
Faith Networks in Northumberland: a Mapping and Scoping Study

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Introduction and Preamble

This mapping and study project was commissioned through the Equality and Diversity Project which is managed by the Northumberland Community Development Network (NCDN). The work of the Equality and Diversity project has included liaising and engaging with members of each diversity strand in the county to explore how best they might improve and extend networking opportunities within their own strand. The Equality and Diversity project was aware of a number of separate initiatives to strengthen the voice of faith communities and was interested in supporting moves to bring them together.

In South East Northumberland the Widening Participation Project run by Churches Together in Bedlington had led to the formation of the South East Northumberland Network Group for faith communities. No formal networks had developed encompassing the north or west areas of the county beyond the local and long established Churches Together groups.

This mapping and scoping study was conceived as a mechanism to explore what was happening in faith communities across Northumberland as whole, particularly at this time of transition from distinctive district councils into to a single unitary authority. As requested by NCDN the study focuses upon networking within the faith sector and will therefore be of most interest to faith organisations, faith communities and individual members of faiths. It is also hoped that it will also be of interest and value to

- (a) the new local authority departments and systems exploring how best to engage with natural networks and existing community resources and structures;
- (b) those involved in more formal community, voluntary and third sector organisations;
- (c) elected members and others involved in community governance structures;
- (d) the wider public.

Given the resources available at the onset of the study and the resultant time available for the research work, the report is of necessity an impressionistic study, rather than comprehensive mapping of networks. As indicated above, the study had a special interest in faith sector networking in Northumberland. Comprehensively covering an area with over 250 faith organisations and places of worship is beyond the scope and resource limitations of this study.

The study has been directed by David Penn and the research has been conducted by David Penn and Jim Robertson, who both live and work in Northumberland. Dr Penn and Mr Robertson are independent consultants associated with the Churches Regional Commission in the North East (CRC). The CRC's primary role is to support the social action of churches working together in the region. Both researchers are active members of faith communities and have drawn upon, and taken account of, their faith experience and perspectives in undertaking this study. Dr Penn's research experience includes analysis of equality and diversity information as well as support for and evaluation of community and voluntary sector organisations and initiatives. He has a particular interest in issues of equality of opportunity in relation to post compulsory education and training. Jim Robertson is currently involved in various action research projects embracing community development and organisational change in public bodies and third sector organisations. Both have special interest in concerns relating to faith in the public realm

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Part One: Making Sense of the Ideas of ‘Community’ and ‘Networking’

Networking has always been fundamental to communities and to their survival and development but, as Alison Gilchrist says¹

“the related concepts of ‘community’ and ‘networks’ must be better understood by policy makers if they are to avoid the risk of masking common experiences of inequality and discrimination, based on enduring power imbalances and social exclusion”.

This study looks at the way in which, in Northumberland, networking in the faith context is changing as communities themselves change and develop. As Gilchrist suggests, it is important to recognise that our concept of community should not be based on nostalgic or idealised models.

This is particularly important when looking at community in the faith context, where those not familiar with current developments within faiths may be relying on outdated ideas, for instance about the roles and status of professionals and volunteers. Also, change can be misinterpreted as decline; this is particularly the case when change involves much loved buildings or long established boundaries and associations. Rural and urban communities in Northumberland have experienced radical changes in patterns of employment, housing, transport, shopping, and service provision over the past few decades. These changes have had profound effects upon the ways in which people’s spiritual and social needs are met. As Gilchrist says it is difficult to collect and analyse evidence on the nature and extent of informal community networks and yet it is these informal linkages which are fundamental to communities.

In this study we look at the ways in which change is perceived within the sector and the responses being developed through new and established networking activity. We look particularly at how active faith networks are, and to what extent they serve to communicate the needs and concerns of the faith sector to community and local government structures. We have collected our information by holding conversations with interviewees² of various faiths, denominations and communities across the county. Documentary sources from previous related work have also been used, for example,

¹ Gilchrist, A. (2009) *The well-connected community: a networking approach to community development* (pp 146 – 152) The Policy Press, Bristol

² See Appendix I for methodology for selection of interviewees

statistical data from the 2009 survey of faith communities in the North East region conducted by the Churches Regional Commission.

Defining the faith sector

Having, or not having, a faith is one of the dimensions of life alongside age, gender, race, disability, and sexual orientation. The 2003 employment equality legislation does not define 'religion or belief' but makes it clear that the law is intended to include people who do and who do not have a religion or belief. Everyone therefore has an aspect of their life defined by their relationship to faith. Sociological studies of religion see it as having three dimensions: affiliation, practice, and belief³.

Affiliation or Belonging. Most people have a strong need to belong⁴ which can be met for example by family, friendships, nationality, or membership of a profession or club. Religion has been one of the principal sources of belonging in the past. In the UK census of 2001, people were asked "what is your religion?". 82% of people in Northumberland indicated that they had a religion, 12% that they had none, and 6% did not respond to the question. The census question does not provide any information on the strength of an individual's sense of belonging. At one extreme an individual might indicate that their religion was Christian or Muslim because this best expressed their family or community origins, whilst having no active connection with any church or mosque. The same answer might be given by a person who was a full and active member of their church or mosque. Religion, as affiliation, can be an acquired characteristic, like nationality, passed on through families. Alternatively it can be the result of conscious choice or in response to a spiritual experience or revelation.

Practice. At first sight the 'practice' dimension of religion appears to offer a more specific definition of the faith sector. In this sense a person belongs to the faith sector if they are currently and actively practising their faith. This would include prayer, participation in festivals and ceremonies and attendance at places of worship. Practice of a faith could also be said to extend to the way in which a person lives their life and follows the precepts of their faith. A survey of adults living in England and Wales in 2005⁵ indicated that 32% of Christians by affiliation said that they were 'practising'. (The 'practising' percentage of those of other faiths were all over 50%.) Not all religions place the same emphasis on the performance of specific rites and attendance at a place of

³ Office of National Statistics (2008) Information paper 'Religion'.

⁴ Marsh, P. et al. (2007) 'Belonging' Social Issues Research Centre/Automobile Association.

⁵ 2005 Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government Dept.

worship may not be an obligation. Defining the faith sector by the number of people attending places of worship is too narrow an approach. The concept of 'vicarious religion'⁶ has been used to describe the religious role which the active minority perform on behalf of a much larger group who may participate only at time of crisis or major life events.

Belief. The third dimension of religion is belief, the beliefs associated with particular faiths and the beliefs which individuals hold. As with the other dimensions, beliefs can be strongly or weakly held and beliefs do not always correspond with practice or with affiliation. The distinction has been made between *believing* and *belonging*⁷. Research points to evidence that, although the number of people participating in religious practice in the UK has fallen since 1945, religion or some other expression of spirituality remains an important part of life for many more people than those who attend places of worship.

We would like to introduce here a further set of key concepts or ideas.. Networking, in the context of faith, can have a variety of meanings, including the ideas of being a people, a church, a community and a whole world.

Being 'a people'

The idea of being a people is at the heart of many faiths (Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh amongst others). It is not therefore surprising that much of the teaching and activities of faiths is directed at building and sustaining strong relationships between people, not only within each faith, but between all people. The concept of being a people also gives impetus to building links between different denominations or strands within faiths.

Being 'a church'

Within Christianity the ecumenical movement is the expression of the idea that all Christians are one people or church. Local Christian Churches Together (CCTs) organisations provide a structure within which people from different Christian denominations work together. There are over twenty CCTs in Northumberland.

Being 'a community'

Because the practice of faith involves caring for others most faith communities build communal networks to provide for the social needs of people at different stages of life.

⁶ Davie,G.(2007) *Sociology of Religion* Sage.

⁷ Davie,G. (1994) *Believing without belonging* Wiley.

This sense of responsibility almost always extends beyond the 'members' or 'congregation' to embrace the 'whole community'.

Being 'one world'

An understanding of the essential oneness of creation, central to Buddhism, is also common to many faiths. In this sense networking describes the way in which all people and all things are interdependent and interconnected. From this understanding comes the impetus to work with others to protect the environment, and to seek just and peaceful relations between people (an aspect of faith particularly evident in Sikhism).

Mapping faith networks in Northumberland – a tapestry of connections

In any study of this nature it is important to understand that networking takes place within faiths and between faiths, and within and between denominations and branches of each faith. Interfaith groups have networking as their primary purpose and ecumenical bodies and posts also exist to encourage and support networking. Individuals have personal networks which in most cases extend beyond their faith community.

We explore the extent to which members of faith communities and faith organisations build networks and connect with the wider community. Evidence of direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of faith and belief has been sought from interviewees. The study also looks at how active faith networks are and to what extent they serve to communicate the needs and concerns of the faith sector to community and local government structures.

Part Two: Constructing a Conceptual Framework for Analysing and Reflecting on Information and Findings

Social capital theory is the conceptualisation of how networks in the community interrelate through the role they play to enhance community cohesion and connectedness. It uses the notions of bonding, bridging and linking people in social contexts. We have used social capital theory to give structure to the results of our interviews with members of faith communities. This builds on research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁸ into the contribution of faith communities in community regeneration and community development. We have also used a model of 'distinctive presences' developed by Jim Robertson, to describe the actions and responses of faith communities in urban and rural areas: Strategic, Critical, Resisting, Discerning and Affirming Presences. We have drawn upon this model to provide a perspective on faith networks, building on the general networking theory of Alison Gilchrist illustrated in the preamble and introduction above.

In undertaking this study we felt it was important to connect with previous work relating to faith communities in Northumberland. Consultations and research conducted over the last decade include (a) the 2002 Northumberland Consultations⁹ (b) the 2008 Glendale Alive report¹⁰ and (c) 'Keeping Faith with the Countryside', a series of public consultations led by the Churches Regional Commission in the North East in 2002 in the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis.

The Northumberland Consultations report was based upon a series of ecumenical consultations which took place over the period 1999 to 2002 across rural north and west Northumberland, with the object of identifying ways in which Christian denominations could work more closely together. The Castle Morpeth, Wansbeck and Blyth Valley areas were excluded as talks were taking place between the Methodist and United Reformed churches about a Joint Area. A mapping exercise was undertaken which sought to identify every worshipping Christian community within the rural area.

The outcome of the consultation process was summarised in a report to North East Christian Churches Together (NECCT) in 2002. The Northumberland Consultations report provides some useful indicators of the extent to which networking was taking

⁸ 'Faith as Social Capital' (2006) Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁹ 'A report on the Northumberland Consultations' presented to NECCT 2002.

¹⁰ 'Glendale Alive: Report for the Rural Mission and Ministry Initiative' (2008) William Temple Foundation

place within the (Christian) faith sector and gives some insights into the underlying motives for networking. (See Appendix Three). The report developed a concept of 'natural communities'¹¹ to describe ways in which people relate to one another outwith statutory or organisational boundaries, structures and hierarchies.

The Glendale Alive¹² report was produced in 2008 by the Rural Mission and Ministry Initiative (RMMI). The purpose of this Anglican initiative was

'to conduct a feasibility study on possible ways forward for churches and communities in (the Glendale) part of North Northumberland'. Its brief asked the researchers to look at a range of issues including

- sustaining an effective Christian presence in each of the Glendale communities
- engaging with the secular and religious structures of the area and region
- theological reflection on what it means to be a church and community in today's rural context
- development of realisable forms of local ministry and developing collaborative ways of working as churches and communities.

A set of linked strategies outlined in the report are summarised in Appendix Three.

A region wide consultation took place in 2002, under the title 'Keeping Faith with the Countryside'. Led by the Churches Regional Commission the consultation was organised to mark the tenth anniversary of the Archbishops' Commission report 'Faith in the Countryside'. Taking place in the aftermath of the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak, it raised some key issues relating to the faith sector under the broad themes of social exclusion, the rural economy and the environment. A fuller account of the consultation and of its conclusions is given in Appendix Three.

The theme of the churches' potential role in community development is common to the two 2002 consultations and is central to the Anglican 'Glendale Alive' initiative. These studies also highlight how important networking and co-operation (within the faith sector and between the sector and society as a whole) is, if the faith sector is to realise its full

¹¹ The use of the term 'natural communities' occurs in the 'way forward' section of the 2002 NECCT report (above). Here it is suggested that "...Churches identify what we have called natural communities..." This term is now used in a specific way in Northumberland's Sustainable Community Strategy to refer to four layers of community ranging from the very local neighbourhood level to the county at the highest level. Use of the term 'natural communities' in this study refers to the looser NECCT usage and not the technical usage found in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

¹² 'Glendale Alive: 'Report for the Rural Mission and Ministry Initiative' (2008) William Temple Foundation

potential as an agency for community development. In the next section we look at some contemporary examples of faith sector networking and draw some conclusions.

Part Three: Networking in the Faith Sector – Key Issues from Information Gathering

In our interviews we explored interviewees' perceptions of the extent to which people are networked with others within and outside their faith community. Using the concept of social capital¹³ we have sought to identify examples of the contribution of churches and other faith communities to building bonding, bridging and linking social capital.

The examples (in bold) are based on our interview notes but are not verbatim quotes and are not attributable to individual interviewees. The following questions are explored using examples taken from our interviews:

- (a) What faith networks do and how they can help to build bonding social capital, overcome isolation;
- (b) What is the level of awareness of faith and interfaith networks and how they build bridging social capital.
- (c) How faith networks can help to build linking social capital, provide leadership and represent the concerns of the faith sector to local government and local partnerships.

We illustrate these themes with extracts from our interviews with people from faith groups and people with ecumenical roles. Appendix One contains a full list of our interviewees.

(a) Ways in which faith groups help to build 'bonding' social capital

1. In times of crisis the community looks to the church for support and leadership. Churches help to bring people together and begin healing process.

"When three young people lost their lives in a shocking accident on Wylam's bridge in 2006, people looked to the churches to help them cope with the turmoil the tragedy brought to the village. The churches helped people to bring people back together and begin the healing process."

"Clergy worked with everyone affected during the foot and mouth crisis in 2001."

¹³ Putnam, R (1995) 'Bowling alone: America's declining social capital' in *Journal of democracy*

“Today many people don’t know how to come to church, it is outside their realm of experience but they nevertheless have strong spiritual needs particularly at times of crisis so the church has to come to them.”

2. In many villages the largest community organisation is the village church. Faith groups need resources to sustain them and groups without their own premises need places which they can rely on to meet at a regular dates and times.

“There are villages in the county, such as Christon Bank, where the only place of worship is the Methodist church, and in these places the community relies on the church’s premises. Although congregations may be small the church’s premises are much in demand by community groups. Local churches have had to make additional investment in premises, to provide additional storage space, kitchens etc and to comply with health and safety and equal access legislation so that buildings can be used by the community.”

“[The minister] referred to the joint use of church buildings, citing the example of a Black led church using Church of England premises. The growth of new churches was a notable feature of the current faith environment.”

3. Faith organisations (churches, mosques) have an enabling role, helping communities to develop a sense of identity and an effective means of engaging with statutory and voluntary community services and developing imaginative projects focused on topical issues and concerns.

For example, a church inspired project has made a DVD Film about the experience of Polish Migrant Workers in Seahouses. They have subsequently made an animation film, with children, on Noah and the flood. The next film making project is a short film based on Ebb’s Nook in Beadnell.

The need for a mosque in Blyth has been proved by the response from the local Muslim community with a hundred people attending Friday prayers each week. Our visit to the mosque was shortly after the end of Ramadan and the Imam explained that Ramadan is always a very busy period for a mosque. During Ramadan many people come to the mosque to learn and deepen their faith.

The Imam has an important role in representing the Muslim community locally, liaising with a range of public services including the police and other emergency services, and he has met with the local authority’s equalities team to discuss equality issues. The

Imam provides advice and guidance to members of statutory services on Muslim culture and traditions, helping them to show respect and to avoid giving offence.

4. Informal networks can be as important and valuable as formal links.

For example, as well as formal networking through Churches Together, church members find that the informal networks that arise spontaneously, for example amongst staff at a school or other workplace, can be equally important and valuable. Such informal networks provide people with mutual support and renewed sense of purpose.

Belonging, to a group, community or place may be less significant to Buddhists and networking is therefore more likely to be on an individual rather than a community or group basis.

5. Networking is less evident in communities where there the congregation is small and its efforts are focussed on survival. (see 'Glendale Alive' report¹⁴ in part two above)

6. Maintaining social and spiritual links with fellow members within the county and region is important.

"The network includes groups across the North East and they keep in contact with each other in a variety of ways e.g. exchanging speakers for their meeting, informal and social events."

7. Faith has an important role to play in the workplace.

"In her role as chaplain to the mayor [she] found that 'the collar' opened doors and enabled her to bring a faith dimension into the workplace, to celebrate and to give support in times of trouble."

(b) Ways in which churches and faith groups build 'linking' social capital and provide leadership and representation

1 Churches Together groups are important.

For example, the Salvation Army is fully involved in Ashington Churches Together. They see Churches Together as a means of drawing upon the complementary, collective strengths and gifts of each church for the common good of the community. Churches Together provides opportunities for clergy to provide support for each other and can

¹⁴ 'Glendale Alive: Report for the Rural Mission and Ministry Initiative' (2008) William Temple Foundation

lead to arrangements for sharing premises. In some denominations involvement is sustained largely by the laity due to clergy being overstretched.

The Farne Churches Together group is another good example of the innovative ways in which Churches Together groups have developed. The group has established a community cinema in Belford, an ecumenical youth group, and ecumenical worship in the Iona tradition. The group co-operates to promote and draw upon the ancient and rich Christian heritage associated with Lindisfarne, the Farne Islands and St Cuthbert.

2. Churches have a key role in encouraging and promoting community development.

“[He saw it as].part of the church’s mission to be a key element of the voluntary sector infrastructure, helping to nurture and develop it, providing and supporting community leaders, critically engaging with government policy. The church’s role is not limited to the ‘faith’ agenda (as defined in government policy initiatives – most recently ‘Side by Side and Face to Face’¹⁵)”

3. There is a greater engagement with lay people generally.

“[The] wider range of roles being undertaken by lay members of churches is associated with increased investment in their training and personal development. This trend could result in an increase in the number of people able and willing to undertake leadership roles in rural community and voluntary sector organisations.”

4. With lay members to playing a greater role, ecumenical bodies have become more active and gender inclusive.

“Gradually, as lay members began to play a greater role, Churches Together itself become more active as an organisation. Over the same period more women became involved. A was its first lay and first female chair. It is now the custom for the chair to be appointed alternately from the laity and clergy each year. As the organisation expanded its activities it also expanded its membership, adding the New Life Church and the Brethren to its existing Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Quaker, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and URC member churches.”

5. People belonging churches provide leadership within the community (leadership and representation)

¹⁵ Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society
Department for Communities and Local Government (July 2008)

“People belonging to one of the district’s four churches provide leadership within the community serving on the parish council and in political roles at local and county level.”

6. The faith sector has a wealth of human and physical resources

“The diocese is in the process of appointing a heritage development officer who will work with local parishes and communities to build capacity around the Church’s buildings and the people who care for them.”

“Monasteries and abbeys and retreat centres, such as the two Buddhist monasteries in Northumberland, provide a focus for the lay community locally, regionally and nationally. They provide pastoral care, a place to celebrate festivals and a place to practice prayer and meditation.”

7. The ways in which the church might relate to the new local government area partnerships are still emerging and could take different forms in each area

One diocese was currently ‘taking the temperature’ of ecumenism, looking at how local arrangements were developing and engaging in debate about the place of ecumenism. This debate was relevant to changes that were taking place within local government. The interviewee saw the main focus as being on networks based on local communities. The diocese has 147 churches which are involved in a variety of networks and partnerships, and there were many examples of strong local groupings such as Farne Churches Together. The ways in which the Church might relate to the new local government area partnerships are still emerging and could take different forms in each area. Many Churches Together groups have established links with the community forums across the county.

Churches had good representation on former borough partnerships but much less now following unitary restructuring.

8. It is often a local church that leads the establishment of the community partnership

One church which did this has links which are well embedded and will continue to develop in the context of the county’s new local governance structures. One of the marks of a healthy church is its outward looking focus, and the local Methodist churches are encouraged to work ecumenically to address community needs. The UK wide 2008 ‘Hope’ initiative was a good example of this ecumenical approach in action¹⁶.

¹⁶ www.hope08.com

Development trusts and the local faith communities work together to foster community cohesion and collective responses to community concerns and interests.

9. Relationships between the Muslim faith community and statutory service providers are developing well but could be deepened and extended

It was clear from our discussion that, whilst a good start had been made by key public services (police, fire services, local government), more work on deepening relationships with the Muslim community was required. For instance, faith equality in relation to schooling for local Muslim children was an issue that needed to be explored. Imam Sadiq told us that he encouraged the community to continue to send their children to local schools in Blyth.

10. Churches and the mosque play an important role in developing people's leadership skills.

(c) Levels of awareness of faith and interfaith networks and ways in which churches and faith groups build 'bridging' social capital.

1. There is a need to maintain good communication systems and networks.

One development trust has a very good relationship with the local Churches Together group. Volunteers from the churches take part in a range of their projects and initiatives. In some activities church volunteers take a leadership role. The interviewee mentioned the trust's newsletter, whose editor is involved in one of the churches. The newsletter's content illustrates collaboration between the churches and the trust in a campaign against the closure of care homes in the county. Learning takes place through the links which community organisations, such as development trusts and faith groups, have with similar bodies elsewhere.

Part of the church's mission is to be a key element of voluntary sector infrastructure, helping to nurture and develop it, providing and supporting community leaders, critically engaging with government policy. Its role is not limited to the 'faith agenda'. Emphasis on faith as a sector could result in its marginalisation, the established church it has a much wider role, serving every community.

2. Ecumenism is developing and evolving new forms as the needs and resources of each denomination change:

In one location the churches provide people with a sense of belonging and a focus for shared community celebrations, particularly around the Christmas festival. In the past people's sense of identity was often linked to the denomination they belonged to. To be a Methodist for instance was not just an issue of religious practice but a statement of who you were. Today with more movement across denominations and to some extent across faiths the sense of permanent identity is fading.

There is a mutuality between ordained monks in the county's two Buddhist monasteries and lay Buddhists, the lay community fulfilling their religious duty by providing essential support to the monks and the monks providing spiritual and pastoral care.

Six local Churches Together groups have come to form a together a south east Northumberland faith network. Co-operation between local churches also includes links with prisons, and hospitals and schools.

3. Importance of informal as well as formal networking.

In Haltwhistle the Messy Church is a good example of successful informal co-operation. Messy Church is a national initiative, which finds expression in Haltwhistle in an informal co-operative venture by the town's three churches to provide activities and worship for children. It attracts regularly attracts over 90 participants and involves 20 or more helpers. The interviewee regarded the Messy Church as a congregation in itself. Many of those participating have no other connection with any of the town's churches.

Buddhists may be more inclined to engage with civic society as individuals than through their groups and their voice is likely to be an individual rather than a collective one. Buddhists may nevertheless have particular perspectives on issues based on Buddhist ethics, particularly their belief in the sanctity of all life.

4. Individual clergy are often the hub of a wide and varied network:

One clergy person interviewed has links which extend across west and southwest Northumberland and involve several Methodist/URC partnerships. His town is the hub of a large rural area and both formal and informal networks tend to focus upon the town. Inevitably informal personal links develop alongside the formal ones and the minister himself has become the hub of a wide and varied network.

5. Where major housing developments have taken place along communications corridors, it can be more difficult to for towns and villages to sustain a sense of community:

We interviewed the chaplain of a large supermarket, who said that the store has, to an extent, replaced the town centre as a focal point for social life. She finds that many people she encounters and supports in the store there come there for company and the chance to renew social contacts. Older people in particular can become very isolated and some go to the store to pass the time or get out of the house. Because she is identifiable as a minister she finds that people will approach her for help in times of trouble.

6. Linking the interests of 'inland rural church communities' with the churches along the coastal areas:

North Northumberland Mission Partnership is a URC initiative to serve a number of small communities from Wooler, Chatton, Belford, the coastal area and Holy Island. The partnership has used its ecumenical links to sustain and develop the Church's presence in the area. It includes St Cuthbert's Centre, developed in the 1990s as a URC mission project. Another special project is the Moving Pictures mobile cinema, which "screens high quality cinema compatible with the Christian faith, films to inspire, entertain and talk about." Modest charges are made to community groups which host the cinema and advice is given to groups about how to show films in their local community. The partnership joins other churches from across north Northumberland in leading Iona style worship at St Aidan's, Bamburgh.

7. Lay members of churches provide continuity when ministers and clergy move on or retire:

The collective knowledge and the networks established by Churches Together groups over many years constitute an important part of an area's social capital resources. There are significant variations in degrees of independence of individual congregations.

8. One mark of a healthy church is its outward looking focus, being responsive to local concerns and interests. Ecumenical projects often involve secular professionals in a dialogue with people of faith around a faith centred activity.

The millennium provided a focus for Churches Together activities. One project created a quiet room at Alnwick Hospital. Previously there had been no suitable place to hold services or for private prayer. As well as being an ecumenical enterprise the project engaged secular professionals in a dialogue with people of faith around a faith centred activity.

With faith based academies established in Ashington and Blyth, churches will have an increasingly prominent place in the education system.

9. It is seen as important to maintain the church's interest in, and understanding of, businesses and other workplaces:

One interviewee had a role model who served as a National Power plc chaplain to Blyth power station, where he played an important role in addressing problems at the plant as well ministering to individual needs. The interviewee learnt how important it was for chaplains to have an interest and understanding of the businesses they were working with.

10. There is a good opportunity to build links between local churches and the mosque

The Imam suggested an interfaith gathering should be organised at a neutral venue in Blyth to give faith communities in the area an opportunity to get to know each other and share their beliefs.

Other current developments – two significant examples

In addition to the information we gathered from interviews we have looked at two significant examples of faith sector networking in Northumberland:

- the Churches Together in Bedlingtonshire Widening Participation project¹⁷
- the Hexham Debates led by Hexham Quakers

Churches Together in Bedlingtonshire, with support from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund, initiated a Widening Participation project. The project, which aimed to build up the capacity of the faith groups in Bedlington to participate more in strategic decision making, included raising the profile of Bedlington and of the churches within the town so that they could become part of the strategic decision making processes for the area. Part of the project involved a survey of faith groups' perceptions of living in Bedlington. On the basis of the survey and subsequent discussions a vision for the community was developed and issues and concerns identified. A meeting to explore the issues was held between the Chief Executive of Wansbeck District Council and representatives from all six churches in the town. The project led to increased

¹⁷ Rev Derry Twomey (2007) '*Report on the Widening Participation Project*' Churches Together in Bedlingtonshire.

levels of networking and involvement of the faith sector in decision making affecting the life of the community.

In 2007 Hexham Quakers and the Northumbrians for Peace group initiated a series of Hexham Debates¹⁸ led by speakers of international repute, initially focusing on the theme of war, peace and democracy. The debates, which attract from 100 to 250 participants from a range of faiths and none, are now (in 2010) into their third series. The scope of debates, which are held at the St Mary's Roman Catholic centre in Hexham, has broadened, and the 2010 programme includes debates on climate change, sustainable economics, human rights, representation and the media and international law as well as peace and democracy. At the end of 2009 the Hexham debates team organised an 'Any Questions' meeting involving the four declared candidates for the Hexham constituency, and the meeting provided an occasion for discussion of current topics affecting Hexham and Northumberland. The Hexham Debates have led to increased networking amongst people of faith and a greater level of engagement with opinion leaders.

Summary

In our interviews and related research we found many examples of how faith community networking is building social capital. Using Jim Robertson's 'distinctive presence'¹⁹ approach, referred to above, we found evidence of the *strategic, affirming, discerning, resisting and critical role* which faith communities play.

Sometimes it is through collaboration, mainly within the Churches Together framework, that faith groups achieve a distinctive presence. For instance Churches Together in Amble is working with the Development Trust to address local concerns such as the closure of the care home, and Alnwick Churches Together sustains ecumenical pastoral links with people in Acklington Prison. Sometimes individual faith groups take the lead as Hexham Quakers have in initiating the Hexham Debates which bring a wide range of people together to address key issues of war and peace, human rights, climate change and the economy. The Roman Catholic Church has led the way in responding to the

¹⁸ *The Hexham Debates: War, Peace and Democracy* (2009) Friends House bookshop. ISBN: 9780955751042

¹⁹ Robertson, J. (2006) 'Faith Communities – a distinctive presence in urban and rural communities' CABLE Project Training Programme. DIAK/CWAA Durham.

needs of migrant workers²⁰ but has also encouraged collaboration at the grass roots level as in Seahouses. Sometimes it is a faith based charity that takes a lead as Christian Aid has in relation to proposals for a new coal fired power station in Blyth²¹.

Faith networking

- helps mobilise and sustain community resources and in times of crisis, emergency and stress
- contributes to community development through provision of human and physical resources
- gives voice and expression to groups and communities in their interaction with statutory services and their involvement in partnerships
- provides practical, emotional and spiritual support to people at work
- provides communities with leadership
- enables people to engage with others regionally, nationally and internationally
- builds a structure of resilient informal links and ties that are not dependent on organisational structures or statutory bodies
- counteracts isolation by reaching out to individuals and groups isolated by disability and disadvantage (migrants and asylum seekers, youth offenders, people with mental illnesses, addictions etc)
- builds partnerships between faith networks and other voluntary sector infrastructure organisations
- builds links between faith groups and people in need in hospital, hospices and prison.

Ecumenical officers from the principal denominations meet regularly and share good practice, enabling them to take a strategic view of the county and its needs.

Ecumenism, which is a key aspect of networking, is developing and evolving new forms as the needs and resources of each denomination change.

In 2009 the Church of England's Lindisfarne Regional Training Partnership initiated a web based Interfaith and Ethics Forum²² developed to enable people from across

²⁰ See section 4 below

²¹ In 2009 Christian Aid joined a local campaigning group 'Panic stations' set up to oppose the building of a new coal fired powerstaion at Cambois.

²² <http://www.lindisfarneforum.org>

the region to learn and interact with each other about matters of faith. Some help and grant support was provided by the Department of Business Innovations and Skills. This has the potential of providing a place where issues relating to faith and community development could be explored although it has not yet taken this direction.

Churches Together groups provide a point of contact for local government consultations. Lay members provide continuity as ministers and clergy move on or retire. The collective knowledge and the networks established through Churches Together groups over many years constitute an important part of the county's social capital resources.

The role of the Church of England has been evolving since the 1985 'Faith in the City' report and the initiatives which stemmed from it, including the Church Urban Fund. The Church sees it as part of its mission to be a key element of the voluntary sector infrastructure, helping to nurture and develop it, providing and supporting community leaders, critically engaging with government policy. Its role is not limited to the 'faith agenda' (as defined in government policy initiatives – most recently 'Side by Side and Face to Face'²³) .

The 'Glendale Alive' report²⁴ provides a good example of an Anglican led, locality focused, strategic approach which covers the linked themes of tourism and pilgrimage, use church buildings and land for community benefit, caring networks (including the role of churches in community development), leadership training and personal development for clergy and lay people undertaking new roles related to the church and the community, and lastly the way in which the church and its people could support the work of the local development trust.

The Mosque in Blyth is helping local Muslim people to strengthen their sense of identity, affirming men and women through learning, helping to develop good relations with statutory and voluntary services and providing a critical voice when this is required.

Churches Together groups are developing strategic alliances with other voluntary sector infrastructure groups particularly local development trusts. Individuals and groups provide connections between faith organisations and local partnerships, continuing long established patterns of involvement with local government at parish and town level.

²³Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) 'Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society'

²⁴ See above

Part Four: Inclusion, Exclusion and Discrimination

The following extract from a 2001 Home Office research study²⁵ illustrates the way in which religious discrimination can develop:

'Ignorance and indifference towards religion were of widespread concern amongst research participants from all faith groups. Ignorance and indifference do not in themselves constitute discrimination, but in organisational settings they can contribute towards an environment in which discrimination of all kinds (including 'unwitting' and institutional discrimination) is able to thrive'.

The areas where discrimination on the grounds of religion was most frequently reported were employment, education and the media. Discrimination on the grounds of religion was felt most acutely by Muslims. Amongst smaller faith groups, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons particularly reported high levels of prejudice and ignorance.

The three aspects of religion - affiliation, practice and belief – can each give rise to discrimination and issues of inequality. People can be discriminated against because of their perceived religious *affiliation*, irrespective of whether they practice their faith or even believe. In the workplace and in schools and colleges lack of flexibility and understanding can prevent people from *practising* their religion. Lack of respect from colleagues is an experience common to many people who make their *beliefs* known to those they work with, and much media coverage of religion encourages negative attitudes.

Discrimination can lead to isolation of individuals and groups from the wider community. In this study we have looked at ways in which existing networking within the faith sector serves to overcome, or reinforce, isolation.

In addition to interviews and conversation we have drawn upon research conducted by the Roman Catholic diocese of Hexham and Northumberland concerning the church and migrant people living and working in Northumberland²⁶.

²⁵ Purdam, K. et al (2001) 'Religious Discrimination in England and Wales' Research Paper 220 Home Office

²⁶ Antoniak, D. (2008) 'The Pastoral Care Needs of New Migrants in the North East of England : final report of a research survey into the needs of migrants in the North East's Catholic Community' Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and CRC(NE).

Migrant workers and discrimination

A survey undertaken in 2008 by the Roman Catholic diocese of Hexham and Newcastle with support from the Churches Regional Commission, examined the experience of migrant peoples belonging to the Roman Catholic faith and working in the region. The report showed that migrant people experienced significant levels of discrimination at work, at school and in the community.

The report examined the extent to which the church was able to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of migrant people. The survey was based on 236 returned questionnaires from migrant people, mainly from the Polish, Indian and Filipino communities.. In addition separate questionnaires were completed by 16 parish priests.

The most common issues that migrant people sought help from their priests for were employment, accommodation, food, education (including enrolment to Catholic schools), immigration (visas), and racial abuse. Some priests felt that migrants were 'not integrating' and 'not engaging' in parish life. Priests acknowledged that there was a need for clergy training on the culture and needs of migrants.

The report raises important questions about national and religious identity and belonging, and about the tension between the need to maintain cultural identity and the need for integration into what the report calls 'the wider community'.

In relation to maintaining cultural identity, which for these groups includes expressing their faith in its familiar local or national form, the Roman Catholic church provides special masses for Polish Roman Catholic communities in Berwick upon Tweed, Alnwick, Blyth and Prudhoe and special masses for the Indian Roman Catholic community in Berwick. The religious needs of migrant people are met in part by priests from their own countries of origin. Some of these priests thought it important to ensure that migrant people 'who are in the UK temporarily ...should maintain their identity and ways of worship so they do not have problems of reintegrating into the society when they go back home.'

This objective could become an isolating factor militating against migrant people becoming part of community life in their local parishes in England. One in three of the migrant people surveyed 'felt discriminated against', and many stated that they had experienced indirect discrimination. Some migrant people had limited and limiting expectations of the Church seeing it as being concerned only with spiritual concerns and did not see the Church as a source of practical support, for example, 'I expect the

Church to assist me in walking the way of Christ. That's it. I do not expect any paternal care, only the spiritual help, just support, right guidance'.

In Seahouses the local Roman Catholic and United Reform churches responded positively to the arrival of Polish people in their community, many of whom attended the two churches significantly increasing their congregations. Aware that migrant workers experience difficulties and prejudice the two churches worked with North Sunderland and Seahouses Development Trust to provide support and friendship to Polish people in the area. This initiative led to development of close personal ties and reciprocal family visits to Poland and England. Local Citizen's Advice Bureau volunteers attended Polish language lessons led by a tutor from the local Polish community. Support to Polish people included help with tax returns and employment related issues, common problems for people not familiar with the regulations of a new country. The involvement of people from the two churches helped to address prejudice based upon ignorance, particularly around the issue of employment. A DVD of the project entitled 'North Poles' is available from the URC church.

Issues from interviews relating to exclusion, inclusion and discrimination.

In our interviews we sought to establish the extent to which people in Northumberland experience religious discrimination using questions based on the 2001 Home Office research study referred to above:

- 1. Do your members, or their children, experience unfair treatment because of their religion?:*
- 2. Does your organisation ever experience unfair treatment because of religion when applying for funding?*
- 3. How often, if ever, does your organisation or religious community experience unfair treatment because of their religion in the media?*

In response to these questions the following conclusions emerged:

1. Churches have a responsibility to provide pathways to meet the spiritual needs of people who would not be comfortable approaching a minister or entering a church building.
2. Changing work, shopping and leisure patterns are creating different kinds of communities, and churches are often tied to the geography of the past.

3. Although many people live their lives without participating in organised worship they nevertheless retain an attachment.
4. For many people who have professional and personal networks relating both to their local community and to the city, the church provides a sense of belonging and a focus for shared community celebrations.
5. In the past people's sense of identity was often linked to the denomination they belonged to. Today with more movement across denominations and to some extent across faiths the sense of permanent identity is fading.
6. In places where all the children attend schools outside the village the church and its activities for young people provides the sense of local identity and coherence.
7. The presence of the Mosque and the Imam enables the police and other statutory services to engage positively with the Muslim community.
8. The Mosque provides significant learning and personal development opportunities for men, women and children.
9. It can be difficult to engage Churches Together groups in issues of social justice
10. Salvation Army members often encounter challenging behaviour and there have been instances of desecration (satanic graffiti for instance).
11. Ignorance and indifference about faith matters is common, Spiritualists and Jehovah's Witnesses in particular can experience discrimination on the grounds of religion based on ignorance.
12. Children can suffer at school if they are easily identified as Christians.
13. Muslims are encouraged by their Imam to acknowledge and be proud of their faith.

Part Five: Current Developments, Conclusions, Recommendations and Issues for Further Consideration.

Current developments

The Northumberland Strategic Partnership's (NSP's) current county wide consultation exercise, the Perfect Ten debates²⁷, provides a good opportunity for faith networks to engage with and help shape the development of the county and its communities. As the debates have progressed during 2009 and 2010, two related issues have been highlighted in open forums and in submissions by organisations and representative groups:

- firstly that community led development is central to the future of the county and
- secondly the importance of sustaining those things which make life worth living.

Although faiths and faith networks have important contributions to make to all ten of the Perfect Ten topics, the aims relating to the 'resilient people' and 'strong communities' topics are clearly of central concern. Equalities and freedom from discrimination are also matters in which faith network members have a direct interest.

The case studies explored in section three (above) of this study give many examples of the way in which local faith networks, often working in partnership with other community organisations, are helping to build and maintain sustainable communities, making a major resource contribution through volunteering and shared use of buildings and human resources. Some of the organisations responding to the Perfect Ten debates have highlighted the importance of quality of life issues such as sustaining traditions, local culture, heritage, creativity and a sense of place which, for many people, are central to making their lives rich and rewarding.

²⁷ <http://www.nsp.org.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=1777>

Recommendations

Networking by and within the faith sector should be strengthened to ensure that successful models of local collaboration can be more widely known and replicated.

There are many examples of faith communities actively engaged in community development in partnership with other community and voluntary sector organisations. At a very local level faith communities and the networks they represent provide their members with a sense of place which can encompass the quality of life factors discussed above. These local communities also help members of faiths to counter the isolation and discrimination often experienced by minorities. Networking within faiths, through local, regional and national faith organisational structures is more evident than networking across denominational and faith divisions.

Faith sector networking should be mapped in detail and related to the emerging 'natural community' structures from neighbourhood level upwards.

In terms of cross denominational networking local Churches Together groups are the principal faith networking structures but, with the notable exception of South East Northumberland, local Churches Together groups are not networked together except at regional level, through NECTT (North East Christian Churches Together)²⁸ and do not encompass people outside the Christian tradition. They are not therefore in a position to provide a voice for people of faith at the area or county level of the emerging local government structure.

This raises the question of the extent to which faith communities are concerned to pursue opportunities for such representation. In South East Northumberland there seems to be a positive response. In the North and in the West, where area wide links between faith communities have not yet emerged a desire for representation is less evident. This is not to say that people of faith are not actively engaged with local and area bodies only that they are not, in the main, participating as faith representatives. In an evolving environment it may be that people of faith in each of the county's three areas will find different ways of relating and engaging.

²⁸ www.northeastchurches.org.uk

Interaction between faith groups/networks and local government at all levels should be supported by 'Engaging with Faith' workshops for local government elected members and officers who have no personal experience of religious or faith motivated organisations.

Although the reasons for currently low levels of engagement by faith groups with local government structures relate mainly to the localised nature of the faith networks and to questions about representation in principle, lack of knowledge and experience of working with local government may also be a significant inhibiting factor.

The 'moral economy'²⁹ approach should be explored as a way of relating the ethical concerns of faith communities to the economic realities which all communities in Northumberland face.

Responses to the NSP's Perfect Ten debate point to the importance of shaping economic development to address wider issues such as sustainability and environmental impact. Faith communities and networks give voice to these ethical concerns.

Religion and belief should be more fully acknowledged as an integral part of the unitary authority's single equality scheme.

The extent of disadvantage and isolation arising from discrimination on the grounds of faith, or lack of faith in Northumberland, have yet to be fully explored, but faith networks are clearly important in relation to equalities and the unitary authority.

Issues for further consideration:

1. At times of crisis and stress, and when civil emergencies occur, individuals and communities often turn to faith leaders and groups for practical help, emotional support and leadership. What can we learn from previous events about the effectiveness of faith networks in responding to an emergency?
2. Faith organisations provide physical and human resources which are used by the whole community. How important is it to take a more strategic approach to the way in

²⁹ <http://www.workandsociety.com/downloads/theo3.pdf>

which networking can ensure that these resources can be inclusively accessed, supported and sustained?

3. Individuals and faith organisations give voice and expression to the needs and identity of faith communities. Would those involved benefit from training and development in communication, advocacy and use of creative forms of expression (for example, journalism, creative writing, visual and performing arts, video)?
4. Informal networking is fundamentally important. Do we need to give more consideration to how it can be encouraged, (for example, in the design of working and public spaces, processes of, and interactions with, statutory and representative bodies, internet social networking)?
5. Isolated and disadvantaged people need emotional and spiritual support but some do not relate to conventional faith organisations or their buildings. Chaplaincies in retail stores, offices, prison and hospitals offer alternative ways of accessing the resources of faith organisations. Would investment in networking within the faith sector and between the faith sector and the wider voluntary and statutory sectors help to support and develop the chaplaincy concept?
6. Membership of faith groups provides people with the opportunity to expand their networking to include a wider and more diverse spectrum of people. Are there ways in which the networking opportunities provided by faith organisations could be encouraged and enhanced?
7. Smaller communities and faith groups can find it difficult to sustain their own activities and may not have any resources to spare for networking. Does the Glendale Alive initiative provide a model for collaboration which could be replicated elsewhere in the county?
8. Faith networking bodies including Churches Together groups are building strategic alliances with other community infrastructure organisations, particularly with development trusts. Can the knowledge and expertise gained from these initiatives be shared through enhanced faith networking?
9. With numbers of paid clergy falling more religious functions and roles are being undertaken by lay people. As a consequence lay people are gaining transferable skills and experience. How can communities benefit from the human resources that faith organisations are developing, and what additional knowledge and skills do

people from faith groups need to serve their communities (for example, leadership skills, knowledge of local government and other statutory services, negotiating skills, advocacy skills, conflict resolution skills)?

10. There is some evidence that people of faith experience hostility and that ignorance about faith causes difficulties at work and in the community. Is there a need for more faith awareness and understanding programmes, particularly amongst those providing services to the public (including schools, health services, emergency services, local government)?

These questions could form the basis of a wider consultation and we would like to propose that an interfaith based seminar style event (or events in each of the three areas of the county) might be held to address these issues.

Appendix One: Selection of Interviewees

In selecting people to interview we aimed to have a broad mix without taking a rigid 'representative' approach. We have interviewed stipendiary and non stipendiary clergy, lay members of faith networks (Churches Together groups) and 'ordinary' members of faith communities. Whilst we did not aim to include all faiths or all Christian denominations we interviewed people from the principal Christian denominations represented in Northumberland (Church of England, Methodist, Roman Catholic and URC) as well as some smaller denominations (Quakers, the Salvation Army and Spiritualists), a well known Buddhist and the Imam of the Blyth mosque. In terms of geographical spread we interviewed people from all three areas (North: Alnwick, Berwick and Morpeth, South East: Blyth, Ashington, Pegswood, West: Wylam, Haltwhistle, and Prudhoe). We did not select interviewees on the basis of age or gender; there were more men than women interviewees and most were in the older age ranges.

Appendix Two: Profile of Faith Organisations in Northumberland

This summary is based on provisional data collected by the Churches Regional Commission (CRC) in connection with the forthcoming North East Regional Faiths Network/CRC regional faiths survey 2009, and is subject to any corrections or additions resulting from the survey returns.

Assembly of God

- Morpeth and Prudhoe

Ba'hai

- Burnlaw Centre (Allendale)

Baptist

- Alnwick, Berwick, Morpeth, Stocksfield

Buddhism

- Buddhist group (Hexham)
- Throssell Hole monastery (West Allen valley)
- Wat Ratangiri Buddhist Centre (Belsay)

Church of England

- 147 churches
- Alnmouth Friary
- Retreat Centre (Stocksfield)

Church of Latter-Day Saints

- Alnwick and Ashington

Methodist

- 50 churches and chapels

Muslim

- Blyth mosque

Quakers

- Allendale, Alnwick, Hexham, Stocksfield

Roman Catholic

- 26 churches
- Retreat Centre (Minsteracres)

Salvation Army

- Alnwick, Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth, Cramlington, Hexham, Newbiggin

URC

- 27 churches

Independent churches and congregations

In addition to churches within the Christian denominations shown above there are a number of independent churches and congregations across the county.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships

In a number of areas including South East Northumberland and rural West Northumberland Local Ecumenical Partnerships have been established including the Methodist and United Reform Churches. Arrangements for sharing buildings also involve the Roman Catholic Church.

Appendix Three : Previous Studies Relating to Faith Networking in Northumberland

(a) The Northumberland Consultations

The Northumberland Consultations report was presented to North East Christian Churches Together (NECCT) in 2002. The outcome of the consultation process, summarised in the report, provides some useful indicators of the extent to which networking was taking place within the Christian faith sector and gives some insights into the underlying motives for networking.

These included:

- the declining number of clergy/ministers available to resource a stable number of worshipping congregations
- changing local authority community structures and boundaries
- issues of isolation, and marginalisation (caused by poverty and disability)
- need to sustain and support rural communities
- lack of social housing affecting the age and income profile of communities
- mismatch of community ties (school catchment areas, parishes, travel to work and to amenities)

The report draws a number of conclusions,

- that people are able to organise themselves in “natural communities³⁰” irrespective of statutory boundaries
- that focusing on the areas in which people live helps them to look beyond the agenda of their own church
- there are different patterns of “natural communities” within Northumberland and some villages may not fit easily into area “clusters”

³⁰ The use of the term ‘natural communities’ occurs in the ‘way forward’ section of the 2002 NECCT report (above). It is suggested that ‘...Churches identify what we have called “natural communities...”’ This term is now used in a specific way in Northumberland’s Sustainable Community Strategy to refer to four layers of community ranging from the very local ‘neighbourhood’ level to the ‘county’ at the highest level. Use of the term ‘natural communities’ in this study refers to the looser NECCT usage and not the technical usage found in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

- churches need expect advice and assistance if they are to get involved in community partnerships and access funded community programmes
- levels of ecumenical cooperation vary greatly across the area. Involvement tends to be higher in larger communities.

The report also recommends churches

to establish a common system for gathering and updating statistical information relating to levels and nature of pastoral care

- to share their policy decisions with one another and share in the processes that lead to policy changes
- to encourage congregations to work together at the natural community level, in part to support their engagement in community partnerships that reflect government policy and funding priorities
- to assist congregations that have not yet caught the ecumenical vision to develop into effective natural community clusters
- to work with natural communities in ecumenical teams sharing ministry and maybe buildings too
- to share responsibility for pastoral care and to develop and resource lay ministries in each natural community, in full consultation with the people living there.

The report made a number of suggestions for action which included:

- identification of natural communities
- ensuring that natural communities have a fair share of available human resources
- named individuals in each community given responsibility for encouraging ecumenical growth
- ecumenical training for lay ministries
- consultation with local people to consider building sharing schemes
- NECCT to accept responsibility for collecting and updating statistical information relating to each natural community
- outcomes of the consultation to be widely disseminated.

(b) The Glendale Alive³¹ report

This Anglican initiative was produced in 2008 based on the Rural Mission and Ministry Initiative consultancy.

A set of linked strategies were developed covering the themes of tourism and pilgrimage; use of church buildings and land for community benefit; caring networks (including the role of churches in community development), leadership training and personal development for clergy and lay people undertaking new roles related to the church and the community; and lastly the way in which the church and its people could support the work of the Glendale Gateway Trust.

The report looks at examples of the decline of established rural voluntary organisations, due in part to ageing population profiles in smaller rural communities. It is suggested that there may be a trend toward concentration of voluntary sector activities into market towns (Wooler being the example in Glendale). Churches in smaller settlements may be perceived as having less vitality than those in the market town. A certain population size is required to support the specialist or single issue voluntary organisations that have to an extent replaced the more 'comprehensive' community organisations that characterised smaller rural communities in the past. Also, whilst many newer voluntary and community organisations have been initiated and developed by people connected with the church, their relationship to the church may be less evident than the link between the village churches and village organisations was in the past.

The wider range of roles being undertaken by lay members of churches is associated with increased investment in their training and personal development. As well as helping the church overcome falling numbers of stipendiary clergy the trend could also result in an increase in the number of people able and willing to undertake leadership roles in rural community and voluntary sector organisations.

(c) 'Keeping Faith with the Countryside'

This region wide consultation which took place in 2002 was led by the Churches Regional Commission. It marked the 10th anniversary of the Archbishops' Commission report 'Faith in the Countryside'. In the aftermath of the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak it looked at the following issues:

³¹ 'Glendale Alive: Report for the Rural Mission and Ministry Initiative' William Temple Foundation (2008)

- What can we do about rural social exclusion?
- Whither agriculture and the rural economy?
- What kind of landscape and environment do we want?

The conclusions reached by panels included a call to churches to lead:

- in pressing for a social justice agenda leading to wealth distribution
- in driving government and society to challenge people to put something back into the community through volunteering and philanthropy
- in developing the 'moral economy' where assets are justice, integrity, hope, trust, co-operation, sharing, inclusivity, networking and mutual respect
- in lobbying for policy changes that support rural areas
- in community development, building hope in the community
- in being a prophetic voice in relation to ethical local food production, challenging the blame culture and building self-esteem through the recognition of skills.