and returned "borrowed" items to their rightful owners I feel a sense of clarity beginning to emerge from the fog. I can actually find things when I need them. (Joy Weeks, Winchester)

Recently my eldest brother died suddenly. For years there have been family misunderstandings, largely I think due to mistakes made by my husband and me. Through your campaign I found myself longing to clear up these misunderstandings but wondering how I could do this. Then in a marvellous way, my brother's wife brought up these divisions, that she felt so sorry about. It was an emotional time for both of us but enabled my husband and me to go to the funeral and be a real part of the family. They were all so outgoing, and I can hardly believe that it has happened like this. (Anonymous, Oxfordshire)

I have been hurt by the gender discrimination I often experience within my own Asian community. I have decided to clean my slate of this hurt, and not allow it to make me angry or have a negative effect on the way I treat others. (Baroness Flather, Maidenhead)

I promise not to undergo a personality change when I get behind the wheel of my car. I shall attempt to avoid hiding behind the anonymity of my vehicle and being impatient and intolerant of other road users. I have been conscious

that I have been intolerant of the elderly, of slow vehicles and horse riders, of road works and unexpected delays. I shall try not to subscribe to the time pressured bully culture of the road. This should also have the advantage of making me a safer driver. This is a promise which I can execute on a daily basis and which will be an ongoing challenge well into the next millennium. (Anon, Oxfordshire)

I find I am constantly having to wipe my personal slate clean with my wife. The other weekend, I got so angry, over what I thought at the time was unduly sharp criticism from her over an incident with one of our children, that I took myself off to the cinema by myself! It was pride on my part, for which I had to apologise to her later, for abandoning her to the two children, when one of them needed support with homework. (Anonymous, London)



Cartoon from *The Church Times* reproduced with permission

More stories on the back page

## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

### Churches

The Clean Slate Campaign is for everyone. But, for Christians, it is complementary to the 'New Start' plans of the Churches Together. Speaking at a CSC meeting, Revd Richard Thomas, Communications Officer for the Oxford Diocese, and one of the Church of England's two representatives on the Millennium Group, said, 'The Clean Slate Campaign is an extremely good campaign which fits in very well with what the churches are doing for the Millennium.' One vicar writes in his parish newsletter, the CSC 'recognises that a New Start can't just happen: it requires careful thought and prayer, if it is to be at all significant.'

"This is likely to help people to see that they are not as powerless as they often imagine."

An Anglican Bishop

The campaign theme is being used in churches all over Britain. For instance several vicars in Herefordshire and Berkshire, who received a letter about the campaign, have written requesting further resources, including copies of a Bible Study pack specially prepared on the campaign theme. A member of a Liverpool congregation writes: "Our vicar had my wife speak for five minutes on the CSC at the beginning of the main morning service followed by prayers of penitence. He got us to stand at the door at the end to hand out the Guide to everyone, about 200. One person commented that she already knew what she should do. The vicar has asked us to keep supplies at the back of the church stocked up."

All delegates to the Church of Scotland General Assembly in Edinburgh in May received a copy of the Guide in their pigeonholes. A Church of Scotland minister in Castle Douglas, who received the Guide from someone in his area, wrote: "At last I have a scheme I can recommend to my congregation with enthusiasm and conviction."

### Other faith communities

A Press Release from the Board of Deputies of British Jews included: "The aim of the Campaign is to encourage people of all faiths, or none, to take some individual action or decision which will put right a past wrong." The Board's Director General commented, "All that the campaign asks is that each one of us should make some tangible contribution to our society by admitting or apologising for some wrong that we have done, whether big or small. By helping clean our own slate, each of us can together make the world a better place."

Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group (IFCG) at its Annual General Meeting formally adopted the resolution to support the Clean Slate Campaign. All mosques, churches and synagogues have been requested to introduce the campaign to their congregation. All present were encouraged to support the campaign.

All 83 member organisations of the Inter-Faith Network have been sent information about the campaign.

## EDUCATION

Schools are showing interest in the campaign as a useful resource for classrooms. A short study guide for use in primary schools has been prepared by teachers. One of the campaign's patrons, the Director of Education for Newcastle, wrote not only to all the schools in his education authority, but also to all Chief Education Officers in England; a dozen have subsequently requested copies of the Guide for distribution to schools in their area. One education officer wrote: 'We think that schools may well take your campaign up. Every success.'

The Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRES) adopted a special resolution to recommend the Clean Slate Guide to all SACRES throughout the country.

Information about the CSC has been included in a 'Millennium Pack' prepared by the Nottingham Council of Churches and sent to every school in the county.

"I think the Clean Slate Campaign is a really good idea. We all do and say things we regret and wish we could turn the clock back. What better time than the new Millennium to put the past behind us and make a fresh start. Let us become a nation of contributors, exercising our responsibilities, rather than demanding our rights." Fiona Castle

## OTHER NEWS

Another Newcastle patron, the President of the North East Chamber of Commerce Trade and Industry, has sent a copy of the Guide to each of his 4,500 member organisations.

The head of *Relate* asked for 150 copies of the Guide to distribute to all of their branches.

The Clean Slate Guide has been printed in Welsh - 'Ymgrych y Llechen Lân'. The Cardiff Central Library has agreed to run a special display in the autumn.

"Thirty young people were happily 'clean slated' at a Global Club weekend in Cheshire in March. Inspired by the campaign the theme was, 'Approaching 2000 - a chance to re-think'. The honesty of those in the opening session helped all to go deep, e.g. a PhD student shared how he had had to face up to and overcome an alcohol problem which was ruining his life, and another told of how being honest with her parents was one step on the road to recovery from eight years of anorexia. All focussed on the challenge: what could be different about my life and what practical steps can I take in 1999 to bring this about?" (Laura Trevelyan)

Recently I lost my temper with a woman in a council department. The next day I took a box of chocolates to her office! (Anonymous, Liverpool)

## MEDIA OUTREACH

In an article in the *Catholic Herald*, Ann Widdecombe MP wrote about the Clean Slate Campaign as one of two Millennium initiatives she wants to commend. 'It encourages us to start the new Millennium by putting right past wrongs, forgiving the trespasses of others, removing grudges, patching up quarrels.'

### **The Journal**

Dick Godfrey of the Newcastle Journal wrote about the Clean Slate Campaign in his column:

*"Last year, I devoted a column to the idea of apologising for things in our past of which we now feel ashamed. It was prompted by the very important work being done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and I suggested it could usefully be transposed to a personal level. It struck a chord and a number of people wrote and spoke to me of their enthusiasm for the conscience cleansing approach.*

*I would like to say that a nation-wide movement which has been launched along these lines is a result of my efforts. But rather than stock up another chunk of guilt, I won't. However, the Oxford-based Clean Slate Campaign does exist and I am pleased to record its existence. Its basic premise is admirably simple. It wants each one of us to clean our personal slate either by apologising to somebody we have offended, or to decide to change an aspect of our character with which we are, if we think deeply about it, unhappy, in what might be described as a Millennium Resolution.*

*I have already decided that I shall cease to be as assertive and domineering in the home as I know I am inclined to be. Humility will not come easy but I shall give it my best shot.*

*I am throwing this column open to those brave souls who wish to come clean. I know you are out there. Perhaps an appearance in this column will effect a reconciliation, who knows. Do write. You know it will do you good."*

### **The HERALD**

In this big Scottish daily, in a feature entitled 'Resolving to Wipe the Slate Clean', Jennifer Cunningham writes: 'The millennium has been a focus for grand projects, but there's still space among the new museums and public works for a bit of individual action, starting, possibly, with the next-door-neighbour you've been cold-shouldering for some transgression which history will hardly count as significant.

"We know there won't be a sudden rush of bank robbers taking their loot back," says Christopher Morgan, the campaign director, but he hopes that the Clean Slate Campaign will provide a focus for individual analysis of our lives.

"Approaching the new millennium is a chance to have a think as well as a party," he says.

That chimes with John Chambers's view: "Very often anniversaries are a good time for thinking about things."

For the past year he has been a minister in Inverness, but, as someone who has spent most of his life in Northern Ireland, he knows all too well the effects of suspicion, distrust and hatred. As chief executive of Relate, the marriage guidance organisation, there, he saw the cancerous effects of harbouring grudges and guilt. "One of the things you come across when working with families is how often people are haunted by baggage from the past..." he says.

If you've searched your conscience and identified your task, how should you go about taking at least one practical step during 1999 towards wiping the slate clean?

"First, think carefully about why you want to wipe the slate clean and recall what the quarrel was about from your perspective, because it may have seemed quite different from the other person's perspective," suggests John Chambers. "Then you have to say sorry for what you did, because you realise that it must have been hurtful." He warns: "There is no guarantee that the other person will be able to accept that. Sometimes both people bend over backwards to blame themselves, or it may take a couple of days. The relationship is never exactly the same afterwards, but it can sometimes be richer."

**We want to hear from *Herald* readers inspired to wipe their own slates clean in 1999. There will be bottles of *Herald* champagne for the best stories.**

### Other press coverage

Other newspapers which have covered the campaign include *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Church Times*, *The Oxford Mail* and *The Nottingham Evening Post*.

"If millions of people respond practically to this idea, the creative energy released will bring unimagined benefits to all concerned. The positive effects will go beyond 1999." Ian Healey, magazine editor

### Radio

There have been 13 radio interviews about the campaign to date:

- BBC National Radio Five Live
- BBC Radio Wales (2 programmes)
- BBC Radio Cleveland
- BBC Radio Merseyside
- BBC Radio Newcastle
- BBC Radio Nottingham
- BBC Radio Northampton
- BBC Radio Suffolk
- BBC Radio Three Counties (Luton)
- BBC Radio Thames Valley (Oxford)
- BBC Radio Thames Valley (Berkshire)
- Scot FM (Edinburgh/Glasgow)

The idea is cool and moral! (Student)  
What an inspired idea! I am very immobile but I wholeheartedly back the campaign. (Pensioner)

## FINANCE

£18,000 has so far been donated towards the campaign expenses, in nearly 200 individual gifts. We are very grateful to all who have given so generously. We estimate that a similar sum will need to be raised by the end of the year, if we are to fulfil our commitments – and possibly much more if the tempo increases further in the autumn.

"We have all done things that we ought not to have done, and have left undone things that we ought to have done. The Clean Slate Promise would help us to rectify at least one - hopefully more - of our errors of commission and omission. I intend to sign up for such action and hope that many others will too."

Mrs Bunmi Anyaoku, wife of the  
Secretary General of the Commonwealth

## OVERSEAS

*Union Jack*, a US newspaper with a readership of 220,000, refers to the Clean Slate Campaign as 'one of the most deceptively simple and yet potentially far-reaching propositions for marking the new Millennium. ... Surely this ingenious British idea could well be taken up in other countries.'

In the *Malta Independent*, under the headline 'The Church and Everybody Cleaning their Slate', Bjørn Ole Austad ends his article: 'Such a campaign would go to the heart of the trouble in many countries. Most of us point the finger at someone else when discussing what is wrong. We may, however, have ideas at the back of our minds about where we ourselves can begin. Some years ago a friend did something which offended me. I cut the contact and have not been in touch since. Making amends could wait no longer. A letter has been posted.'

News from India: "The CSC has attracted considerable interest wherever we have been. A friend in the north-east proposed similar action at the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Nagaland Baptist Council held in Kohima on 24 January. This was then adopted as their official millennium programme and they propose to report it at the international Baptist gathering in Australia next January."

## FORWARD PLANS

The City of Oxford is considering holding an official Clean Slate Week in November. Other cities, towns and villages may like to do the same.

In Sheffield, a special 'Party-cipation' event is being prepared for the autumn.

The Clean Slate Campaign will feature in the programme of Nottingham's pre-millennium celebrations.

"I welcome the chance to do something positive for the Millennium instead of criticising the Dome!"

## WEBSITE

We have a website at [WWW.CLEANSLATE.ORG](http://WWW.CLEANSLATE.ORG)

On it you will find the following information:

- Latest news of the campaign, updated regularly
- Text of the Clean Slate Guide and list of patrons
- Stories of slate cleaning
- How the campaign began, and how it is financed
- An invitation to be an 'ambassador'
- A list of available resources
- Links to other sites
- An Interactive Forum.

Please visit the site – and ask your friends to visit!

"The Clean Slate Campaign appealed to me because it is personal and practical."

## MORE STORIES

I bought a piece of jewellery from a charity stall. It was in an unpretentious plastic box and did not cost very much. When I returned home and looked at it again I saw that it had a continental gold stamp on the back. I put it aside, thinking to have it valued. Later I came across a remark in a book I was reading which focused my mind. It said simply, 'Never take advantage of another.' I thought about that piece of jewellery. Wasn't I taking advantage of the person who had sold this to me not knowing its true value? Also, as the object of the sale was to obtain funds for a charity, I was depriving the charity. I have now returned the piece of jewellery and suggested that it be valued. Upon my clean slate I have decided to write: 'I will never take advantage of another.' (Lorraine Khan, Cardiff)

As the oldest of three young brothers, I got the largest allowance. It must have made me an economic imperialist. One day I flaunted my wealth by offering brothers aged 3 and 5 the sum of \$1 each if they would eat dirt. To my extreme shock, they each did so. I added shame to shock by renegeing on my deal. Yesterday I read about a Millennium Clean Slate Campaign. I decided to start with my earliest crimes and am sending each brother a cheque for \$20, the present value of \$1 in 1930. Also enclosed is \$20 for the Clean Slate Campaign! (Anonymous, USA)

I can make myself miserable by being envious of those who, unlike myself, have grown up in a happy family. A mood can attack me and put me out of action for hours. After this happened recently I decided to do something about it - someone once told me power comes with a decision - so I wiped the hateful word 'Envy' off my slate and in its place I put 'Contentment'. That's what I'm aiming for now. (Betty Richmond, Edinburgh)