

Conclusion

The aim of a theology of partnership is to provide a long-term and sustainable process that conveys to other partners and the local community at large that faith communities will still be around long after the regeneration companies have moved out. It also stresses that processes of partnership working are as important as any product – indeed without the right processes no product will emerge.

A theology of partnership as outlined in this paper is designed to help bring into being and sustain a network of communication and exchange within local communities that can share experience of regeneration and communicate good practice.

Further information on the Theology of Partnership please contact

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The Faith in partnership series is:

- *an information resource for people of faith as they engage with their local communities in the new partnership agenda*
- *a joint enterprise, between The Partnership for Theological Education, Manchester various ecumenical partners from the North West*

Whilst we currently provide this resource for the Christian Community we welcome contributions from other faith traditions.

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**The Partnership for
Theological Education**

The Faith in Partnership Series

*An information resource for people of faith
as they engage with their local communities*

No 2. Towards a Theology of Partnership

An Introduction to a Theology of Partnership for Churches and other Faith Communities

This leaflet proposes four elements of a theology of partnership

- Recognition of common ethical concerns
- Building on the existing effectiveness of the faith communities
- Reflection on the importance of attitude and process
- Practical expressions of Partnership

A Theology of Partnership

The changing nature of urban communities in the last 30 years presents an unavoidable challenge to all faith communities. We now live in an increasingly globalised world which has brought unimagined ethnic cultural and religious diversity into our regions.

There is a growing acknowledgement from central government that faith communities should use their knowledge and involvement in local communities, often built up over many years, to good effect in neighbourhood renewal. The challenge is for local faith groups to get more directly involved in political and economic processes in partnership with other agencies, a move which may feel like a departure from the traditional spiritual and social roles, and therefore a move into uncharted territory

The challenge of partnership, however, applies to urban and rural communities alike. A theology of partnership needs to recognise the unavoidable nature of new urban environments and see the immigration and diversity that it has produced as a potential for hope and transformation rather than cynicism and despair. The local context in which people live and work can be changed for the better if there is a willingness to bring the strength and richness of a practical belief in God and God's love and compassion for the world in which we live.

What might a theology of partnership contain?

It could contain the following four elements which are important cornerstones of any partnership agreement.

1) Common ethical concerns

These include

- Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
- Commitment to a just economic and political order
- Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness
- Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

This is a small list and by no means exhaustive. At local level there may well be others that can be added which arise from discussion and sharing.

2) Building on the existing effectiveness of faith communities in their neighbourhoods.

This includes

- Genuine renewal rooted in the community and participation in local context
- Shared sense of purpose and confidence-building
- Creating places of peace and safety
- Initiating local economic and social enterprise initiatives
- Power-sharing within ethnically diverse groups
- Welcoming the outsider and the marginalized.

3) Attention to attitude and process

This requires

- willingness to learn from others' experience and perspective
- willingness to share our own experience and perspective
- willingness to listen
- willingness to practice tolerance in ways which are both realistic and sustainable
- willingness to engage with cultural sensitivity
- willingness to engage in honest debate and an acceptance of difference
- recognition that we are a resource for all the community, not just those from a narrow elite group

4. A series of steps to be considered as a practical expression of the above

A sequence of stages in the task of partnership might be

- mapping and visiting
- supporting and trusting
- practically working together around an issue of common concern
- strategic implementation of regeneration projects
- joint statements on spiritual/community matters of concern

These stages need to move at a pace that is comfortable for all. Unlike other types of target-focussed and grant-funded regeneration it is important that faith communities do not feel pressurised to speed up processes of trust and confidence building to meet outside pressures.