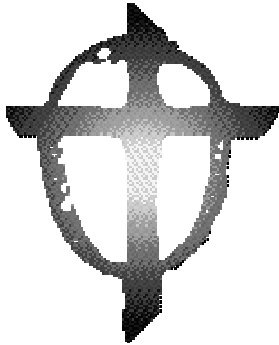


Calls for Easter synchronization



New calls have been made for the worldwide Church to mark Easter on the same day, and promote Christian unity in the process.

“Especially for churches in Muslim countries, it is a scandal if Christians cannot celebrate together,” Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said.

Easter is celebrated most years on two different days, one by most Protestants and Roman Catholics, and the other by most Orthodox Churches. The different dates stem in part from disagreement over reform of the calendar by Pope Gregory XIII in the 16th century.

Sunday trading is back centre stage

A crucial few weeks lie ahead for the Keep Sunday Special Campaign and a plethora of other organisations and individuals who are determined to fight off the threat of more shopping hours on a Sunday.

The campaign has called upon a group of eminent politicians to examine the effect that weekend working is having on community and family life. The Parliamentary panel will meet over a period of weeks and will take evidence from an assortment of witnesses from children and family organisations, trade unions, retailers, religious groups and consumer groups.

The new threat to what remains of the family weekend comes from an alliance of major retailers calling themselves ‘Deregulate.’ Members, including Tesco, Ikea, B&Q and Asda, want the Government to lift all restrictions on large-shop trading on a Sunday. They are seeking to convince the Department of Trade and Industry that the demand comes from consumers hungry to spend even more than they already do on Sunday shopping sprees.

Heading the panel will be Labour’s Lord Anderson, together with Ann Widdecombe, Gary Streeter, Andy Reed and Colin Breed. Their task will be to report by Easter to meet a tight Government deadline. One of the first things they will be asked to examine is the huge discrepancy between poll results issued by the big stores and the NOP commissioned by KSS which demonstrated that 72 per cent of those interviewed would prefer to have a regular shared day off with their family and friends rather than have more time to shop on a Sunday.

This result does not stand alone. Usdaw, the shopworkers union with many members in Tesco stores, produced a similar NOP poll result. A survey of 500 shop staff found that 62% came under pressure to work on Sundays and only 11% have had the confidence to use their legal right to opt-out of Sunday working.

The attitude of many back-benchers in the House of Commons has raised hopes that Parliament will not on this occasion go for an extension. Nearly 180 MPs, among them many Labour members, have signed an Early Day Motion opposing any extension to Sunday trading.

There are many other concerns for the Panel to consider. Promises made in the 90s to pay shopworkers premium rates on a Sundays have been largely disregarded; ancillary workers