

## A new start for the new millennium

The Clean Slate Campaign, which ran throughout 1999, invited every one of us in the UK to take personal, practical steps towards 'wiping our slates clean' for the new millennium. Backed by 80 patrons - including religious leaders, and sporting and media celebrities - the campaign achieved considerable national publicity. It also led to fresh starts, on small and large issues, in the lives of countless individuals.

This report gives **highlights of the year's campaign**, together with some of the stories of personal slate-cleaning. Although the campaign has formally ended, 'cleaning our slates' can be a normal, regular part of life - leading to improved relationships, and a clearer idea of the contribution each person can make to society through the way we choose to live.

### STORIES OF SLATE CLEANING

*Although privacy was one of the campaign's groundrules, dozens of people wrote to us telling what they had done - often asking to remain anonymous. Here are some of them.*

Recently my eldest brother died. 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. (Anon, Oxfordshire)

I had argued many times with a certain girl who I didn't like very much, but I wanted to be friends with her - or at least on speaking terms. So one day after school I told her how I felt, and explained that I was sorry for what I had done and said to her. She apologised to me too, and now every time I see her, instead of glaring at her we smile at each other. It feels SO much better now! (Teenager, Oxfordshire)

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

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. (Anon)

A friend introduced me to the Clean Slate Campaign when we were discussing giving something up for Lent. I thought about it and decided that my 'clean slate' would be to try to do in a day all that I planned to do. One evening I was thinking over whether I had carried this out and I remembered I had planned to ring my sister who broke her pelvis some time ago and still has great pain in her legs. I looked at the clock - 8.30 pm - 'oh no, I'll leave it until the morning,' I thought....and then.... 'what about my clean slate?' So I rang. It took a long time before she answered, and her voice sounded strange. 'Sorry, darling,' I said, 'did I wake you up?' There was a long pause and she said, 'No, you didn't wake me up, you stopped me taking an overdose.' (Anon)

*continued on the back*



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### HIGH PROFILE SUPPORT

*Among the campaign's 80 patrons were:*

**Professor the Lord Alton of Liverpool,** *Crossbench Peer*

**Dr Zaki Badawi OBE,** *Chairman, Imams and Mosques Council UK*

**Anne Carr,** *Co-ordinator, Women Together For Peace, N Ireland*

**Sir Bobby Charlton,** *Former England footballer*

**Rt Rev. and Rt Hon. Richard Chartres,** *Bishop of London*

**Lord Cowdrey of Tonbridge,** *Former international cricketer*

**H. E. Cardinal Cahal Daly,** *Former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland*

**Gavin Hastings OBE,** *Former Scotland and British Lions rugby captain*

**The late Cardinal Basil Hume,** *Archbishop of Westminster*

**Gary Lineker OBE,** *Former England footballer*

**Dr James MacMillan,** *Composer, lecturer at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama*

**The Duke of Montrose,** *Landowner and farmer*

**Neville Nagler,** *Director General, Board of Deputies of British Jews*

**Lisa Potts GM,** *Former nursery nurse, Wolverhampton*

**Libby Purves,** *Writer and broadcaster*

**Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks**

**Iqbal Sacranie OBE,** *Secretary General, The Muslim Council of Britain*

**O P Sharma MBE,** *President, National Council of Hindu Temples*

**Indarjit Singh OBE JP,** *Director, Network of Sikh Organisations*

**Ajahn Sumedho Bhikku,** *Respected Abbott of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery*

**Lord Weatherill,** *Former Speaker, the House of Commons*

# 'WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN' CALL BY RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADERS

Almost half the 80 patrons of the Clean Slate Campaign gathered on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1999, to endorse the idea of using the approaching new millennium as an opportunity for a fresh start – personally and collectively. In London's appropriately-named Reform Club, and by telephone link in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh, religious and political leaders, sporting figures, media personalities and people from all walks of ordinary life, gave their support. The conversation was chaired by former BBC news presenter Martyn Lewis.

**The Rt Rev. and Rt Hon. Richard Chartres, Bishop of London:** I support this campaign for the reason that it is a very simple idea which nevertheless expresses a deep spiritual truth. And that truth is that when you put something right in your life, when you forgive, you release a great deal of energy and defuse tension.

If there is to be a real change, a real revolution, as always it has to begin with me and with us. It's extraordinarily important that we all recognise our personal role in making sure that the world is a much more peaceful and constructive place for the next millennium.

One action can reverberate infinitely. I hope very much that



Martyn Lewis flanked by the Chief Rabbi and the Bishop of London

saying "Forgive me". At the heart of Clean Slate is a profound idea also at the heart of so many of our faith traditions. It is never too late to mend relationships that have been broken or never too late to heal people we have harmed. It is never too late. It is never too soon. When many of us begin to change ourselves, together we begin to change the world.

**Cardinal Cahal Daly, former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland (speaking from Belfast):**

The Clean Slate Campaign might have been designed for us in Northern Ireland because we are engaged in a historic attempt to begin the new millennium with a new and clean slate. I feel the hand of God has been in this campaign. All of our great religious traditions, all the great world religions, give a central place to sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation – and all these are central to the CSC.

**Ann Widdecombe MP, Shadow Home Secretary:**

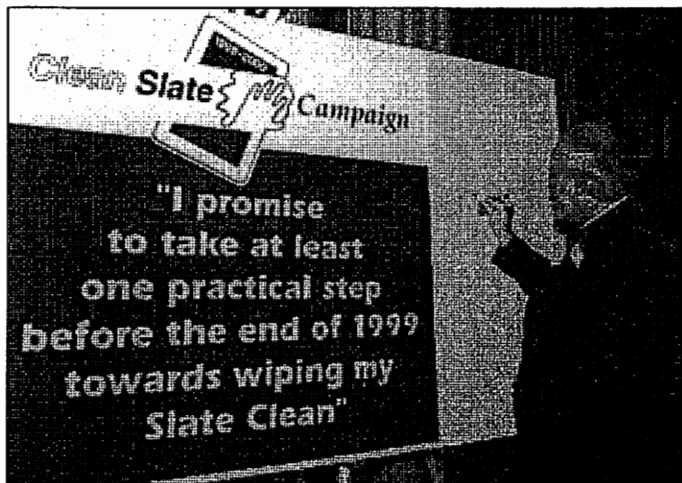
When the new year comes, we all make resolutions. That always concerns some amendment of conduct for the future

– normally broken in February and forgotten by March. But this seems to me different because it means not promising oneself that one *would* do something, but obliging oneself *actually* to do something.

**Martyn Lewis, former BBC News presenter:**

I think the attraction of it is that it is such an incredibly simple, straight-forward, easy-to-execute idea. The Clean Slate Campaign means saying you're sorry, it means mending fences, it means doing something that you might not otherwise have done if something like this had not been here to give you that nudge.

There has been a very powerful message of reconciliation here today. A real frisson went through me when I realised how many of our religious leaders are here, speaking with one voice, and how powerful that is. There is a clear opportunity here for people to do things in a very private, personal way which will help them as individuals, and ultimately help to make the towns and cities in which they live, the country in which they live, a better place.



as people quietly take action themselves and reflect on this campaign they'll see the importance of reverberation, of goodness and moral action.

**Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks:**

There is too much pain in this world and the most tragic – because it is the most avoidable – is the pain that we cause one another. And how simple it is to undo it by simple words, by saying sorry, by saying thank you, by saying "I was wrong", by

**Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain:**

This is a very simple message, but a very powerful one. As human beings we are prone to cause harm and anguish. At this time, when we are looking forward to how we can better participate together in society, the best way would be to accept one's own faults, to amend them. To take the initiative of trying to correct ourselves in very simple ways.

**The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP, Secretary of State for Education, sent a message:**

"I am very sorry that I cannot attend your event today, but I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Clean Slate Campaign every success. I am very happy to support this excellent initiative. Everyone can think of something that they either should have done, or should not have done, and the Clean Slate Campaign provides an opportunity not only to start afresh, but to learn from the past and behave differently in the future. I hope that as many people as possible can begin the new Millennium by 'wiping the slate clean'."

## JOURNALISTS' VIEW

Libby Purves wrote her weekly article in *The Times* about the campaign. Under the headline 'Go on, say you're sorry', she writes: 'In a globalised age, beset by unimaginable macroeconomics and garish world celebrities, there is comfort in small things and private people. The closer we get to the turn of the century and the fruit-machine thrill of the three big zeros, the more - I suspect - we will value the human scale, as a refuge from millennial blasts of hot air.'

She goes on to give stories of people who have cleaned their slates: '...you get an endearing snapshot of people willing to throw out resentments and prejudices and present a smiling, open face to the new century. ... The humble, private notion of apology and restitution and a fresh start needs encouraging in the private domain, not least because in the public domain it is virtually extinct.'

In the Scottish daily *The Herald*, Jennifer Cunningham wrote a feature headlined 'Re-

solving to wipe the slate clean'. '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.'

Sports writer Ian Wooldridge wrote his column in the *Daily Mail* about the campaign. '...what was it that united five prominent sportsmen to endorse this venture called Clean the Slate Campaign? ... To mark the millennium, you simply list the ghastliest things you have done in your life and write to or ring up the other party to effect a reconciliation. In my case, this would fully occupy me between now and New Year's Eve.

'... I would definitely apologise to Graham Kelly, former Football Association chief executive, about whom I once wrote a hurtful article without knowing all the facts. ...[the CSC] seems a thoroughly decent idea.'

## SCHOOLS OUTREACH

David Bell, Education Director for Newcastle and a patron of the campaign, wrote to all fellow directors in England. All Scottish directors were also written. **25 requested campaign materials for distribution to schools in their area.** Some 2,000 schools were reached in this way.

Sixth forms in a further **100 schools** were visited during the autumn term by the 'MRA Schools Service' which featured speakers on the campaign theme.

Staff at Edward Feild Primary School in Kidlington, Oxon, produced a **Programme of Study for Key Stages 1 & 2.** This resource was sent to all Oxfordshire schools by the Lord Mayor of Oxford, and was widely circulated nationwide. At Edward Feild, the whole school used the theme for four

weeks, culminating in a meeting for parents and guests at which children presented their work and stories. One child later said that the theme had 'changed my life', including rebuilding her relationship with her mother.

A **schools competition** was held in Oxford. Some of the entries recorded decisions by the pupils. One example: 'My sister is six years old. Once I drew on the window sill and I blamed all of it on her. I think I should own up to my Mum, and I will also say sorry to my sister for blaming her when she didn't do anything.'

Material about the campaign was included in a special Millennium Pack sent to all **Nottinghamshire schools** by the Nottinghamshire Council of Churches.

## SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

The campaign was reported widely in the national, regional and local press, and on television and radio. Highlights of the media coverage include:

- BBC1 - *The Heaven and Earth Show*, Nov 7.
- BBC Radio 4 - *Thought for the Day* (I Singh), Nov 10.
- BBC Radio Five Live - April 24, Dec 27 & 29.
- BBC World Service - *The World Today*, Dec 3.
- BBC Radio Scotland - Nov 29 & Dec 1.
- BBC Radio Wales: June 18.
- *The Times*: Libby Purves, Nov 9; Ann Widdecombe & the Chief Rabbi, Dec 11.
- *The Daily Telegraph*: April 23 & Dec 2.
- *The Daily Mail*: Ian Wooldridge, Nov 13.

- Features in five major regional newspapers including *The Herald* and *The Newcastle Journal*.
- Extensive local press coverage in Oxfordshire and other regions.
- Features in at least seven religious press, including *The Catholic Herald*, *The Church Times*, and *The Jewish Chronicle*.
- BBC News Online website, Nov 25, followed by a 'Talking Point'.
- Featured at least 22 times on 12 local radio stations in Edinburgh/Glasgow, Manchester, Merseyside, Newcastle, Cleveland, Nottingham, Northampton, Suffolk, Luton, Kent, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and on Greater London Radio.

## CHURCHES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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 wrote 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.'

Dozens of parishes used the theme in different ways and carried the idea in their parish magazines.

A special set of **Bible Study Notes** were produced and widely distributed.

At the **Church of Scotland** General Assembly in May, every commissioner received a copy of the campaign leaflet. One minister wrote, 'At last I have a scheme I can recommend to my congregation with enthusiasm and conviction.'

The **Board of Deputies of British Jews** sent material to all

its 350 members, and issued a press release - as did the Office of the Chief Rabbi.

Material was also distributed via the **Muslim Council of Britain**, and the Inter-Faith Network.

The campaign chairman was guest speaker at the Cardiff Inter Faith One World Week Celebration in October, and at a Forum of the Birmingham Council of Faiths in November.

The AGM of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education adopted a special resolution to recommend the Clean Slate Guide to all SACRES nationwide.

### WHAT NEXT?

*If you have any ideas on how to continue the momentum of the Clean Slate Campaign, please write to:*

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Tel: 01865-516558  
email: [ideas@cleanslate.org](mailto:ideas@cleanslate.org)

## OTHER CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

The Clean Slate Guide was printed in Welsh – 'Ymgyrch y Llechen Lân'.

Cardiff Central Library ran a special display from late October on. There were also displays in libraries in Oxfordshire and Glasgow.

The campaign's seven Scottish patrons wrote to all 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament, and to all councillors of the 12 authorities within the Strathclyde Joint Police Board area.

The Lord Mayor of Oxford, Val Smith, launched the idea of a Clean Slate Week, which was supported by city MPs and other leaders, and was held from November 29 to December 5. Local media gave coverage.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Cllr Joe Devaney, wrote to all city councillors encouraging them to support the campaign. He was interviewed on *Radio Merseyside* about the cam-

paign, and linked it to the city's move to apologise for Liverpool's role in the slave trade.

Nearly 100 people attended a special dinner in Newcastle which raised £1,100.

In Wrexham, an anti-litter campaign was started which arose out of one person's clean slate promise – 'to do something instead of moaning.'

Overseas media coverage included *The Christian Science Monitor*, *ABC Radio Australia* and *The Malta Independent*.

In Argentina a leaflet was produced in Spanish carrying the message of the campaign.

In Canada an official national campaign was launched.

In South Africa leaflets were sent to church and other leaders, and were also disseminated widely at the World Parliament of Religions meeting in Cape Town in December.

## HOW THE CAMPAIGN BEGAN

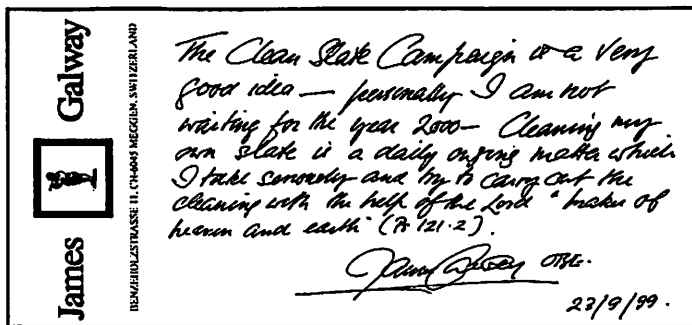
The idea of a Clean Slate Campaign resulted from a simple experience which Edward Peters, its Chairman, had. He writes: 'My conscience had been bothering me over the breakdown of a couple of friendships. I had hit back at some friends who I felt had bad-mouthed me. I decided to apologise for my part in this petty quarrel, and these friendships were restored. This made me feel so much better.

'A little while later I discovered that another old friend had held a resentment towards me for something I had done 15 years earlier. I was horrified, and apologised to this friend for the hurt I had caused. But it also reminded me how easy it is to carry baggage from the past, something unfinished which can weigh us down. I thought: wouldn't it be great if we could leave behind the baggage of the past and start the new millennium with a clean slate?'

Edward mentioned the

idea to friends who encouraged him to develop it. He sounded out a few public figures, who agreed to come on board as patrons. Slowly, during the last part of 1998, the patrons list developed. A small group, including charity workers, a law student from the Asian community, an Imam and a marketing professional of 30 years experience, put together plans for the campaign. Limited time and resources pointed towards an organic, rather than centrally-driven, campaign, with the idea being spread by word of mouth and media interest.

As one journalist later wrote, 'the Clean Slate Campaign is modest in its aims – after all, people are only being asked to put one thing right, and it's up to them to decide what it is. The hope of its organisers is that the experience will give those who try it a taste for new beginnings – and that living with a clean slate will become the habit of a lifetime.'



## CAMPAIGN RESOURCES



Over 70,000 'Clean Slate Guide' leaflets were printed and used.

Posters and stickers were widely disseminated. A special T-shirt was produced.

The campaign website ([www.cleanslate.org](http://www.cleanslate.org)) was averaging 250 visitors per week in the latter part of the year.

Almost 5,000 Millennium cards were created and used, carrying the message of the campaign.

Total expenditure reached £30,000 and was fully covered by over 250 individual gifts, more than 80% of which were from individuals. An estimated further £35,000 was given in kind, through unremunerated professional services, design skills and print subsidy.

## MORE STORIES

*continued from front page*

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 CSC I decided to pay back the difference, as I had to admit that I would certainly have complained if I had been overcharged. (Anon, Merseyside)

I have decided that I am not going to feel guilty any more about my actions and behaviour from the ages of 19 to 27. These years included my college years when I behaved promiscuously and hurt my friends very badly. I thought only about myself and lost contact with God. I am putting the guilt of those youthful years behind me in the knowledge that if God can forgive all I've done then I can wipe my slate clean. (Anon, Oxfordshire)

My practical step is giving up smoking. After several attempts in the past and after more than 25 years of smoking, I have stopped. (Albert Burton)

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)

Today I finally returned an overdue book to a library, having meant to do so for a long time. (David Down)

I promise not to undergo a personality change when I get behind the wheel of my car. (Anon, Oxfordshire)

In an evening of profound frustration when I was feeling totally unable to deal with my problems, I found myself asking God for 'forgiveness' and 'help'. These words surprised me, because I rarely ask for help – any help – from 'someone, something out there'. But I also thought, 'how can I ask for forgiveness when I am unable to give it?' In that moment I forgave a friend whom I had been unable to forgive till then. (Rosa Bellino)