

supporting faith in action in the south west

Faith in Action in the South West!

This summer **faithnetsouthwest**, in partnership with the Government Office for the South West, held a very successful regional conference in Taunton - highlighting the contribution of faith groups to community support in the South West region. More than 130 people attended from many churches and diverse faith groups, public bodies and voluntary and community organisations.

The conference saw the launch of **faithnetsouthwest's** *Faith in Action* report, the first comprehensive regional survey of the contribution of faith groups to the wider community through provision of a variety of support services and resources.

The conference was ably chaired by Dr Harriet Crabtree of the Inter Faith Network for the UK and the keynote speaker was Mr Atul Patel, Deputy Director of the Cohesion and Faiths Unit at the newly formed Department for Communities and Local Government.

Key messages arising from the report and the conference were:

- Faith groups have a key role to play in creating vibrant communities, promoting greater understanding and supporting those most in need. Many people are unaware of the level of

support faith groups give to the wider community, particularly in rural areas where they may be the main resource.

- National, regional and local Government and other public bodies need to appreciate the diversity of faith communities, as well as the variety within each community.

- Faith groups need to work more in partnership with one another and with other organisations and networks of community groups and public bodies.

faithnetsouthwest has a key role to play in helping faith communities to work together and with partners regionally and locally.

The Faith in Action report is available from **faithnetsouthwest**. We welcome donations of £1.50 per copy for p&p. Cheques payable to ISR should be sent to the **faithnetsouthwest** Bristol office.



Atul Patel



Conference delegates enjoy a networking opportunity



A Multi Faith Forum for Devon

On Tuesday 18th July 40 people met to explore the potential of 'inter- and multi-faith' forums in Devon. One of the hottest evenings of the year, it was a far cry from the images of conflict in the name of religion in the news.

People from a wide range of faiths, traditions and beliefs gathered, representing the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh beliefs, plus Inter Faith and local authority bodies.

They listened to presentations about the positive work of faith communities, got a clearer picture of those communities in Devon and heard about the possible roles and structures for a county-wide forum. Workshops on these issues followed.

Key recommendations were made and a way ahead agreed. 25% of those present volunteered to join the Faith Initiatives Group, which planned the event with support from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.

The energy and commitment to develop a deeper understanding and ensure 'faith and belief' of all kinds is kept on society and public service agendas was clear.

The first of several follow up meetings has now taken place and plans are going ahead to draft a constitution for the forum.

Ed Moffatt, who holds the faith seat on the Devon Local Strategic Partnership, will share his experience with the members to help with the process of building the forum. The members will also hear presentations from different faith groups illustrating their individual experiences and use this information to create a plan for taking the forum forward.

*A report on the preliminary meeting has been produced and can be obtained, along with any further details about Devon Multi Faith Forum from the Newton Abbot office of **faithnetsouthwest:** contact Clare Mortimore on 01626 200503 . Email clare@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk*



Making Good Use of our Buildings

Ecclesiastical Property Solutions is an organisation helping religious groups source and manage suitable properties. EPS works with all faith groups. They have helped a Synagogue find a permanent home and have been asked to assist in finding a site or building suitable for a new Mosque.

EPS recently ran a training event for the Anglican Diocese of Bristol to encourage and inform Church leaders about managing church buildings and ways for Church communities to have buildings that serve the members and their mission objectives.

Too often religious groups have to contend with second rate buildings, designed for a past era, and without facilities to meet the requirements of contemporary society. EPS combines experience of the commercial property world with religious commitment and an understanding of faith communities' needs. This unique consultancy enables the built assets of faith groups to deliver the maximum benefit to their community.

for more information: www.abetterview.co.uk or phone 01398 351581

New Role for VCS

Government policy intends that public bodies and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) work together to support the wider community. The VCS will increasingly be contracted to provide public services. To this end, the capacity of the VCS is under review. Faith communities are part of the VCS and are already providing significant services as described in the *faithnetsouthwest* report *Faith in Action in the South West*.

The Somerset Voluntary and Community Sector Policy Commission comprises representatives from the VCS, the NHS, Somerset County Council and 5 district councils. Early in 2006 the Commission's consultant carried out a policy review involving extensive discussions with the VCS. *faithnetsouthwest* attended part of the consultation.

The consultant reported in August, and the Commission is recommending

- support of **local** delivery by the VCS with **countywide** coordination
- the VCS work together to agree a structure that will coordinate and manage services
- funding and reporting mechanisms be streamlined with responsibility devolved to the district authority level except for countywide organisations
- the VCS be consulted before decisions are made
- recognition that involving the VCS in consultation forums takes them away from providing services and they should be recompensed for this
- the VCS become the 'experts' in volunteering matters, with Volunteer Bureaux throughout the county

They noted that implementing these recommendations will involve a huge culture change: the public sector needs to relinquish some control of services and funds and the VCS must prepare itself for more responsibility. This will take time and patience but is a great opportunity for the VCS!

The faith sector is represented on SVSN through the Forum for Equality and Diversity in Somerset (FEDS). Discussions with Robin Dixon, County Ecumenical Officer who also sits on FEDS, John Clarke (Dean of Bath and Wells and Somerset Strategic Partnership), Somerset County Council Equalities Dept, *faithnetsouthwest* and others for the establishment of a Multi Faith Forum for the county are going ahead

GARAS offers Welcome to Refugees

GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) was set up by a group of volunteers, many from local churches, in 1999. It began as a drop-in centre extending a welcome and providing for the basic needs of the growing number of asylum seekers. The Social Responsibility Officer for the Diocese, Canon Adrian Slade, started the process and has remained involved ever since as the Chair of Trustees.

In 2000 GARAS had 2 members of staff, a co-ordinator and an advice worker responding to the needs expressed by those using the service. Six years on and they now have 5 members of staff, including 3 advice workers, one of whom is a Women's Advice Worker, for those who find it easier to work with another woman. They also provide counselling services as asylum seekers and refugees often find it hard to cope with the many traumas they have experienced.

GARAS now holds a drop-in 3 days a week, offering advice in many areas including: immigration, housing, education, health etc. They also work with Solicitors helping clients get the best support they can in an ever-changing field of work. Volunteers provide support by ensuring a continuing welcome and providing English classes at whatever level is required. GARAS also provides bedding and food for those with no support. Those with refugee status are supported as they become more established.

Faith groups give support in many ways, not least Harvest gifts, and giving throughout the years.

Since its conception, GARAS has striven to provide a 'safe-space' for those who need someone to listen to them and believe them after many experiences of being doubted and constantly questioned by authority. GARAS provides information and gives talks to groups, from Churches to Council organisations trying to change the perceptions of asylum issues perpetuated in the press.

For more information: contact GARAS at 01452 550528, or info@garas.org.uk

West Wiltshire Interfaith Group 'The Peace Cycle'

film & discussion on seeking peace in the Middle East
14th November 2006, 6.30, The Arc Theatre, Trowbridge

Please contact Farzana on 01225 868042 / 07834 812663 or
Farzana_Saker@yahoo.co.uk

Local Strategic Partnerships ...?

A Faith Rep says, Hang on in there!

LSP, LAA, Rural Pathfinder - help, I need a translator! As a faith representative on a community partnership you will come across more acronyms and jargon phrases than you might have thought possible, but hang on in there, the hard work of making sense of it is worth it for the sake of working in partnership with others to shape the future for the area in which you live.

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is the community partnership for the county council areas and unitary authorities; the Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are the local area plans and targets which those providing services in an area are working together to produce, and the Rural Pathfinder is not a map but some extra funding available to rural areas to provide services across their widely scattered areas. The Government requires partnerships to be created for county council, district council and unitary authority areas, and to complicate matters further, many towns and villages are also producing community plans. This means that in Dorset we have 3 Local Strategic Partnerships, 6 District Community Partnerships and over 50 town and village community partnerships!

And how are we as the faith communities responding to the challenge of engaging with all of this?

1. Faith communities are very warmly welcomed onto Boards of Local Strategic and other community Partnerships. If the churches find the representative, they can use it as an opportunity to engage with people of other faiths and to bring their concerns to the partnership. It is therefore a good opportunity to build better inter-faith relationships and in this way for some very small minorities to have their issues brought into the wider domain and possibly to make it into the final Plan.

2. Churches in particular, though this may not be true of some of the other faith groups, have experience of partnership working through their ecumenical relationships, which is of value in what is a new way of working for many of the other bodies and agencies. We are perceived to be open and constructive in such settings.

3. There are 3 levels of community planning - and the churches operate at all these levels so are in a position to take up places on boards and committees for these, eg. a representative from Churches Together in Dorset has a place on the county LSP, the Borough chaplain has a place on the Poole Unitary Authority LSP and the Industrial Mission chaplain has a place on Bournemouth Unitary Authority LSP. Representatives of local Churches Together groupings are on the boards of District and town level community partnerships.

It is interesting to see what the other partners think we have to contribute to these partnerships.

1. We have a comprehensive presence across rural areas which most of the other bodies and services have withdrawn from.

2. We deliver services and are in contact with specific groups in the community, eg. we visit housebound elderly people, run youth activities, head up initiatives for vulnerable people, such as drop-in centres for the homeless, and we offer services to parents and toddlers. We have a chaplain to the Gypsies and Travellers.

3. Our members are strongly represented in voluntary activities of all kinds in the local communities.

4. We have premises which could be used by other agencies and statutory bodies to deliver services, in both rural areas and in town centres, where a church hall could be the most accessible venue for delivering anything from IT training courses to use by the Primary Health Care Trusts.

The papers and consultation documents produced by and for these partnerships may make us worry about our forests, but there are many positive benefits from playing our part. We meet members of the other statutory bodies, councils, agencies, and voluntary organisations. In all of these relationships other people may change some of their misconceptions about the churches, what we do and what we stand for. We have also been able to progress our own concerns. We have added to the Partnership response our own points on the Regional Spatial Strategy consultation (where new developments are to be) and the Transport Strategy. As churches we have taken up environmental issues and we have made closer links with the police, which has led to the establishment of chaplaincies in the police divisions and to linking local churches to support the work of their local police stations. At meetings we have been able to voice concerns about minority groups who would not otherwise have had any input in the process. At local level the churches have taken their full place in town and village partnerships, which have helped to build a stronger sense of community in those places, and have attracted funding for local projects, from establishing group walks for older people to shelters and skateparks for young people, provision for the homeless and a new boiler for a youth centre. If we are convinced that we should be working to further God's Kingdom in our own localities and can do this by working with other people of good will, then these community partnerships are one way in which we can make our own distinctive contribution.

This article was provided by Val Potter, County Ecumenical Officer, Churches Together in Dorset, and faith representative on Dorset Local Strategic Partnership.

Faith Communities make their mark on LSPs in Cornwall

Links between the faith communities and a Cornish LSP go back 4 years to when Kerrier and Penwith districts were designated Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and West Cornwall Together was formed. In accordance with the guidelines for these NRAs, a Faith Representative was sought and Mike Hooper, minister of Elim Church in Camborne, was invited to take on the role. Mike was quick to gather wider validation for his position by setting up a West Cornwall Faith Forum open to any worshipping community within the area. Mike speaks positively about the advantages of sitting on the West Cornwall Together Board. The Faith Forum has mapped social and community activities undertaken by the faith communities, published in a report 'Faith in Action in West Cornwall'.

When the other districts formed their LSPs there were no moves to include faith representatives. However, a small ecumenical group from North Cornwall, working with Andrew Yates, Diocese of Truro Social Responsibility Officer, conducted a simple survey of community provision and there are now faith representatives with a number of LSP themed working groups, including youth and volunteering. Another Cornish district, Restormel, also established a Faith in Action group. Working with *faithnetsouthwest*, who carried out this district's mapping exercise and gave

a presentation of the results in St Austell, the group has now been offered a seat on Restormel Strategic Partnership.

Mike and Andrew also addressed the Cornwall Strategic Partnership and from the evidence of the West and North Cornwall surveys an offer was made to the faith communities to have a seat on CSP. In May an event was held at County Hall to discuss the establishment of a Cornwall Multi Faith Forum which will appoint this representative in the future. It was well supported and the next event will be on 12th October at County Hall

This information was provided by Andrew Yates.

Migrant Workers in Rural South West

**A Conference on
Friday 10th November 2006
at Somerset County Cricket Club,
Taunton**

Migrant Workers? Where are they from? Why have they come here? What do they do? What contribution do they make? What is the impact on rural areas?

Contact Matthew Hill at the South West Rural Affairs Forum for details: swraf@gosw.gsi.gov.uk or fax. 0117 900 1905

Working Together District Council talks to Faith Communities

Sedgemoor District Council is formulating rules conscious of all faith needs in their existing and new cemeteries. Various stakeholders, including *faithnetsouthwest*, responded to the draft document. The council understands the sensitive nature of burial and cemetery management and their aim is to have clear and unambiguous rules.

The New Quantock Road Extension will be what the council calls an Interdenominational Cemetery. This term in itself could be thought to mean only the Christian denominations so *faithnetsouthwest* recommended that the word Multifaith should be added.

faithnetsouthwest also advised the council that believers of some faiths (in particular the Moslem and Baha'i Faiths) require burial facing in a particular direction and, as cremation is not allowed, consideration should be given to the orientation of plots. This is especially important as the council allows the reservation of one plot in advance for each household. It also avoids the necessity of purchasing two plots for one grave.

faithnetsouthwest considered the other rules and regulations fair and reasonable, including restrictions on the type of monument used because of health and safety concerns.

Sedgemoor District Council Cemeteries Officer is Val Colwill who can be contacted on 01278 435483

Hindu Women Tackle Isolation

Bournemouth Hindu Women's Association was started about 10 years ago by Bharati Joshi and now has a committee of 6 Hindu women with 30-35 others who help out at various occasions.

In the late 1990s Mrs. Joshi realised that Hindu women were often isolated in their homes. The men socialised amongst themselves and the women were generally "stuck in the kitchen". There were and are many professional Hindu people coming and going in Bournemouth (doctors, nurses, bankers etc.), and so the need for support is ongoing.

The aim of the Group is, in the words of Mrs Joshi, 'to help each other'. New people who come to this country have difficulties because they do not understand the culture and sometimes do not speak English and so the association helps to integrate them into English culture and to be a focal point for their own religion and culture.

The Association organises Hindu festivals that are open to the community at large. It organises funerals and provides comfort to bereaved families and also provides help for weddings. In the past it has provided children's education, which has included the teaching of English. This has been done in order to facilitate entry into Bournemouth schools, as often Gujarati is the only language spoken at home. BHWA also provides counselling for divorce and various others kinds of assistance when needed. This might be helping people apply for benefits or helping people to enrol in local English classes.

The chair of the BHWA (Mrs Joshi) is also a member of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and in addition teaches about Hinduism in local secondary schools. She is official Hindu chaplain at one of the schools, and also provides classes in relaxation, yoga and dance to alleviate the stress of GCSE and A-Level students. Mrs Joshi also sits as the Hindu representative on the Dorset Police Independent Diversity Panel and is a guest training speaker for them.

During the past 10 years BHWA has been successful in supporting hundreds of women and their families. In addition they have responded to requests from the community at large in whatever way they have been able to. They were, for example, able to provide material for an exhibition for the local Labour party. A London Hindu community, after having joined BHWA for an event, were so inspired by them that they persuaded Heathrow Airport

to let them organise a Gujarati exhibition and dance to celebrate the commencement of Air India direct flights to Ahmadabad.

Although there has been much success for BHWA, there have also been difficulties: When BHWA organises events it doesn't ask for money from the community but does accept contributions. This has caused some confusion in the Hindu community at large, which has thought that somebody has been making good business out of the events. It is also becoming difficult to hire halls for events because of issues with insurance and public liability. The community would like to have its own premises, but does not have the capacity to organise this at the moment.

This initiative is typical of many other faith-based projects in that it needed the vision and energy of committed people to get things started. Keeping it going in the future is another matter altogether.

Plymouth CT Offers Winter Refuge

Concerned by the hardships suffered by Asylum Seekers living in Plymouth in recent years, Churches Together in Plymouth began their Winter Refuge project in January 2006, as featured in our Spring issue.

The refuge was open for 3 months, offering a hot meal and a safe place to sleep for up to 12 refugees each night. The refuge ran thanks to the efforts of many volunteers throughout the faith community and the town's students.

The project has now obtained a grant to fund a worker to coordinate the faith group response to asylum issues. Denis is keen to visit Churches and other Faith Groups to raise awareness and suggest practical ways for individuals and groups to get involved.



Contact Denis on
ctiprefuge@gmail.com
Tel: 01752 248187

Funding Opportunities Big and Small

The **Community Buildings programme** will give communities the chance to improve their quality of life by funding buildings that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The programme will pay for creating and improving facilities that offer a wide range of services and activities to a broad range of local people.

All faith groups can apply for funding, although church-based faith organisations may need to check if there are legal relationships between them and other parts of their faith organisation which would affect this relationship, if they were awarded a grant.

Grants are **over £50,000 and up to a maximum of £500,000**. If the project costs more than £250,000, it may be necessary to find match funding. Development grants of up to £25,000 are also available.

There will be a two-stage application process. At stage one the Big Lottery will consider the need and outcomes for your organisation's project and how your building will be run. **The final deadline for receiving stage one applications is 5 pm on 30 April 2007**. Only projects successful at stage one will be invited to apply to stage two.

For more information, contact: The Development Officers at **faithnetsouthwest** or the Big Lottery Advice Line on: 0845 4102030 or see their website: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

The Garfield Weston Foundation

Supports UK registered charities and churches in a broad range of activities, eg: education, arts, health, welfare, the environment and religion. Grants from **£100 to £10 million**.

Contact: *Fiona Hare* (tel. 020 7399 6565, e-mail. fhare@wittington-investments.co.uk)
Or see www.garfieldweston.org

Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund

Applications can now be made for the latest round of funding up to a **maximum grant of £5,000 for small grants and £30,000 for large grants**.

Priorities of the fund are 'Capacity Building' and 'Inter Faith Activity'. Applications are encouraged from local groups working in the most disadvantaged areas. **Deadlines:** 16th Oct 2006 for feedback, 1st Nov 2006 final submission date.

For more information, contact:
The Development Officers at **faithnetsouthwest** or the Community Development Foundation on:
01223 400341 / 01223 400328
E-mail: fundingadmin@cdf.org.uk

North Devon Christians Launch New Network



faithnetsouthwest is pleased to have been involved in the creation of a new initiative called North Devon Christians in Partnership. The aims of the group are to support each other in the work that each is doing in the wider community and to reflect theologically on relevant issues.

The group also intends to help coordinate the Christian faith community's response to particular issues, such as affordable housing. They hope that the partnership can help to raise awareness of the role of faith communities in practical action. The group believes that the *Faith in Action* report by **faithnetsouthwest** on their recent mapping exercise will be useful for this.

For more information about the partnership please contact *Clare Mortimore*, Tel. 01626 200501 or e-mail. clare@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Organisations

Governance that Works

Conference providing an informative and supportive environment for trustees from voluntary and community organisations

on: Monday 27th November 2006
at: Hilton London Metropole, Edgware Rd.

For more information visit
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/events/latest/index.asp?id=3043

**Interfaith Day at
The Ammerdown Centre, Radstock
The Path of Spiritual Peacemaking**

9.30am - 4.00pm on 19th November 2006

**Speaker -
Eliyahu McLean**



**Speaker -
Sheikh Abdul Aziz
Bukhari**

**Come and Learn from Two Highly-Respected
Peacemakers Involved in the Middle East**

For more details and application forms please contact:
centre@ammerdown.org or Tel. 01761 433709 or write to
The Ammerdown Centre, Ammerdown Park, Radstock, BA3 5SW

Useful Links

Qualifications for Managing Volunteers

The Institute of Leadership & Management are offering NVQs for people who manage volunteers.
See www.i-l-m.com for details

Training & Advice for Community Organisations

The Public Law Project & National Association for Voluntary & Community Action offer training to organisations which attract funding from public bodies
E-mail terry.perkins@navca.org.uk for details

Risk Assessments Explained

A simple guide by the Health & Safety Executive for carrying out risk assessments
See www.hse.gov.uk/risk/fivesteps.htm

IT4 Communities

Links skilled Information Communication Technology experts with voluntary and community organisations
See www.it4communities.org.uk

The South West Churches Regional Forum

Energy, Faith and You Churches responding to climate change

Wednesday 10th January 2007

**10.30am-1.30pm
at the Albemarle Centre, Taunton**

Speakers will include:

Michael Northcott

Reader in Christian Ethics, Edinburgh University

Stewart Coleman

Devon Association for Renewable Energy

For further details please contact
Vena Prater, ISR, 162 Pennywell Road, Bristol, BS5 0TX or Tel. 0117 9557 430.

**Civic Hall, St Stephen's
Place, Trowbridge**

EID FESTIVAL

**2.30 - 5.30pm
on 29th October 2006**

Come and make friends and
get to know your community
Free entry

Talks, Food & Henna Tattooing

**Organised by West Wiltshire
Interfaith Group**

Contact: Farzana_Saker@yahoo.co.uk or
07834 812663



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

Contact us...

The Bristol office has moved – please note new address

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