

Raising the Profile of Faith

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, *Faith as Social Capital: connecting or dividing?* published earlier this year and the Economic and Social Research Council's report *Faith Based Voluntary Action* (see inside this issue) are important landmarks for faith communities involved in community development and regeneration. Like the debate in the House of Lords on May 19th about the role of faith in civic society, much of what is said is not new to those who have been involved with faith based organisations. What is new and very significant is who is saying it and where it is being said.

The value that faith groups add to society is being recognised in wider society, and independent and respected organisations and institutions are providing the analysis and proof. This all helps to give us the tools we need to be valued and recognised as partners and contributors to society: but let us not forget that tools do not work by themselves, we have to use them. We need to know about the latest research and analysis, and also learn to use them in our work.

We also need from time to time to reflect on the values that underpin our work. Why not do this with other practitioners at the FbRN Faith in Community Development seminars? And, if you are thinking about whether Social Enterprise might be an avenue to pursue, or want to know more about how to get started, we have a series of seminars that will help (see inside this issue for details of the FbRN seminar programme).

Finally, the next round of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund will be announced soon; check the website of the Community Development Foundation which is administering the Fund. You can also keep up to date through the FbRN email bulletin, to make sure you receive the latest information send an email to admin@fbrn.org.uk

Doreen Finneron
 Executive Director

Have you got your toolkit yet?

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The second edition of FbRN's popular Toolkit, containing updated and expanded sections. Price £12.95 plus £2 postage. See the website for more details: www.fbrn.org.uk

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AROUND THE REGIONS

LONDON AND THE SOUTH WEST

The West Midlands has one. So does the North West and so does the East of England... but London doesn't. What is it?

A regional faiths forum for London

Since the creation of regional assemblies, multi-faith bodies have emerged in most of the regions. No two are alike – they have different forms of governance, different functions, and different approaches to funding and staffing.

So, when discussion started about a London-wide faiths forum, there was no 'best practice' to follow. And in any case, it was recognised very early on that no two regions are the same, so a regional faith forum should reflect the unique nature of its region. For example, in London, we have an elected Mayor and Assembly (with no automatic place for a faiths representative), the regional development agency (London Development Agency) is directly responsible to the Mayor, and most national faith bodies have their headquarters in London. In addition, there is the Olympics – just in case anyone is in any doubt, this will have a massive impact on community, social and economic development across the region.

London Civic Forum is dedicated to bringing people together from different sectors across London, and its faith community members had discussed the possibility of a pan-London faiths forum for several years. Some enthusiasts felt that we should set up a forum without delay, but most accepted that the delicacy of the task required very careful thought. But a proper feasibility study requires funding so we had to wait until the opportunity presented itself through the government's ChangeUp programme.

Getting the resources was only the first challenge. What are the objectives of a feasibility study? What, actually are we studying? And who should play a part in our work? – there are several thousand local faith communities and faith-based organisations in London; we couldn't involve everyone.

Our objectives included the following:

- Identifying the level of support.
- Identifying the terms of reference.
- Identifying resources and funding.
- Identifying models of governance and structure.

- Devising a clear, staged plan which would enable the permanent implementation of a faiths forum.

Our approach to the work has necessarily been a hybrid of research activity and community development work. We have gathered information from all the other regional faith forums, as well as national organisations like the Inter-Faith Network. We have invited faith-based organisations in London to complete our online questionnaire which has asked for opinions on activities, structure and resourcing of a faiths forum.

Most important have been the face to face activities – because, above all, the feasibility study is about building working relationships that may form the basis of a future faiths forum. We have interviewed key personnel across London, held discussions with specific groupings and hosted two 'working lunches' bringing together a diverse assemblage of organisations and individuals.

What have we learnt so far? We have widespread support for a forum which will engage with the various and complex arms of regional government in London, which would articulate faith communities' perspectives on issues of social concern in London, and which would enable effective sharing of information, knowledge and experience.

A London faiths forum would need to focus clearly on regional issues – leaving local and national issues to the already effective bodies that exist. There is recognition that consensus will not always exist on all major issues and that on occasions it will be important to allow multiple voices to be heard.

Participants in the study have engaged seriously in detailed discussions on potential structure for a forum. On the one hand there is a strong desire to keep it simple. But, there is also a recognition that the complex landscape of London's faith communities will require a sophisticated structure for the forum. Some creative models are emerging from the discussions. The report of the feasibility study will be available at the end of July for widespread discussion and debate. We also hope that there will be sufficient momentum and enthusiasm to lead rapidly to the next stage – implementation. Look out for exciting developments!

Steve Miller, on behalf of the feasibility study team.

For more information contact Steve on:

stevesvm@blueyonder.co.uk

And for further information about organisations mentioned above see:

www.londoncivicforum.org.uk

www.london.gov.uk

www.changeup.org.uk

Faith in Action in the South West

A packed audience of over 200 gathered for the launch of Faith in Action in the South West in Taunton on 22nd June. This project, which mapped faiths in the region, is the latest in a number of substantial and well researched reports, not only documenting where faith groups are found, but also illustrating and analysing their role in communities and civil society.

The research found 4,107 faith groups across the South West and 840 responded to the questionnaire. The main findings are

- There is a high level of use of buildings for activities for the local community (65%)
- Faith groups provide support in the community for a wide range of groups and organisations including, young people, families, newcomers to the communities, schools, hospitals, prisons.
- Many (42% of those surveyed) work in partnership with other groups, often other faith groups and 10% were involved with the Local Strategic Partnership.
- A significant number (25%) provide paid staff who offer some support to the wider community, and almost all have volunteers engaged in social and welfare activities; the survey respondents provided 10,000, suggesting a total across the region of over 50,000 volunteers.

Many of the successes, cited by faith groups, relate to the high priority they give to tackling the social issues raised by their knowledge and experience of the challenges faced by their local community. Much of their activity relates to addressing the challenges posed by making themselves available to the wider community and a focus for community activity.

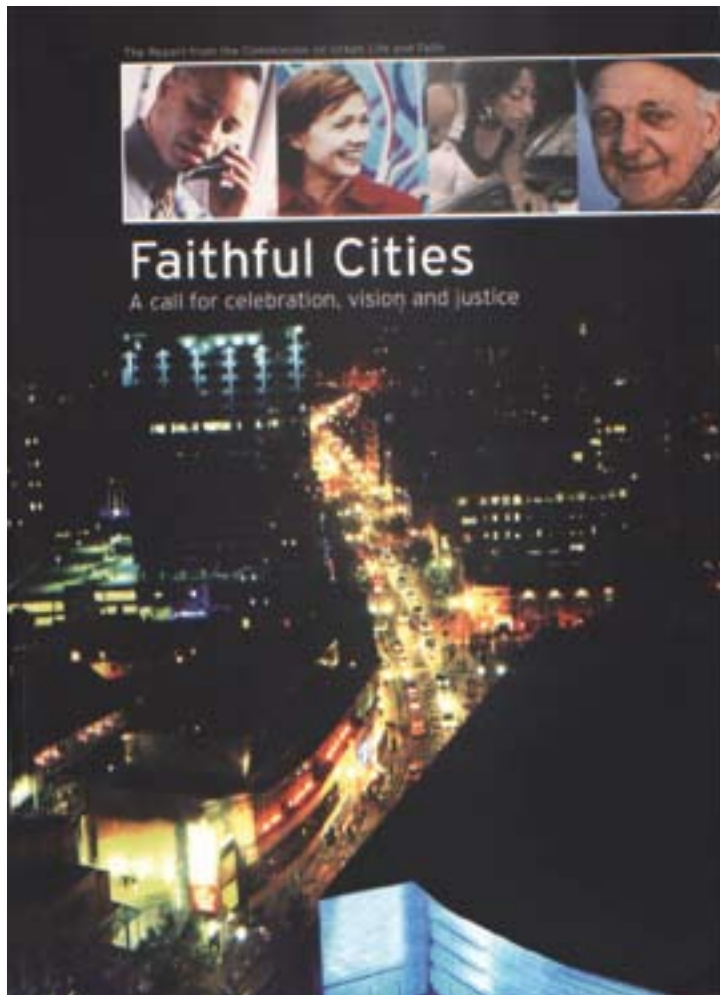
www.faithnetsouthwest.org.uk



A THIRD WAY CHURCH?

FAITHFUL CITIES AS A CLARION CALL TO WHAT?

Twenty one years on from the landmark of *Faith in the City*, the Church of England's new report *Faithful Cities* is reviewed by Dr Adam Dinham, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Anglia Ruskin University.



social milieu which it seems to accept as more congenial to the aims of a church with a long and established track record in social action. The problems are clearly identified and well researched and evidenced, and are usually located within the wider policy contexts of social inclusion, multi-culturalism and globalisation. In these senses it is a thoroughly modern document.

In this it is, too, a very New Labour document which appears to accept the new 'common sense' of the complementarity of social justice and the market, wanting to work constructively with others, sometimes despite ideological differences, to make change.

But what, then, of the radicalism of '*Faith in the City*', in whose tradition this claims to stand? Yes, the economic and political culture has changed dramatically since the height of Thatcherism. The report's useful chart (on page 9) gives a strong account of this and the changed policy contexts are referred to and recognised throughout. But the result is that socio-economic and structural accounts of poverty and disadvantage are left largely alone.

The landmark report, '*Faith in the City*', was always going to be a hard act to follow, a fact made all the more acute by the timing and provenance of the follow up, '*Faithful Cities*'. That it sees itself as standing in the tradition of that great "call to church and nation" is made clear from the outset – the 1984 report is mentioned in the very first paragraph.

But what is less clear is how that somewhat radical report, with the 'Marxist' undertones of which it was accused, has been inherited in this new 'commission on urban life and faith'.

In a general way, *Faithful Cities* is an essentially positive, engaging and optimistic document. It consistently wants to engage with a political and

This may be a perfectly valid approach – and it certainly reflects a ‘Third Way’ recasting of the relationship between wealth and poverty. This might account for what feels like a rather easy acceptance of the language of ‘regeneration’ (a whole chapter) and ‘well being’ (with ‘prosperity’) – which are seriously central discourses in social policy right now – without the critical eye which might ask, why are there areas still in need of regeneration after all this time? And are there other options for a church – at least to bring to the table?

None of this is to suggest that the report ought to have been more radical. My own view on this, at least for these purposes, is neutral. But it is to observe that it seems to accept a very modern ‘New Labour’ language with little questioning of it or the ideas that underpin it. The ‘common sense’ of social justice and markets – both ‘stakeholders’ in a thriving society – is embedded and accepted. Or is it?

Tucked away in pockets here and there, are little nuggets of seemingly innocuous material which, when read again, are startling. Take this from a little section on page 30 – “...the commission is clear that by solely harnessing the values of status, power and profit, the fulfilment of all cannot be achieved”. This seems relatively harmless, especially along with the assertion that economic growth is a “justifiable route” (p30). But we are then told that “it is time to question whether

this economic and social model [capitalism] can really promote the happiness and well-being of all” (p39). Is this the rare sound of a questioning of the whole system? This might be a flaring up of the enormous challenge posed by *‘Faith in the City’*.

But another reading of the report reveals a consistent and subtle message throughout – that there is more to life than materialism and that faith communities might have something important to offer in response. In this sense the commission comes near to presenting church as a call for the re-prioritisation of the social in the direction of a happiness which materialism has failed to produce. Is ‘faithful capital’ one of the ingredients which can help bring about this re-prioritisation?

But it is this ‘coming near’ which is at times frustrating about *‘Faithful Cities’*. The messages are often rather muddled and confused. At one point there seems to be an unquestioning acceptance of a very modern political milieu; elsewhere a challenge to capitalism itself appears to be whispered in the ear. It is pleasing that the commission has come into being and chosen to reflect on the social, and much of what it says is of use, in as far as it goes. But the potentially useful concept of ‘faithful capital’ – of *‘faithful cities’* themselves – ends up somewhat ‘underwhelmed’ in a late-spring drizzle of mixed messages and signals.

Economic and Social Research Council recognises the value of faith based voluntary action.

The ESRC and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations have produced a publication based on a series of seminars conducted by Greg Smith and Vivien Lowndes.

Faith Based Voluntary Action takes as its starting point that the government is increasingly aware that faith groups can play an important role in working towards the three goals of civil renewal – active citizenship, strengthened communities and participation in meeting public needs.

The evidence for the contribution of faith groups and the analysis of their role is drawn from Professor Lowndes’ work *Faith, Hope and Clarity* and from Greg Smith’s work with the Bridge Builders Project in Preston. The great value of this publication is that it comes not from a faith based organisation seeking to prove its value, but from an impartial, well respected national academic body. It is a valuable and welcome contribution to the growing evidence base on faith and civil society.

www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

WHAT CAN IT DO FOR YOU?

Are you or your organisation a member of any of the following: bassac, Community Matters, Development Trusts Association or The Scarman Trust?



The four organisations listed above comprise a national partnership called the Community Alliance. This partnership offers a range of products aimed at assisting community organisations to grow and develop. Members of one organisation are able to access the products of the other three as part of the package of benefits available to them. (There is more information on how to join at the end of this article.)

The partnership can offer assistance in the following areas: demonstrating effectiveness as a community organisation; exploring how organisations can share their resources effectively; asset based development; advice and information services on organisational management; online resources and a variety of training options. Further information on all these can be accessed by contacting the Information and Administration Officer (contact details below).

The partnership draws on a wide range of in house expertise and is serviced and resourced by a small, dedicated staff team. This team produces a number of resources aimed at raising awareness about the Community Alliance which include a monthly newsletter, information flyers and updates on the various products.

It should be noted that the term 'Community', as it is used throughout the Alliance, refers to communities of both place and interest and thus may be of considerable interest to faith-based communities. Dispensing with any notion that one size fits all, the partnership offers a number of options to organisations throughout the whole spectrum of their development, from the smaller, locally based (and focussed) organisations to larger ones with a much wider ambit. Individuals are also catered for as local 'Can-Doers', and enterprising groups which have their eye on a disused building or piece of ground can get help in looking at how to turn this into an asset of real community benefit.

Anyone requiring more information about the Community Alliance, or who would like to receive copies of its newsletter, can contact the Information and Administration Officer on **020 7336 9492** or email anna.desouza@comm-alliance.org

If you would like to join one of the Community Alliance partner organisations, you can do so, and get more information to help you choose which, via their websites:

www.bassac.org.uk

www.communitymatters.org.uk

www.dta.org.uk

www.thescarmantrust.org

Any other issues can be raised with the Programme Director on **020 7336 9491** or email bec.clarkson@comm-alliance.org



FbRN Seminar Programme

FAITH IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Do faith based organisations working in community development and regeneration have shared values?
- What do we have in common and what can we learn from the wider community development sector?
- What have we learned about working with government?
- Is it 'faith first' or 'community first'?
- How do we work with diversity?
- Are we into service or transformation?

These were some of the questions that rose out of two pilot seminars that FbRN and its partners organised in 2005. We committed ourselves to pursuing these further, and thanks to a grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund, we are running seven more seminars between October 2006 and February 2007.

We aim to:

- Explore the values of faith based community development
- Look at practical examples
- Identify resources for faith based community development practice
- Connect with the wider field of community development
- Examine the policy context

We all need time to reflect and think about the values that underpin our busy and pressured work life. Why not come and join us – it doesn't cost much either!

Seminar dates and venues

Manchester 5th Oct

Unitarian Chapel, Cross St Manchester M2 1NL

Bradford 11th Oct

The Thornbury Centre 79 Leeds Old Rd Bradford BD3 8JX

Cambridge 17th Oct

St Andrews Hall, St Andrews Road, Chesterton, Cambridge

London 30th Oct

London Muslim Centre 46 Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1JX

Cost: £10.00 per person

Other venues are planned for January 2007, details in the next newsletter.

For more information see the enclosed leaflet or the FbRN website.

SEMINARS ON FAITH AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Faith Communities are often the seedbeds for social and community enterprise; they have the potential to make a significant contribution to economic and social life in the UK and to reach the most marginalised and excluded groups.

These seminars, which build on the FbRN 2005 national conference, will:

- raise vision
- generate enthusiasm
- give people tools and skills
- begin to create/strengthen local networks of support and local partnerships
- integrate faith groups more into the wider field of social and community enterprise

The seminars will feature practitioners who have been there and done it and will include workshops on:

- How to get started in social enterprise
- Income generation and funding
- Governance/community participation and representation
- Procurement, tendering and contracts

Venues and dates

Sheffield

7th September 2006

Liverpool

13th September 2006

Plymouth

18th September 2006

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

20th November 2006

Tower Hamlets, London

30th November 2006

Crowborough, Sussex

Date to be announced

For further details go to

www.fbrn.org.uk

email malcolmd@fbrn.org.uk

or phone **020 7471 6792**

Letter from the Chair of FbRN

the Hon Barney Leith

Development is an organic process in which *'the spiritual is expressed and carried out in the material'*.¹ In our increasingly interdependent world, development efforts must be guided by a vision of the type of world community we want to create. They must also be animated by a set of universal values.



Communities that acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human nature and make the moral, emotional, physical and intellectual development of the individual a central priority are communities that thrive and prosper. Such communities guarantee freedom of religion and encourage the establishment of places of worship. Their schools and other centres of learning seek to cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness and they encourage everyone's participation in generating and applying knowledge.

Understanding the mutual interdependence of the individual and of society, these communities promote respect for both rights and responsibilities, foster the equality and partnership of women and men, and protect and nurture families. They promote natural and human-made beauty, and incorporate environmental protection and sustainability into their design.

Guided by the concept of unity in diversity, they support widespread participation in the affairs of society, and increasingly turn to leaders who are motivated by the desire to serve. In these communities the fruits of science and technology benefit the whole society, and work is available for all.

Idealistic? Perhaps, but I believe that all of us who are involved with FbRN UK must be inspired by a transcendent vision if we are to enable the people we work with to release and use their potential for their own benefit and for the good of the whole of humankind.

¹ From the Bahá'í scriptures

Recruitment of Associate Fieldworkers to conduct interviews for the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF)

The Community Development Foundation is looking for associate fieldworkers to conduct surveys of women in faith communities receiving grants and young people in faith communities receiving grants. This is part of the evaluation of the **Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund**.

The fieldworkers will be experienced interviewers with a thorough knowledge of faith communities, faith based organisations and the issues they face.

For more information please contact: Malcolm James, Research Officer, Community Development Foundation, Unit 5, Angel Gate, 320 – 326 City Road, London EC1V 2PT

Email: malcolm.james@cdf.org.uk

Visit the website: www.cdf.org.uk and click "Associate fieldworkers needed."

Application deadline is 29th September 2006.

The Faith Based Regeneration Network UK

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