

Faith and Community: a good practice guide for local authorities, published February 2002 by the Local Government Association, Local Government House, Smith Square, LONDON SW1P 3HZ, Telephone 020 7664 300. The complete document can be downloaded on www.lga.gov.uk

Further information on the document *Faith and Community* please contact **John Devine, Churches' Officer for the North West**
Northwest Development Agency
Renaissance House
PO Box 37
Centre Park
Warrington
WA1 1XB
Tel: 01925 400100 Fax 01925 400401 Mob 07951 032803

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.

For copies of the FiP leaflets and further information please contact
Margaret Walsh
Partnership for Theological Education
Luther King House
Brighton Grove, Rusholme
Manchester, M14 5JP
0161 249 2533

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in association with



**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 4. Faith and Community

The Changing Role of Churches and other Faith Communities in British Society

This leaflet contains an introduction to the document

FAITH AND COMMUNITY

A good Practice Guide for Local Authorities
published by the Local Government Association
in consultation with representatives
from the major faith communities
in February 2002

Previously encouraged to keep their distance from faith communities, local authorities and other statutory agencies are now encouraged to recognise faith communities as valuable partners with roots at neighbourhood level, especially in areas increasingly abandoned by 'professional' providers.

What does the document say?

- The document encourages local authorities to take faith communities seriously.
'Faith groups may be the best means of reaching those in need within their faith community and sometimes those in the wider community also.' (3.2)
- 'Faith Communities' refers to all world faiths, including Christian churches.
'Most local authorities have some experience in the field of race relations and in dealing with equal opportunities issues, but the focus of this present publication is on 'religious identity' rather than 'ethnic identity.' (1.5)
- Faith communities speak on behalf of a large number of people.
'It is therefore important to ensure that they are appropriately consulted in the development of local strategies and services.' (1.2)
- They are entitled to serve on Local Strategic Partnerships.
'Guidance makes clear that faith communities have a part to play in the relevant processes and structures, such as local strategic partnerships and Neighbourhood Management.' (4.7)
- This is a new concept for local authorities and for faith communities themselves.
'Many faith communities (also) report that local authority officers seem unwilling to engage with them due to a misunderstanding of their motivation and purposes.' (5.4)

- Faith communities do not come to the conference table empty handed.
The document speaks of 'the contribution faith communities make to good health, as providers of pastoral care, promoters of citizenship and community development, voices for social justice, and as the locus for gatherings of people in varying economic and social positions, of differing political views, from a range of ethnic backgrounds with shared concerns.' (3.1)
- They bring leadership, resources and, above all, volunteers.
'Among the typical resources which faith communities and local inter-faith structures can offer as part of the voluntary and community sector are local networks, leadership and management capacity, buildings with potential community use, and volunteers.' (3.4)
- Both sides have a lot to learn.
'It should not be assumed, however, that the necessary skills, knowledge and capacity are present in either all local faith communities or in public agencies.' (4.7)
- Faith communities can be eligible for funding, a concept still to be universally recognised.
'Both central government and many local authorities now accept the validity and value of funding services and activities run by faith groups. Some will argue that this is justified only if the services and activities are open to all, regardless of their faith. Others will argue that a service or activity, even if targeted at those within a faith community, can nevertheless be assessed in terms of its public or community benefit and a case for public funding can therefore be made.' (5.1)