

Christian corporate responsibility groups join forces

By agency reporter

Two organisations with strong church support who have been working to call business and financial institutions to the bar of social responsibility have joined forces, and will redouble their efforts in promoting ethical investment.

The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) has opened its doors to members of the Christian Ethical Investment Group (CEIG), which voted in January 2008 to dissolve itself as an independent organisation and transfer its activities and assets to ECCR.

ECCR undertakes research and advocacy on corporate and investor responsibility policy and practice. It has offered a year's complementary membership to former CEIG members, with an invitation to become subscribing members from 2009.

The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility's chair, Lee Coates, said: "ECCR is delighted to offer a structure within which former CEIG members can continue to engage on issues of ethical investment and corporate responsibility. CEIG has had a pioneering role in raising the profile of ethical investment within the Church, and ECCR's ongoing mission complements such work."

Former CEIG Chair Gavin Oldham said: "Among church bodies there is now almost universal acceptance that funds should be invested ethically. With the focus today more on engagement with companies to encourage them to improve their practice, ECCR provides a natural home for Christians who wish to continue their involvement."

CEIG was founded in 1988 – one year before ECCR - to strengthen the ethical investment stance taken by Church of England investment bodies. It later amended its constitution to involve other Christian denominations.

In the influential Bishop of Oxford case of 1991, the Bishop of Oxford and CEIG members argued in the High Court that, in keeping with the Church's mission, the Church Commissioners should not invest in ethically questionable activities such as businesses operating under the apartheid regime in South Africa. The case led to a clarification of Charity Commission guidance on ethical investment for charities.

Over the years, the two organisations enjoyed considerable overlap in terms of membership, concerns and activities.

ECCR's secretariat team is now writing to all former CEIG members to invite their participation. It would also welcome hearing from others formerly associated with CEIG who may be interested in joining or working with ECCR to promote corporate and investor responsibility across the British and Irish churches.

The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility is a company limited by guarantee and a 'Body in Association' with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), the official inter-church network.