

supporting faith in action in the south west

Welcome to *faithnetsouthwest*

faithnetsouthwest encourages people of faith to work together, and with others, on community matters across the south west.

If you want to find new contacts, establish links with other organisations, weed out information relevant to you, get advice and assistance on developing your group, information on funding sources, *faithnetsouthwest* can help. We work with churches and faith groups, with regional bodies, local authorities, local networks, volunteers and local partnerships working to serve their communities in a variety of ways.

In the last few months *faithnetsouthwest* has undertaken a comprehensive survey of faith groups in the

region and we are now analysing the replies to build a picture of faith groups in the south west and the contribution they make to their communities. We will be presenting our report at the *faithnetsouthwest* conference in Taunton in June (see page 4).

faithnews aims to keep you in touch with faith in action across the region, and with regional bodies and resources. To help us make our publication useful to you, we need to know your views and needs: please send your comments to info@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

We hope you enjoy the first issue of our newsletter — please send us your news, plans and events for future editions, by email, on CD or floppy disk or on paper.

10,000 people visit Anne Frank exhibition

In March 2006 the Methodist District of Plymouth and Exeter, working with the Jewish community, held The Anne Frank Exhibition, which was attended by almost 10,000 people including pupils from 64 Somerset schools. At the opening session, half of the presentation time was spent on the hatred and prejudice of the Nazis. Then the focus shifted to our own time, with presentations by an Albanian Muslim girl who survived the Kosovo Albanian massacres and the brother of a Taunton teenager brutally murdered in September 2005.



Over the last two years, this Methodist District has worked to promote inter faith understanding. Courses have been held on Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, with local speakers, from inside the Faith Communities, and opportunities to visit a Synagogue, Mosque, or Buddhist Centre.

A Resource Pack has been designed to enhance understanding of Inter Faith Relations. The pack includes

1. *Faith Meeting Faith*, (2004), 30 questions asked and discussed about Inter Faith issues

2. *The Life We Share: a study pack on interfaith relations (2 CDs)* (2003)

3. Harris, E. (ed), (2002), *Paths of Faith*, nine World Faiths, eight pages for each

4. *Dialogue: A CMS study pack for use in small groups on Christian-Muslim relations with a video My Muslim Neighbour*, and material for four study sessions.

Ten copies of the Resource Pack are available for any Study Group to borrow – you don't have to be Methodist! See www.plyexetmethodist.org.uk

This information has been provided by Grahame Miles. For further information, or help using a Resource Pack please contact him. Email: bgmiles@btinternet.com Tel : 01752 348432.

Have you ever seen a living ghost?

They are nearer than you think

Imagine what it would be like to be stranded in a foreign country, perhaps with little grasp of the language, with nowhere to live, forbidden by law to earn a living and without the means to go home – even if “home” were a safe place to return to. For a growing number of people living in the UK, this is exactly what life is like. Increasing numbers of people refused asylum in the UK are removed from their accommodation within four weeks of refusal. They are forbidden to work and have all financial support withdrawn. They frequently lack the means to return home and ‘choose’ a life of destitution, rather than return to a country where they would fear for their safety. These are the Living Ghosts.

Living Ghosts is a new campaign run by Church Action on Poverty. Its aim is to bring about the end of destitution for asylum seekers. More than 100 people attended a special ‘hearing’ on 17th March 2006 in the Council Chambers in Bristol. They heard a series of moving presentations by asylum seekers and organisations working on their behalf. One of the main difficulties asylum seekers face is getting adequate legal representation. There were stories of

information not being passed from one solicitor to another. One asylum seeker had her case dismissed without even being aware that there had been a hearing—her solicitor had neglected to tell her!

A Plymouth project set up to help people who find themselves in this terrible situation is featured in the box below.

A number of agencies supporting refugees across the region are co-ordinating the South West campaign, with two main objectives:

- ◆ Lobbying for a national change in policy, to ensure a basic level of support for asylum seekers who are either awaiting a decision on their future status, or appealing against an initial decision
- ◆ Setting up local support systems locally

For more information about the Living Ghosts campaign and how you can help, contact David Maggs on 0117 955 7430 email: living@ccisr.org.uk

Church Action on Poverty www.church-poverty.org.uk

Winter refuge for asylum seekers

Churches Together in Plymouth (CTiP), working with specialist agencies, are providing a place of haven, food and overnight shelter for up to 12 destitute asylum seekers. The Refuge is supported and staffed by members of Plymouth’s faith communities under the auspices of CTiP.

The project is jointly managed by faith groups, refugee agencies and other organisations working with local homeless people.

Admittance to the refuge is only possible with a valid referral from one of the local agencies working with asylum seekers and refugees. Anyone with a known record of violence, drug or alcohol abuse, arson or sexual abuse will not be admitted. The Refuge Co-ordinator supports the refuge team in dealing with referring agencies and with difficult situations if they arise.

*For more information on the project and how it operates, contact:
The Refuge Co-ordinator, tel: 0790 3943537
Email: ctiprefuge@hotmail.co.uk*

Resources

✓ Earlier this year 578 organisations, including 25 in the South West, were awarded grants from the **Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund**, supported by the Cohesion and Faith Unit of the Home Office. The Fund, which has two key priorities, capacity building and interfaith activity, was heavily oversubscribed and additional funds will be available in 2006 - 07. **The next bidding round will be announced in June.**

Two of the funding programmes from the Big Lottery which are currently open:

✓ **Awards for All** – grants of between £300 and £10,000 for people to take part in art, sport, heritage and community activities, and projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community.

✓ **Reaching communities:** funds projects that respond to needs identified by communities, and actively involve them. These include geographic communities and also communities with shared interests, such as people with poor mental health, including those people or groups who are hard to reach.

Details from <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes>

Muslims and Jews share the airwaves

Home Office funding for new initiative

Bristol Muslim Cultural Society is developing an Internet based radio station designed to bring the local Muslim and Jewish communities together. It aims to help both communities to develop greater understanding and respect for one another. BCMS has received £50,000 from the Home Office's Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund to support the project.

The project, which was inspired by recent social gatherings of Jews and Muslims in the city, will be the first of its kind in the South West. It is hoped that by giving Muslims and Jews a vocal outlet, whilst also working together, people of both faiths, whether religious or not, will gain valuable insights into one another's lives and come to understand from one another why their ancestors, right up until the twentieth century, had always profited by working with and supporting one another.

Amer Salman, of BMCS, has said: "We offer our sincerest thanks to the Home Office for both their generosity and vision, and in their acknowledgment of the community and interfaith work of BMCS.

"We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the synagogues of Bristol who have been so supportive of this initiative and to the open minded and forward thinking Muslims and Jews of this city who have pushed for joint ventures so

enthusiastically, particularly Farooq Siddique and Martin Vegoda who initiated recent meetings. The hard work begins now, we pray that more will flock to support this unique opportunity."

Muslim/Jewish initiatives of this kind are a relatively new phenomenon; the most high profile project being Alif-Aleph (www.aauk.org) which was started by a group of Muslims and Jews in 2003.

We hope that Bristol, with its diverse religious, ethnic and cultural mix can go on to become a beacon of light for interfaith dialogue and initiatives.

For further information please contact:

Amer Salman, Bristol Muslim Cultural Society (BMCS) Ltd 101a St Marks Rd, Easton, Bristol BS5 6HY.

Tel/Fax 01179392559 Email bmcs@bmcs.org.uk

Mobile 07974016129

www.bmcs.org.uk



Rural Communities Working Together

FARMS Groups are local farmers' groups meeting together regularly to share ideas and problems together. Originally organised by Christian farming couples, they built a network of contacts among friends and neighbours so that as far as possible every farm in the district is represented. Now some of the groups have grown to include local villagers in their meetings – another step towards rebuilding communities badly damaged by economics, politics, diseases like FMD, BSE and a deep sense of loss.

Many of those working on the land now rarely see another person from dawn till dusk and these meetings have provided an oasis in the new rural desert. When "incomers" are included, many preconceived attitudes on both sides are understood for the first time.

Recent funding has allowed these groups to spread from Devon to Dorset, Wiltshire, Cornwall and Somerset. About 30 groups have been started of which 20 are currently running.

FARMS Groups are looking for church leaders in rural areas and Christian farming couples to help set up more groups.

Contact: John Wibberley on 01626 873159 / 873234 (South Devon, Cornwall, Somerset) or Nick Viney on 01929 422914 (North Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire)

Equality South West

The recent Equality Bill sets out plans for a single national Equality Body, bringing together members of different equalities communities, including Religion and Belief. In this region, Equality South West (ESW) has been established to bring all equality issues "under one roof" so that their opinions can impact on the work of a range of organisations. **faithnetsouthwest** provides the Religion and Belief Network for ESW and the Director sits on the ESW Board. We are grateful to ESW for support in producing this Newsletter.

From the Region

SW Regional Assembly

A full meeting of the Assembly was held on 10th March.

Transport Concern was expressed at likely cuts to train services following the new franchise to First Group, and lobbying continues to ensure that the Crossrail developments do not have a negative impact on rail services between London and the South West.

There was a very good level of consensus on the final adjustments to the *Regional Spatial Strategy*. The Assembly agreed to set a regional target of 22,000 new houses per year instead of the 25,000 which had been proposed. It was felt that 22,000 was a more realistic assessment of the region's environmental capacity.

Energy A Sustainable Energy Regional Strategic Review is now taking place to consider how the use and supply of energy in the South West can be made more sustainable. The review will consider activities in the region around renewable energy, security of supply, business resource efficiency, and domestic energy efficiency and fuel poverty. The SWRA will consider how the South West Regional Development Agency and other regional organisations are responding to regional needs.

The Region's Faith Communities are represented on the Assembly by Revd. Heather Pencavel, Tel: 0117 304 2299, email heather@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

For more information on the Regional Assembly, visit their website on www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/swra

Regional Conference on Faith Launch of Regional Mapping of Faith Communities

faith in action in the south west

Thursday 22nd June 2006, The Holiday Inn, Taunton

Keynote speaker: Judith Lempriere
Head of the Home Office Cohesion and Faiths Unit

Workshops and displays on three main themes:
Caring about People, Good Citizens & Relationship Building

If you would like to attend the Conference, please contact *faithnetsouthwest* on 0117 304 2298 or email info@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk



is a partnership of four organisations: ISR (The Churches Council for Industry & Social Responsibility), the Exeter Diocesan Council for Church & Society; the South West Council of Faiths and the South West Churches' Regional Forum.

Contact us ...

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Newton Abbot TQ12 4AA
Tel: 01626 200502

Local events

Cornwall Multi Faith Forum Launch

Tuesday 16th May, at 7.30pm,
County Hall, Truro

Community Halls Conference

Wednesday 17th May,
Creditor, Devon Cost: £17
Contact: gail@devonrcc.org.uk
Tel: 01392 383443

The Great Dorset Church Show

Sunday 11th June, 11.00 - 5.30
St Nicholas Church, Corfe Mullen

North Devon Churches Network Regeneration and Partnership

Tuesday 13th June, at 7.30pm
venue to be confirmed
Contact: clare@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

'Creating Links'

Devon Multi Faith Forum Launch

Tuesday 18th July, at 6.30pm
The Loop Centre, Exeter
Contact: jo.hooper@devon.gov.org

The South West Churches Regional Forum and Churches Together in England

Planning for Presence

Conference on New Housing Areas

on: Wednesday 24th May 2006
at: St James Church, Taunton

Chair: Anthea Cox

*Chair of the national Churches Co-ordinating
Group for New Communities and Coordinating
Secretary for Public Life and Social Justice in
the Methodist Church.*

Cost: £12 (to include lunch and drinks)

Further details and Booking Form from
Robin Dixon Email sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

Director

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Email info@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

Website www.faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

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