

Introduction: Why Faith in Partnership?

John Devine, Churches' Officer for the North West, explains

Several factors have contributed to the timing of this conference:

- A renewed appreciation of faith communities as part of civil society
- The possibility of new forms of participation in government created by regional structures
- The Birmingham conference *Inter Faith Co-operation, Local Government and the Regions*, 12 June 2000
- The establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships
- Recent events in the north of England and on the international stage
- The appointment of John Battle M.P. as the Prime Minister's representative on interfaith dialogue
- Imminent publication of the government White Paper on the English regions
- Publication of the document *Faith and Community: a good practice guide for local authorities*

In 1997 the government declared its intention to develop regional government in England. Having played a part in regeneration partnerships for many years, Christian church leaders were aware of the potential for faith communities to participate in the regional agenda. However, crucial to serious participation in this new dimension of public life was the need for churches to organize themselves to speak with a regional voice. The establishment of the North West Development Agency in 1999 led to my appointment as Churches' Officer for the North West.

Crucial to serious participation in this new dimension of public life was the need for churches to organize themselves to speak with a regional voice.

As Churches' Officer for the Region, I liaise with Government Office North West, The North West Regional Assembly and the North West Development Agency.

I also have strong links with Voluntary Sector North West. Commissioned to speak for the Churches on regeneration, urban and rural affairs, social inclusion, culture and tourism, my role requires me to do so, as far as possible, alongside other world faith communities. Although unable to speak on their behalf it is acknowledged that there is much that the faith communities can pursue in common. My seat on the North West Regional Assembly, which I have occupied since 2001, requires me to join up interfaith structures throughout the region. This conference is the first step in establishing a regional interfaith network.

Publication of the good practice guide *Faith and Community* in February 2002 needed to be brought to the attention of local authorities and faith communities alike. The highlighting of Blackburn and Darwen as an example of good practice within the document indicated that Blackburn might be an appropriate venue for a regional conference. Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council responded enthusiastically and provided sponsorship, as did British Telecom.

This conference is the first step in establishing a regional interfaith network

Fawad Bhatti, Inter Faith Development Officer with Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council, and Canon Chris Rich, Director Social Responsibility for the Diocese of Blackburn were happy to join with me in planning this event. We were supported by Andrew Threlfall from the office of the Economic and Social Partners of the North West Regional Assembly and Jaqui Mallinson from Chris Rich's office. Our thanks are due to all of them as well as to our keynote speakers and workshop leaders.

Building Bridges

John Battle M.P.

John Battle entered Parliament in 1992. In 1997 he was appointed minister of state at the Department of Trade and Industry, and Minister of state at the Foreign Office two years later. He is the Prime Minister's representative on interfaith dialogue

Thank you for inviting me here from Leeds. I live in the inner city, in West Leeds. We have a mosque, a Sikh gurdwara, a Hindu temple, a black-majority Pentecostal church, and Methodist, Baptist, Anglican and Catholic churches. I attend a Roman Catholic Church. It is a multi-faith city.

My theme is 'building bridges' – the role of the faith communities in building basic communities in our neighbourhoods. Faith communities are bricks of community building. Before you build a bridge, you must clear the site first and then dig solid foundations at the ends.

First, we need to start from the positive premise that faith traditions can be liberating, helping us become human beings, a community of brothers and sisters. In other words, faith communities are seen by many as part of the problem, but can be part of the solution – and we of faith traditions have to demonstrate that, not just say it, but show it and witness to it. Our job is to ensure our city has space to breathe – so the best of the faith traditions is liberated.

No faith tradition is immune from conflict, violence and war, but I believe that faith communities can be part of the solution. We share a belief in human fallibility and hold in common a respect for human life, and a commitment to tolerance. Those who dismiss religious faith as anachronistic in a modern secular age forget how much supposedly value-free systems are rooted in past faith traditions.

Second, we need to tackle crude stereotypes, especially in the media, which in the UK is crudely dismissive of faith traditions. When you read about Muslims or Islam in the British media, it is as if it is a monolithic community. But Islam is not a monolithic community. Muslims in different communities in different cities in Britain celebrate Eid on different days – testifying to the diversity of the Muslim community's traditions. (It's not that I got the day wrong, as a journalist put it to me recently.) We need to know the history and tradition of each faith, and we need to get down to understanding and learning about the details and the diversity of faiths, respecting differences in particular. The issue is not only about how Muslims engage with the mainstream but how the mainstream engages with Muslims, and Muslim traditions – people need to remember the plural diversity of Islam.

September 11th and world events in the months since have resurrected many of the old distorted images of Islam as extremist, misunderstanding the concepts of Jihad and Fatwa and presenting a distorted image of Islam as violent – which it is not. People also need to remember that over 300 Muslims from all parts of the world died in the catastrophe of September 11th.

Third, at the start of this Millennium the questions are not just of terrorism and conflict but of justice and peace.

The world is sharply divided into rich and poor – 80% of humanity are in poverty, mainly in the South. 20% of the world's population, mainly in the North, are consuming 80% of resources.

What tools do we have to build with?

Britain is now home to people of nearly all the world's major faiths. It is the most interfaith country in Europe. In terms of numbers of faiths represented it is one of the most religiously diverse places in the world.

In all the faith traditions we find teachings about the importance of tackling injustice and of working for peace. But the question for this century is **what capacity have faith traditions got to work together** on common values and through common and joint action?

At the turn of the Millennium, on 3rd January 2000, an Interfaith Act of Contrition was made as part of the Interfaith leaders' Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment by the faith communities of the UK.

"In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty we offer this joint Act of Contrition as we look to our shared future.

We commit ourselves, as peoples of many faiths, to work together for the common good, uniting to build a better society grounded in values and ideals we share:

*community, personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong, learning,
wisdom and love of truth,
care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another
for the earth and its creatures.*

*We commit ourselves in a spirit of
friendship and cooperation to work
together
alongside all who share our values and
ideals,
to help bring about a better world now and
for generations to come".*

In 1987, the UK Interfaith Network was set up to encourage increased understanding between and about faith communities, linking together over 90

organisations from Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian traditions, as well as educational and academic bodies with an interest in interfaith issues. There is a Scottish Interfaith Council, recently a Wales Council was set up, there is the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum – there are over 100 local interfaith initiatives in the UK ranging from informal groups or networks to more formal representative councils of faiths. They ensure that leaders of different faiths in a locality meet regularly or at special functions.

In 1999 in association with the Inner City Religious Council and the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Local Interfaith Guide was produced. Now Guidelines of Good Practice for Local Authorities have just been published (relevant in the light of the Cattle and Denham reports in response to Oldham, Bradford and Burnley). Some eighteen local authorities employ interfaith workers as part of their local government staff. Good interfaith relations can be assisted by local and national government initiatives. But they can never flourish if not underpinned by a climate of equality and justice within wider society, where there is equality of opportunity and legal protection against discrimination.

Education is vital – including citizenship education. Responsible media has a role to play.

The faith communities themselves have a great challenge ahead to deepen their work to bring about greater mutual understanding and respect. Interfaith relations will become ever more important.

Know your own tradition! If you have no fidelity to your own tradition how can you respect others? To belittle the differences between faiths is also to belittle the importance of those faiths to those who hold them. If you ignore your own tradition and scriptures, you have nothing to discuss.

Pope John Paul II said, "a vital task before us is to show how our religious belief inspires peace, encourages solidarity, promotes justice and upholds liberty."

Know your own tradition! If you have no fidelity to your own tradition how can you respect others?

The great monotheistic faiths of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions share a common Abrahamic root. The West is rooted in Islam, because of Islam's role in preserving the Greek philosophical tradition, setting the basis for the Renaissance

Lack of knowledge of the depth and history of other faith traditions is a great problem, especially when other traditions lack knowledge of pacific Islam. There are so many common roots. Jews, Muslims and Christians lived together in Spain for 600 years, and made many contributions that were interfaith, not just from one faith. Thomas Aquinas gained the concept of 'common good' from Greek philosophy, via Averoes and Muslim scholars in Spain.

Islamic contributions in medicine, maths, science, astronomy, architecture, and law are immense – the Islamic world between the 9th and 13th Centuries was a centre of learning and wisdom nurturing libraries and the quest for knowledge, preserving the heritage of Greek philosophers and Indian mathematicians. Islam is part of our past and present in all fields of human endeavour. It helped forge modern Europe – so the West is rooted in Islam.

The world is local and global.

It is complex. We know the slogan "think global, act local" but I would like to add a slogan from Thomas Aquinas, "The art of wisdom is in translating the complex into the naturally clear and simple – without reducing it to the naively simplistic."

Our world is interdependent. There are 67 zones of conflict and war at present on our planet – all contribute a major challenge to faith, to increase understanding between

peoples, especially as in many of these conflicts religion is an ingredient. We need to remember that what happens thousands of miles away affects what happens in our neighbourhood. The reason is that we are literally neighbours – people from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh live next door – we share the streets of Leeds and Bradford.

We need to work to build community.

We need to be vigilant against racism.

But we also need to work to build community, not the virtual community of the internet but basic community building creating a relationship in reality between neighbours. Many British people have not visited Islamic centres – they look on them as 'foreign.' But the Islamic tradition of participation and consultation – of Shura – has a major contribution to make. Islam was centuries ahead in giving rights to women, such as the right to divorce.

"The capacity of a diverse neighbourhood to be stable depends fundamentally on its quality of life, and this includes both economic and physical conditions, and the values and attitudes fostered by community institutions."

Neighbourhood renewal is the key.

We all need a common narrative, communities of memory – rituals and feast days are ways that communities preserve ties to their homeland and constantly renew the values associated with the birthplace of their ancestors. It's likely that the source of moral renewal will come at the hands of immigrants – preserving their cultural heritage while contributing to the new society.

We have to choose between diversity and controversy.

Diversity can be a source of anxiety, not a source of inclusiveness.

Stories are very important. In *Birds of Heaven*, Ben Okri said, “stories are the secret reservoir of values, change the stories’ individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations. If they tell themselves stories that are lies they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will set their histories free.”

The story of Britain as a green, pleasant, rural, unchanging, conflict free land is not true. Nor is the discourse of Britain as a single, homogenous country. Britain is a country of communities and citizens, and like all countries its story is changing and complex, changing in response to internal dynamics, social and economic change, interactions with other countries and globalisation. The boundaries between communities are ‘fuzzy’ – people live with multiple communities, and cities are the places where those multiple communities meet, mingle, negotiate and argue about their common life and what makes a good society.

Diversity can be a source of anxiety, not a source of inclusiveness. People may fear that outsiders have moved in and will replace us. They may move out beyond the ring road, in a process of invasion and succession.

However a society where there is religious faith will always, in my view, be inherently more likely to pursue the good of humankind;

In a speech to the Global Ethics Foundation at Tübingen two years ago, Tony Blair said, “Religion has often resulted in bigotry. But so has political ideology. However a society where there is religious faith will always, in my view, be inherently more likely to pursue the good of humankind; and the less it sees reason as its enemy, the quicker it will get there.

Religions can help to make our communities of values. The inevitability of globalisation demands a parallel globalisation of our best ethical values; not a distilling or unnecessary uniformity of the rich values that make up our communities of faith. But the basic premises of our faiths; solidarity; justice; peace and the dignity of the human person are what we need in the age of globalisation.”

Robert Bellal said, “A genuine community of memory will tell painful stories of shared suffering that sometimes creates deeper identities than success.” Interfaith “communities of memory” can have longstanding shared narratives based on common experiences.

Exploring the Place of faith Communities in Public Life

Rumman Ahmed

Rumman Ahmed is a founder member of the Race Relations Forum at the Foreign Office. He is the Community Relations Adviser in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

For a long time there has been a refusal to acknowledge the considerable contribution that faith communities bring to the well-being of society, both spiritual and material. But I think, notwithstanding recent events, we have turned the corner. Public authorities and the broader civil society are awakening up to the need to engage with the reality of multi-faith Britain today. Of course, there is still some resistance from certain quarters to the involvement of religion in any shape or form in public affairs. But they cannot and shall not stop and idea whose time has come.

It is important to explain why I chose to talk on this and also where I am coming from. Britain, today, is becoming an increasingly diverse society. By diversity I do not just mean that there are people of different ethnicities residing here. But there are also more people of various faiths present in our midst than there have been for a long, long time.

Faith as a defining feature of many local communities has been neglected for too long. Fortunately, governments and other public agencies and individuals are increasingly recognising the valuable work these groups and organisations undertake. I would like to relate a grass roots example of interfaith co-operation undertaken in Leeds which demonstrates how faith is thriving in various parts of Britain and using its assets to develop valuable community resources.

Faith Together in Leeds 11 is a Single regeneration Budget partnership between the local Muslim community and the church. The partnership will build a healthy living centre on the existing site of an old church, from which a variety of community services will be provided in the areas of education, training, health, social services and regeneration. These highlights how faith is playing an important role in service provision, and perhaps will increasingly be relied on to do so.

This is not surprising as all the world's major faiths and other religious and spiritual traditions have a significant presence in Britain. Sometime ago I was at Longsight, Manchester and there were two mosques next to each other. I wondered aloud to my friend. What's the purpose of having two mosques side by side? Soon I had my answer. Both the mosques were packed for the Friday afternoon congregational prayers. People came, offered their prayers and left quietly. And during the week various activities take place, and I am sure these scenes are repeated not only for Muslims, but also for people of other faith traditions, at their appropriate prayer times, right across the country in inner cities and outer suburbs. This is another example of how faith is thriving amongst some communities in Britain.

This morning I want to highlight this aspect of our community life in British society. But I also want to share with you some of my own experiences in community development and regeneration over many years. My work in Britain has been largely inner city regeneration and community development. I have worked with people from diverse origins and backgrounds. In my current job at Kensington and Chelsea, my area of work encompasses 110 different nationalities, where 100 languages are spoken and people of all faith traditions have a presence.

Whether I am working with the Moslem community or the Serbian Orthodox community, I have to take on board their faith perspectives because quite often many of the services provided are done so from their places of worship. Hence we need to look anew at the role and function of many places of worship. As increasingly we find that such institutions are providing a wide range of valuable services to their communities.

Why should we involve Faith Communities?

There are many strategic and moral reasons why faith communities should be encouraged to participate in development and regeneration work through engagement in their own localities. Here are but a few:

- Faith communities have long been excluded, or excluded themselves, from the different schemes and initiatives happening in our local communities. We need to redress this imbalance.
- Faith is an important factor in the construction of identity and belonging.
- Regular meetings within a faith setting provide many individuals with a sense of solidarity and empowerment that aids the community development and regeneration process.
- Belonging to a faith tradition can provide vital personal support networks, which will sometimes meet very real emotional, social or economic needs.
- Faith is increasingly being seen as a unifying factor and a dominant feature in determining community and social action in many minority communities, and we should use it as a means of drawing people together around common issues.
- Differences, including those associated with faith are to be celebrated and valued.
- It is important not only to use development and regeneration to tackle colour racism but also cultural racism manifested in stereotyping and discrimination of particular

faith/religious groupings in our society e.g. Islamophobia.

- Compared to community organisations, faith communities can often be better resourced, have a broader base of membership and a wider range of community contacts. They can help partnerships to understand the needs and concerns of people living in a particular area and will often be interested in sponsoring projects.
- Potential to reach a wider audience as many faith communities cut across ethnic and racial categories.
- The faith networks that many are part of are potentially a powerful lobby for bringing about social justice.

Removing Potential Barriers to Working with Faith Communities

As with all good development practice, a practitioner needs to be aware of the factors that may impede working with different communities or groups. When planning to involve faith communities, a number of special considerations need to be taken on board as, historically, various barriers have existed which have prevented accurate information from being disseminated and have led to ineffective consultation. These barriers include:

- Lack of consideration of community involvement, religious and cultural issues. For instance, simple research into holy days could lead to planning in advance in order to avoid clashes.
- Failure to acknowledge consultations with faith communities that may have had an adverse impact.
- Due to the prevalence of religious discrimination and stereotyping, faith communities may have misconceptions about other communities that impede their ability to work with these groups.
- Our own prejudice about taking a faith based approach.

Good practice

I would like to outline some good practice for people involved in development who want to engage with faith communities:

- Before engaging in discussions with representatives of groups, it is advisable to find out about their beliefs. However, lack of knowledge should not stop us from talking to people. An open, positive approach to people will usually produce a positive response. And in view of recent events it is so important that we start the dialogue now.
- Consideration should be given as to whether to involve faith communities in mainstream community wide consultations. We need to seek the guidance of those who are wishing to become involved as to their preferred approach.
- Be aware of the regular days and times of worship of the different faith groups when organising meetings and events.
- Be sensitive to the choice of venue and the types of food that are provided.
- There may be merit in establishing particular structures such as a multi-faith forum through which faith communities can express their views. Check first with the Inter-Faith Forum for the UK to see if there are existing initiatives in your area.
- Think carefully how the appointment of partnership boards of representatives of any one faith will be perceived by people of other faiths or from different traditions of the same faith.
- Ensure there are effective mechanisms in place to allow ongoing consultation with all groups.

Conclusion

- In the years to come the faith communities in Britain will play an increasing role in public life and civil society. In the case of the Muslim community in Britain there is already a very vibrant, internal, civil society which is providing a wide range of services.
- Faith based organisations can make a significant contribution to community development and regeneration work. This has often been overlooked by development practitioners and policy makers.

- Policy makers both in Britain and elsewhere are now increasingly recognising the benefits of including faith based organisations and communities in the development process. Recent governmental initiatives such as *Local Strategic Partnerships* and *New Deal for Communities* are encouraged to include faith based organisations in the consultations and in the forming of partnerships.
- Development practitioners need to acknowledge this and thus develop effective partnerships with faith communities.
- And finally, a holistic approach to community development and regeneration must be adopted which is all-inclusive and necessarily encompasses faith participation.

I would like to end with three meditational verses by the Muslim mystic poet most widely read in the West, Jalaluddin Rumi, who was born in Balkh, Afghanistan, in the 13th century.

Three Meditational verses

By Jalaluddin Rumi

Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.

Don't try to see through the distances.

That's not for human beings. Move within, but don't move the way fear makes you move.

Something opens our wings.

Something makes boredom and hurt disappear.

Someone fills the cup in front of us. We taste only sacredness.

**I am so small I can barely be seen.
How can this great love be inside me?
Look at your eyes. They are small,
But they see enormous things.**

The Workshops

The publication of Faith and Community in 4th February 2002 was a landmark in the life of faith communities in England and Wales. Members of the faith communities, people in local Government and other public agencies and individuals from organisations with an interest in engaging faith communities were invited to explore the report.

Part of the day in Blackburn was devoted to workshops. These were opportunities to list to stories of examples of faith communities already working in Partnership. Participants were invited to decide on practical steps they could take towards engagement in their own localities.

Faith Communities and Local Strategic Partnerships

Led by Martin Miller, Partnership Development Officer, Diocese of Manchester

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have developed from the experience of regeneration going back over forty years. They are a partnership of stakeholders; a single body, bringing together public, private, voluntary, and community sectors for strategic decision making. They are non-statutory/non executive and operate strategically but are close to neighbourhoods and people. LSP's are aligned with local authority boundaries and this has a major implication for faith communities.

Whilst Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is targeted at areas which have LSP's it is expected that other funds may also follow (ERDF is not proposed to follow LSP areas).

The overall aim is to **“align services, programmes and initiatives of all providers within each of the sectors”**. This is in order to reduce duplication.

LSP's have been given 4 specific tasks:

1. Prepare the Community Strategy - communities are now decision makers
2. *Rationalise plans and partnerships – whilst involving all stake holders
3. Aid developments of Local Public Service Agreements – some are nationally defined and some locally
4. Develop and deliver local neighbourhoods renewal schemes

This does not seek to increase partnerships but rationalise and plug gaps. There is a lot of focus on developing and delivering local neighbourhood renewal schemes because of the sums of money involved. For example the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund £46m within City of Manchester is £800m across the country over 3 years.

The government has sought ways to effectively involve the breadth of the voluntary and community sector in these tasks and has chosen to set up networks. These are for consultation, outreach to all groups, capacity building and the selection of LSP representation.

The role of Faith Communities is clear in government thinking: *to involve hard to reach groups and providing resources of buildings and volunteers.*

But faith communities must decide their own agenda. It is recognised that Faith communities are on the ground. When others leave a locality, they remain.

Faith Communities interact at three levels:

- 1 as members of boards /steering groups
- 2 as part of community networks
- 3 as participants in local regeneration schemes

(3, is in part developing buildings, rationalising buildings and seeking joint use.)

Faith Representation in LSP's depends on the local context. In some areas places are allocated to specific faith communities. In others places are allocated to a faith network where people of faith represent peoples of faiths. Again in some places if you are involved then you have a place.

The role of a *Partnership Development Officer* is to promote faith group involvement in partnerships with public, private and voluntary sector groups. It is also to develop relationships *between* faith groups and to develop those relationships with key people in the different sectors.

The post can be established using different models such as:

- Wholly owned by the faith community
- Owned by the local interfaith forum
- Owned by the community network
- Shared ownership by the network and faith communities

Some issues to consider:

What interfaith groups already exist?

1. Will the existing interfaith group be proactive regarding regeneration issues
2. What do we mean by interfaith groups?
3. What specific tasks need to be addressed re LSP's and the speed of development?

Questions raised by the group

- How do we adopt a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' policy?
- Are Pagans included in the term 'Faith'?
- Do we follow the nine historic faiths pattern?
- What about the response of Local Authorities? They focus on multi culture and multi race. Do they understand *faith*?
- Local Authorities should differentiate between faith and race
- What about the weighting of different faith groups?
- Should this agenda be driven by the major denominations?

Some final thoughts

1. Faith communities need to look to their common values and play a full role in the voluntary sector
2. The government is looking for service providers alongside statutory providers.

Regeneration: Lessons Learned from the Last Ten Years

Led by Professor Hilary Russell, Department of European Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moore's University.

Hilary traced the evolution of regeneration policy from an urban context to the present understanding of deprivation. She went on to list general trends in policy since the sixties. What had begun as a 'welfarist' approach by statutory agencies had developed into attempts to involve other stakeholders in targeting mainstream budgets.

GENERAL TRENDS

- 1960s & 70s - welfarist approach
- 1977 - White Paper recognition of structural decline
- 1979 - Action for Cities – enterprise led
- 1992 - towards a partnership-based, comprehensive approach
- 1997 - joining up
- 2000 - becoming mainstream

Lessons learned were as follows:

- deprivation & decline not confined to inner cities
- social exclusion is multi-faceted, interrelated & cumulative
- diverse circumstances require flexible policy responses
- policies needed at different spatial levels
- mainstream more important than 'funny money'
- start from issues - focus on outcomes

The importance of partnership working was a major development and much had been learned about the nature of community involvement:

- communities not homogenous
- community and voluntary sectors
- trust within the sector
- different roles - partner, deliverer, advocate, critical friend
- involvement as a goal and way of working
- active capacity building for involving the community.

It was in this context that Hilary went on to address the fundamental question: **Why involve Faith Communities?** It was increasingly recognised, she said, that the permanence and commitment of Faith Communities make them ideally suited to partnership working as part of the wider voluntary/community sector. They bring a multiplicity of skills, resources and experience to the process.

But above all, *faith communities themselves can be re-vitalised by engaging in a faith-dialogue based on the experience of day-to-day living in the local community.*

General Discussion

The following points were made:

- LSPs involve all sectors in regeneration reinforcing the contribution of individual partners.
- Faith communities can generate models and train people.
- Government attempts to engage with faith communities overnight are not realistic. People are labelled as troublemakers if they do not tow the line. Why is much consultation so unconvincing? Is it done on purpose? Faith communities are more likely to get involved if they know that their voices will be heard.
- There is a need for an unadulterated version of events on the ground to be heard by statutory bodies.
- Given a voice and power and resources, grassroots communities can imagine what can be done and make it happen. Currently the chair/servicing role lies with Local Authorities who give their own spin on the Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda. The LSP agenda is about giving power away.
- Faith communities have a prophetic role to play in influencing policy but they may no longer have the resources to fund projects.
- *Who currently benefits from the regeneration 'boom'?* Professionals, consultants and builders (with suits, briefcases, laptops and cars). It is when they go home that real life begins in communities. In turn, do faith communities take for granted their rootedness in local communities? LSPs challenge faith communities to practice accountability and transparency within their own structures.
- Individual faith community representatives need to demonstrate that they represent a constituency rather than being a face that enables the L.A. to tick a box.
- There are interesting models in East Germany of faith communities relating to the State in critical solidarity.

From Inter Faith Group to Council of Faith, “What’s the Difference?”

Led by Canon Michael Wolfe and Dr Ajit Kumar of the Merseyside Council of Faiths

Canon Michael Wolfe outlined the formation of Liverpool Inter Faith Group, following the Liverpool Garden Festival in late 1980s. Dr Ajit Kumar gave a brief history of Merseyside Council of Faiths. This was an initiative of the faith communities themselves. In 1988 Michael Langrish, at that time Bishop of Birkenhead, initiated the concept of forming Council of Faiths.

After a much deliberation and discussion with leaders of other faith communities, a constitution was formed and aims and objectives were set out. This culminated in the formal launch of the Council in May 2001.

The Local Authority was extremely supportive of the event and offered Liverpool Town Hall as the setting for this high profile occasion. The Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside, who serves as the Forum's patron, was in attendance with other dignitaries, along with people from every walk of life. Brian Pearce of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom spoke.

The event was highly successful and celebratory in tone. Children from each faith community performed a cultural display typical of their own faith tradition. Each faith group contributed food to the splendid buffet that was served by Town Hall staff. The programme was very well received.

What is the difference?

The Inter Faith Group continues to meet as a forum to promote mutual understanding. Its meetings are open. People attend to explore with members of other faiths their own spiritual journey. This essential on-going process is in no way eclipsed by the existence of **the Council of Faiths**.

The role of each body is complementary. The Council is a group of designated representatives from each faith tradition organised in such a way that no one faith community predominates. The Council of Faiths is functional. It is *a formal working body*. It can be consulted by local authorities and other public agencies and is able to articulate the concerns and problems of religious minorities. It facilitates appointments and official representation. Faith community representation on Local Strategic Partnerships is an obvious example. Issues concerning hospital chaplaincies and burial customs are another, along with Remembrance Day events. The Council is able to promote an understanding within the *wider community* both for the common ground between faith communities and also their unique characteristics. It works to eradicate fear and suspicion between the faith communities and between all faith communities and wider society. Another function of the Council is to network with other interfaith bodies at regional and national level.

Dr Ajit Kumar explained that the organisation is still at its infancy but that feedback was encouraging. Faith communities as a group do have a place in public life. How can they contribute?

Key factors:

1. Reducing crime and increasing safety in places of worship.
2. Improving housing and the environment.
3. Promoting lifelong learning within different faith groups.
4. Improving quality of life.
5. Promoting theological, cultural and social activities so that we can contribute towards creating a multi-racial, and multi-cultural society.
6. Representation on Local Strategic Partnerships and as a 'one stop shop' for other public agencies increasingly required to consult with faith communities.

There followed an interesting *discussion* among the participants. The main topics discussed were:

1. Refugee and asylum seeker problems.
2. Immigration and legislation.
3. Involvement of grass roots.

After a lively debate the group concurred that faith communities as a united group can better influence appropriate agencies and authorities.

Women and Faith - An Islamic Perspective

Dr Sara Saigol from the British Islamic Society led the workshop.

Sara opened by saying how much she regrets that there needs to be a workshop on Muslim women at all, because they are equal with men and do not need special attention. She then began the workshop by asking the group for five images that would describe their perception of Muslim women.

These were

1. Subordinate
2. Home manager
3. Tenacious
4. Brave
5. Faceless

Sara's were

1. Prayer
2. Involved
3. Community
4. Mother
5. Charitv

Sara quoted from the Koran:

O Mankind, be careful of your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul from its mate and from them both have spread abroad a multitude of men and women. (Koran 4:1)

It is also difficult to speak of women as one single group when they are, in fact, a heterogeneous group coming from backgrounds that span from Africa to China, Eastern Europe to Pakistan. There are also diverse practices within each group because of geographical and cultural differences. (There are 56 different types of Islam in Britain.)

Muslim women and men are called to the pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge is considered the pathway to God. The first female scholar in Islam was the wife of the prophet Muhammad. Islamic teaching also emphasises the role of the family. It is a place where there is consultation, mercy, compassion, love, obedience among all the members but motherhood is invested with a particular nobility and honour. Sara pointed out that forced marriages are against the teaching of Islam. When they occur they are a result of village cultural practice rather than being part of Islam itself. Marriages are arranged but the marriage only takes place with the mutual consent of both spouses.

Some questions were asked about women's dress. Is it a sign of subordination? The response was a very emphatic 'No'. On the contrary it is a mark of strong identity and expresses the importance of modesty.

Citizenship is also a high value for Muslims. It is practised with loyalty and commitment within the country in which they live. Muslims will do all in their power, within the teaching of their religion, to live as citizens in their own neighbourhood. There is no sanction in Islam for disengagement from common concerns be they political, economic or communal. Justice is in the interest of everyone.

In conclusion Sara noted that all human beings grapple with the same global issues which include the effects on some of capitalism, third world debt, the war on terrorism. Locally we are concerned about crime, the needs of our young people, family breakdown. Muslims can offer experiences and insights for the betterment of Britain and the world. But this can only happen in a climate of mutual trust, respect and listening. First of all we need to get to know one another. The workshop was a first step.

A Local Authority's Initiative: Interfaith Developmental Work in Blackburn with Darwen.

FACILITATORS: Fawad Bhatti, Garth Hodgkinson.

Learning objective: *To experiences an understanding of local authority faith community interaction.*

Background

Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council is a local initiative based on a national trend. One of BwD's (corporate) Community Plan's key objective is to 'Enhance Cultural Harmony'. A goal of this plan was to set up the Interfaith Council. Officially launched with full Borough Council backing in 1999, members came together in May 2000, including minority faiths also. The Development Officer was appointed in August 2000 to act as a bridge between faith groups and the local authority.

Achievements

Regular meetings (6 per year), inclusive of minority faiths not previously recognised by the local authority in their consultations.

Public events (e.g. Holocaust Day, September 11th Prayer Ceremony)

Creating a full-time post of Interfaith Development Officer, to provide a single point of contact for advice to local authority officers on faith communities and give faith communities a single point of contact for approaching the local authority.

Alliances with other multifaith bodies (regional & national).

Faith representation on various committees, forums & partnerships locally.

Regular visits to places of worship.

Working with young people (group visit to Northern Ireland)

Supporting local faith-based community work (THOMAS, Churches' Action)

Discussion points on how faith groups could approach local authorities

A flexible approach was needed when faith groups liase with local authorities. Emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity to procure funding.

Current world politics necessitated more religious awareness. Social needs of people (whom local authorities 'serve') include faith needs.

Involvement of faith communities is increasingly being recognised by national government policy. Local authorities are being encouraged to involve them more through local strategic partnership and various funding initiatives

There are now 18 Interfaith Officers working for local authorities & faith communities. There are many examples of good practice.

Blackburn with Darwen had the good fortune of having an inter-faith 'champion' to ensure project went ahead. High level backing can help to cut through bureaucratic 'red tape'.

The Inter-faith dimension should be promoted across all services involved with young people e.g. Family Centres.

Building Bridges: an innovative approach to interfaith work in Nelson

Workshop leaders: Damien Duggan, Rauf Bashir, Anuradha Srivastava

Background: There are two wards in Nelson & Brierfield. Fear and misunderstanding between faith communities brought local people together at inter-faith meetings. In 2001 three workers were employed: one Christian, one Moslem and one Hindu. A series of monthly meetings with speakers in local community centres followed. An educational programme on citizenship was piloted by the team in two secondary schools and four primary schools to look at topics such as stereotyping and globalisation. It is hoped to extend the scheme across Nelson.

There is a database of 600 contacts with a Newsletter to keep them informed. Post September 11th a public interfaith event was organised with three minutes silence.

An Eid party was organised before Christmas for children from two schools, one white Christian and one Asian Moslem.

An Interfaith resources centre has been opened. The project has an independent management committee in which neither Christian Muslim nor Hindu predominate.

Funding & Resourcing: Initial funding for the project came from the Christian Churches: the Church Urban Fund, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church. From September 200 the project was supported for 18 months by SRB 5 which allowed the present structure to be established. All this funding came to an end in on March 31st 2002! However, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding has been secured for two further years. Funding is also being sought from the Children's Fund. One full time staff member and two part time workers are currently employed in order to build up a representative faith network and a forum for faith leaders in the locality.

Local Strategic Partnership & Community Empowerment Fund: The Community Empowerment Fund exists specifically to aid networking and capacity building. The Neighbourhood Renewal programme indicates that faith communities and interfaith groups are eligible for such funding. In the case of Building Bridges, involvement in the Local Strategic Partnership has been crucial. There were already good relations with the local council that has an Asian leader and several councillors. Building Bridges convinced the LSP that they were the most appropriate organisation to deliver faith community representation with one seat out of the fifty-one members. The challenge now is to ensure that this seat is truly representative. To that end Building Bridges are setting up the faith forum.

COMMUNITY ACTION FURNESS

A church/community initiative in Cumbria

Colin Laxon and Ann Diss offered a brief presentation on the community enterprise initiatives which have been developed by Community Action Furness in the Barrow and Furness area.

Following this a discussion occurred covering the following areas:

- The balance between social and commercial aims within social enterprise with consideration of whether it was possible to reconcile both pursuits.
- The reality and sacrifices necessary to achieve self-sustainability for community based enterprises.
- The extent to which central government funding should be invested in building the capacity of community and social enterprises.
- Whether some essential support work with very vulnerable groups should always be supported by Central Government/charitable sources

Question Time

The Conference ended with a gathering of all the participants with a panel of speakers. These included keynote speakers, workshop leaders as well as Louise Ellman MP and Canon Stephen Little, from the Manchester Diocesan Board of Ministry and Society.

Members of the panel: John Battle M.P., Rumman Ahmed, Louise Ellman M.P., Garth Hodgkinson (Blackburn & Darwen Borough Council), Professor Hilary Russell, Canon Stephen Little. Chair: Monsignor John Devine.

The panel considered the following questions submitted by workshops:

1. Should not the document *Faith and Community* become local government policy?
2. Can Government of any party ever deliver more than rhetoric in terms of social policy?
3. Do secular value systems (Human Rights, Ecology etc) have anything to teach Faith Communities?

4. Why do we (and Local Authorities) confuse Multi Cultural, Multi Ethnic and Multi Faith agendas? How can we get over this?
5. How seriously will Faith perspectives on common issues be taken at local and national levels? When will the wider community (Local Authorities, Employers etc) seriously address the problem of minority faith community Holy Days?
6. How can Faith Communities participate in Local Strategic Partnerships avoiding co-option (collusion) but being “critical friends”?
7. Has the panel any practical suggestions on how to encourage ordinary people to understand the different faith communities of their neighbours and to develop partnerships for community action

In the course of the discussion Louise Ellman M.P. spoke of her experience growing up as a member of a minority faith community. She believed that faith communities still have a constructive and valuable contribution to make to the wider community in multicultural Britain.

Conference Evaluation

Of the 112 people who attended the conference 57 completed an evaluation for responses to the question “**What did you think of today’s conference?**” were as follows:

	Unacceptable	Disappointing	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Speakers?			3	22	28
Workshops?			8	19	21
Panel?*			3	19	5
Venue?			13	22	18
Facilities?	1**		9	24	18
Food?			11	24	18

* Many participants completed their evaluation *before* the Panel session

**This response referred to the lack of a raised platform in the conference chamber

What next?

Of the 57 participants who completed the questionnaire 45 were in favour of the establishment of a **regional interfaith voice**. This represents 78% support. It is proposed, therefore, to recruit an advisory group drawn from each faith community to plan the establishment of a **Regional Interfaith Forum**. Individuals from among the participants at the Blackburn conference as well as members of interfaith bodies at sub regional and local levels will be invited to participate.

Database and Mapping Exercise

The contribution that faith communities make to the common good is underestimated, not least by faith communities themselves. There are many stories of good practise to be told. Without statistical data, however, it is difficult to engage with public agencies and other bodies. There is a need for a reliable database of faith communities in the region along with a survey to map the extent of faith group involvement in community projects. Discussions are underway to secure funding for such an exercise. A preliminary task for the advisory group will be to monitor the project. It is hoped that publication of the results of the survey will coincide with the launch of a NW Regional Interfaith Forum in April/May 2003.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Freda Angus	Council of Christians & Jews, Liverpool
Nasir Ahmed	Youth Worker
Rumman Ahmed, Community Relation's Adviser	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Waheda Ahmed	Racial Equality Council
Rev R Anning	Widnes Methodist Church
Revd Christopher Baker	William Temple Foundation
The Revd Dale Barton	Churches Together in Lancs., Interfaith Advisor
Rauf Bashir	Building Bridges, Nelson
Joy Bates	East Midlands Churches Forum
John Battle MP	Prime Minister's representative on interfaith dialogue
The Revd Peter Brain	United Reformed Church, Moderator, NW Synod
Bernard Caine	St. Aidan's Roman Catholic Church
Gil Chimon	Voluntary Sector North West
Dr Mahmoud Chandia	Lancashire Council of Mosques
Denis Chisunka	New Apostolic Church, Manchester
Mrs Chudasama	Blackburn Hindu Centre
Raymond Cochrane	Methodist Church, Manchester Metropolitan University
Fawad Bhatti	Interfaith Development Officer, Blackburn with Darwen B.C.
Rev Andrew Dawson	Manchester Board for Ministry and Society
Ashok G. Dayal	Blackburn Hindu Centre
Sister Bernadette Deegan	Mission in the Economy, Warrington
Monsignor John Devine	Churches' Officer for the North West
Damien Duggan	Building Bridges, Nelson
Sandra Dutson	Congregational Federation
Louise Ellman MP	Liverpool, Riverside
Abdul Fass	Arabic Cultural Foundation, Liverpool
Kashaff Feroza	Nelson, Lancs
Rev Dr John Findon	Rector of Bury
Edwin Fleming	Mossley Hill Parish Church, Liverpool
Joan Fletcher	Council for Christians & Jews, Liverpool
Ron Fletcher	Council for Christians & Jews, Liverpool
Rt. Revd John Goddard	Bishop of Burnley
Angela Green	Experience Corps
Major Jacqui Griffiths	The Salvation Army, Bootle
Jane Groves	Liverpool Partnership Group
Stephen Health	Kirkham Methodist Church
Richard Helmn	Social Inclusion Officer Wigan MBC
A Hisham	Manchester
Joyce Humphries	Manchester Board for Ministry and Society
Farooq Hussain	
Dr Tariq Idris	Hale Barns, Cheshire
Gazala Javaid	Islamic Society of Britain
Phil Jump	North West Baptist Union
Marie Kearney	Liverpool Habitat for Humanity
The Revd Kevin Kelly	Parish Priest, Widnes
Rev Stephen Kingsnorth	Churches Together in Warrington
Rev Peter Knowles	Churches Together in Lancashire

Dr Ajit Kumar	Merseyside Council of Faiths
Amjad Latif	Altrincham, Cheshire
Amina Latimer	Manchester Interfaith Forum
The Revd Ron Lewis	United Reformed Church
Canon Stephen Little	Board For Ministry & Society, Manchester
The Revd James McCartney	Those on the Margins of a Society, Blackburn
Ian McHugh	Bolton Interfaith Council
Nasir Mahmood	
Dr Ikram Malik	Building Bridges, Nelson
Jacqui Mallinson	Board of Social Responsibility, Diocese of Blackburn
Janice Mason	Urban Officer, Diocese of Chester
Ayesha Mehr	Hale Barns, Cheshire
Mr Mehta	Hindu Cultural Association, Liverpool
Mrs Mehta	Hindu Cultural Association, Liverpool
Councillor John Milburn	Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Martin Miller	Partnership Development Officer, Diocese of Manchester
Mr Mistry	Bolton Hindu Forum
Mr S Merai	Bolton Hindu Forum
The Revd Brenda Moore	United Reformed Church
Councillor Salim Mulla	Blackburn with Darwen B.C.Council
Sara Mumby	Wigan and Leigh CVS
Councillor Vincent Murphy	Lancashire County Council
Panton Okon	House of Joy, Liverpool
Tunji Olaseinde	Yoruba Community Association, Liverpool
Mr Patel	Lancashire Council of Mosques
Alison Peacock	Board for Ministry and Society, Manchester
Madhuben Pandya	Blackburn Hindu Centre
Madhuben B. Parmar	Blackburn Hindu Centre
Brian Pearce OBE	The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom
Graeme Pollard	Blackburn Diocese
David Preston	Manager, BT North West Region
Mr Qureshi	Lancashire Council of Mosques
Anuradha Srrrrrivastava	Building Bridges, Blackburn
Khuram Raja	
Shaukat Rashid	Warrington Islamic Society
Canon Michael Ratcliffe	
Canon David Rayner	Inner Cities Religious Council <u>DTLR</u>
Sue Reid	Deputy Leader, Blackburn with Darwen B.C.
Judy Robinson	Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation
Esmond Rosen	Liverpool Jewish Youth and Community Centre
Professor Hilary Russell	European Institute for Urban Affairs
Ultan Russell	Director for Social Responsibility, Liverpool Diocese
Dr F Sabour	Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Preston
Mrs Joy Sabour	Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Preston
Kamar Saddique	
Dr Sara Saigol	Islamic Society of Britain
Shahid Saleem	Hale Barns, Cheshire
Ed Saville	Member of B.S.R
The Revd Derek Seber	North West Multi-faith Tourism Association
Anne Selby	Wildlife Trust
Bev Sellen	Community Development Officer Stockport MBC

Javaid Shafi	Hale Barns, Cheshire
Naveed Shah	
Willie Slavin	Howgill Family Centre
Alan Smith	Community Cohesion Team, Home Office
Helen Smith	Wigan and Leigh CVS
Ken Smith	Experience Corps
Angela Stephenson	St Marks URC
Anne Stewart	Community Pride
Safdar Sultan	Warrington Islamic Society
Rev Philip Sumner	Oldham Interfaith Forum
Ishwer Tailor	Preston Gujarat Hindu Society
Sally Thomas	United Reform Church and Building Bridges
Andrew Threlfall	Economic & Social Partners, Collinson Assoc
Rev Geoff Townsend	Westbury Gardens URC, Blackburn
Praful Upadhyay	Hindu Society, Lancashire and Morecambe
Lynn Wallace	Mersey Volunteer Bureau
Sister Margaret Walsh	Luther King House, Manchester
The Revd Mark Waters	Community Facilitator, GONW
Alison Wilkins	Co-ordinator, Bury Strategic Partnership
The Revd Martin Wilson	Social Responsibility Officer, Leicester Diocese
Rev Stephen Wilson	St. George's Church, Hyde
Canon Michael M Wolfe	Merseyside Council of Faiths
Revd Christopher Wren	Blackpool Faiths Forum

The document '*Faith and Community : a good practice guide for local authorities*', published by the Local Government Association can be downloaded from their website at **www.lga.gov.uk**