

FAITH AND SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

**Report on the
2001 National Meeting of
The Inter Faith Network
for the UK**

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PROCEEDINGS

The teachings of each faith command or encourage service to others: service to others within the faith community and to the world at large. The purpose of the Network's 2001 National Meeting was to explore what this might mean in practice.

Following the Network's AGM for 2001 held earlier in the course of the morning session, **Bishop Tom Butler**, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting. He emphasised the important role of faith communities in service to others and the value of different faiths working co-operatively on projects. He then invited **Rosalind Preston**, elected that morning to serve as Network Co-Chair for the coming year, Chair of Nightingale, a major residential and nursing home for members of the Jewish community, and Mental Health Manager for the Harrow and Hillingdon Community Health Trust to talk from a Jewish perspective about volunteering in this country in both a faith-based environment and outside of the faith community.

The second speaker in the morning session was **Ravinder Singh**, the founder of Khalsa Aid, talking about the organisation's work. There then followed a brief plenary discussion before lunch.

After lunch, **Bishop Tom Butler** introduced **Priyya Lukka**, a young Hindu researcher at the Institute for Volunteering in which her special area of interest is faith-based volunteering, to offer some insights into the links between faith and volunteering. Following this presentation, there followed four workshops on faith-based social initiatives in the UK: faith-based overseas aid work; the community of living beings: service to animals in the natural world; and serving the community through one's profession.

Following a break for tea, the final plenary session was chaired by **Rosalind Preston**. In the last few years, government has become increasingly interested in the contribution that faith-based organisations might make to social welfare. Whereas in past years such organisations were often excluded from applying for funding for such work, now they are being positively encouraged to do so. **Sarah Lindsell**, Director, Catholic Agency for Social Concerns, offered some reflections on the factors which needed to be taken into account by a faith community organisation in considering whether to seek government funding for its work. There followed a brief plenary discussion before the close of the meeting.

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME? A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

**Mrs Rosalind Preston OBE, Co-Chair of the Inter Faith Network
and Chair of Nightingale**

Introduction

For all of us who are members of faith communities and who serve both our own community and the wider community, what is important is not only what we say but what we do. This meeting provides us with the chance to share our experience in this field.

To provide a context for my remarks, I should like to begin by giving you some background to the Jewish community in the UK today. It is a community largely composed of immigrants and refugees or the children and grand-children of immigrants. The following potted history is by way of explanation as to why our community has structured itself in the way it has, for centuries having found it necessary, indeed essential, to create self-help community groupings. These are chiefly concerned with the provision of welfare services, maintaining religious education, meeting housing and health needs and fighting *against* discrimination and *for* civil liberties.

Jews first came to these shores with William the Conqueror from northern France – 1066 and all that! England was, in fact, the last of the great Western countries to receive a Jewish community.

The Jews settled in the trading and commercial centres of London, York, Oxford, Norwich, Canterbury and Bristol and carried with them, as they had through centuries of dispersal as people without a homeland, their religion and culture.

Nearly two hundred years later in 1290 came the expulsion of the Jewish communities from these shores in the reign of Edward I, as the final outcome and consequence of a Papal Bull of 1215, and following spasmodic periods of severe persecution and extreme limitations on means of livelihood and occasional massacres. It was not until the middle of the 17th Century, and the arrival on the national scene of Oliver Cromwell, that Jewish life began to re-establish itself in the United Kingdom and was the beginning of the present day Jewish community here. These historic events, and, of course, the tragedy of the Jewish experience during the Second World War, have had a direct impact on the nature of our lives in this country now and on the issues of today relating to our theme for this meeting: “Faith and Service to the Community”.

I have said that the Jews carry with them, wherever they go, their religion and culture. What does Jewish teaching say about service to community or “volunteerism”, as we now label it? Or shall I use Biblical language, and refer to “righteousness and benevolence”, the literal translation of the Hebrew word *Tzedakah*, more often expressed in modern terminology as “charity” but always linked to the vision of seeking justice and creating a just society.

Jewish teaching is clear. I quote from the standard code of Jewish law, “Every person is obliged to give charity. Even a poor man who is himself supported by charity is obliged to give from that which he receives”. And, yes, there is an obligation firstly to give to the poor in one’s own family, then in one’s own town and then to the poor of other towns. But if

Jewish charity begins at home, it certainly does not stop there. We are also taught that the collection of alms and the giving of assistance to the needy is a basic precept and a fundamental instruction. We are given clear instruction on how to collect alms, without harassment, and how to distribute them, with great sensitivity and without causing embarrassment. There has to be no condescension in alms giving or in the care of the needy. In ancient Jewish teaching acts of benevolence especially singled out were visiting the sick, attending funerals, comforting mourners and, of great importance in those times, the essential need to redeem captives held to ransom by kidnappers.

I rather like an old Jewish saying which illustrates the difference between the words “charity” and “benevolence”: “Charity awaits the cry of distress; benevolence anticipates the cry of distress”.

How have these teachings and traditions been handed down and turned into positive action in today’s modern society? With a welfare state system in place and with the fairly recent creation on the national scene of “The Third Way”, the non-Governmental, independent, voluntary sector?

To supply the answer to this question, with up-to-date data, the Institute of Jewish Policy Research, an independent agency established by our community to provide it with properly researched information, conducted an in-depth study and published its report last year.

It would appear that faith and service are both very much alive and well. The report discovered a Jewish voluntary sector comprising registered charities; self-help groups; voluntary associations and self-governing organisations in abundance. In fact, just under 2000 financially independent organisations. We were amazed at the scale of it. A representative group of 36 organisations were then selected for in-depth study. And what have we learned? The largest number in the study, (33%,) have a paid staff of between just one and four people and 15%, that is the five largest organisations, employ 100 or more full-time staff. The main fields of activity are very reminiscent of bygone days: the largest proportion 33% address social welfare needs; 19% Religion and Education and the rest are spread fairly evenly over Culture; Youth; and Israel.

Thousands of volunteers are supporting this great range of organisations, both financially and physically, with considerable levels of personal service and commitment, giving their time and energy to supply our community with the means to maintain synagogues and educational institutions, run fundraising charities, grant-making trusts and housing associations. In doing so they are impacting on individual lives, most especially the young, the sick and disabled, the elderly, the lonely and depressed, adding happiness, comfort, dignity and general well-being to many members of our congregations.

Beyond this range of activity, in society at large, again thousands of individual Jews are recognising their responsibility to the wider community and, of course, many choose only to contribute to this field, preferring to work for, and support, national and international causes. A large number do both.

One outstanding example of our faith community reaching out to the wider world, and with which I am very proud to be associated, is provided by the League of Jewish Women, which was established in 1943 and states as one of its principles “To stimulate in each Jewish woman her personal sense of civic duty and to encourage her to express it by increased service to the country”. Members are active in groups around the country working in hospitals and hospices; serving people with disabilities or learning difficulties; running adult

literacy and numeracy schemes; working in the tea bar, reception and creche at Strangeways Prison visitors' centre; supporting asylum seekers and refugees; making sandwiches for homeless people; working in Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Relate Centres, and for Victim Support and Samaritans. The list is endless.

Another outstanding example of service to the community is to be found at the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the community's leading representative body, in whose work I have also been involved. Founded in 1760 to bring together the Jewish community of that time and to have a single voice to represent them to the outside world, the Board today speaks to Government, statutory agencies and other faiths on major issues of the day which impact on the lives of Jews in this country.

The Board brings together synagogue congregations, youth movements and independent service organisations and is financed by members of those organisations. Elected Deputies attend regular plenary meetings, and serve on Regional Councils and working parties and in many other ways as part of their voluntary service. This organisation has served our community very well.

I am very proud to be associated with both these organisations. I hope you will see that I feel very strongly as a member of the Jewish community that I have been greatly blessed by the opportunity of working, not only within my own faith community in various capacities, but through that to be able to work with members of other faiths. I have been involved in inter faith dialogue on one level or another all my adult life. Indeed, I started even when I was a child. It has been a most rewarding side of my work and a very important part of my life.

I feel most honoured to have been asked to become a Co-Chair of the Inter Faith Network, which has become an outstanding organisation and has achieved a great deal over the last few years. I look forward to continuing to be part of that process.

SERVICE: THE COMMUNITY IS THE WORLD – A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

Ravinder Singh, founder of Khalsa Aid

Khalsa Aid was not set up as a result of careful planning over a period of months or years. It was formed in 1999 at the time of the Kosovo crisis and represented a very spontaneous response to that particular situation.

In 1999 the Sikh community celebrated the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Khalsa. The distinctive image of a Sikh means that we can always recognise one another and be recognised as Sikhs by other people. Wherever we go, we cannot hide ourselves but have to stand up and be counted: to be seen to be on the side of justice, to feed the poor and most of all, to feel the pain of other people. When you know that there are struggles and difficulties in other parts of the world, maybe in the household next door to you, maybe within your own family, then either you can live and sleep peacefully or you know that you must do something about it. In the family, whether my brother or mother or my sister is suffering then I cannot be unaware of this. But if we look at the whole of humanity as a large family then we have to be aware of ways in which all other people are suffering. It was this approach which inspired young people in the Sikh community in 1999 to do something about the Kosovo crisis.

I myself came to this country in 1981 from the Punjab in India. I could not speak English and came from a farm which had no electricity or TV. After a few years in secondary school here I learned some English. I remember in 1986, very clearly, some Oxfam leaflets coming through our letterbox. I went to the Oxfam shop in Slough and said that I wanted to do something to help. I walked from Slough to Uxbridge and back, eight miles in each direction. I did it by myself and raised about £300 for Oxfam and felt very good as a result. I had made a start but wanted to do more. But when you leave school and start work, it is easy to think you have no time for charitable work.

However, in 1999, five or six of us got together, concerned about what was going in Kosovo. At that time, there were a lot of street processions in the Sikh community all over the country to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa. At these processions there were a lot of food stalls. If you have ever been to a Sikh procession you will know that there is food in abundance at them, given away freely by Sikh families as a gift from their heart. Part of being happy is to share. “Vand Chhakna” is what we Sikhs call it: sharing what we have. This does not just mean food. I may need to lend you my coat if it is raining and you do not have one. So, those of us who got together thought about the way there was so much food available at these Sikh events and within the Sikh gurdwaras where there is a tradition of a “langar” or a community kitchen where anyone, no matter who, can come in and eat. Why did we not offer food to those who really needed it? Which at that time was in Kosovo.

None of us had ever done anything like this before. We made an appeal to the Sikh community in particular, asking them to give generously on the basis that this was what the community should do. We did not demand specific sums of money but left it open to those who we approached to decide how much they wanted to give. But no one turned us away or said that they would not help because the appeal was for people who were not from the Sikh community itself. It was a moment when I was very proud of the Sikh community. We raised at that time between £20,000 and £25,000 in ten days in Southall and Slough alone.

This experience was an inspiration for us. Our religious traditions can inspire us in this way. We looked back at Sikh history and were aware of many occasions when Sikhs have been inspired to do good. Since the fall of the Sikh Kingdom in 1849, Sikhs have suffered a great deal but we have learned from this suffering. We learn from all our experiences. The word Sikh actually means “learner”. One story from our tradition is about Bhai Ghaniya who was in the service of Guru Gobind Singh, our tenth leader. During a battle, Guruji received a report that Bhai Khanaiya was giving ointment and water to the wounded enemy soldiers. He was called into the Guru’s presence. The other Sikhs around the Guru asked Bhai Ghaniya why he was doing this. He explained to the Guru, “You have told me that everyone is equal and to recognise the whole human race as one. Why should I not do this action?” The Guru said that he had never said it was wrong to do it and congratulated him on his actions and gave him support in carrying on his good work.

Nowadays, Sikhs are to be found all over the world and constitute a network of communities and individuals. When we are doing charitable work in another country we always look at how any Sikhs there help us, or any community for that matter. In the Kosovo crisis, we headed off to Albania, driving through Europe. On the way through Europe we were pulled over by the police on many occasions and were often called Afghans! But we explained who we were and what we were doing. At the port in Italy they were charging a thousand dollars a truck to go across to Albania and were not concerned about charity. There were a few others from England in the convoy who were trying to take help there but could not afford to get their trucks across. We had some spare money which was not my money but given by people just like yourselves for our charitable work. So we paid the money to get the truck to Albania. In Albania, even in the port there were many problems. Everyone had to bribe the port officials. Luckily, we linked up with a Catholic mission in Lac in Albania. A priest came over personally and took us out of the port after we had waited there for over six hours, but many people were stuck there for weeks and even unloaded and burned their charity supplies and left the country because they couldn’t leave the port because they hadn’t got the money to pay for the bribes. So we learned a lot about how life is. Everyone was armed; kids, youngsters, everyone was armed. After two weeks of work in Albania, we learned many things, some of which were more hurtful than others. Actually seeing the suffering changed us.

We found that we could not actually get into Kosovo itself but could reach the main refugee camp at Kukes on the border with Albania. Kukes is the main camp in north Albania on the borders of Kosovo, with refugees arriving almost on a daily basis. The last day we were there and were leaving, we gave all our foodstuffs to the UN. We had spare clothes for ourselves but knew we would be back in England after two more days, so we gave away the extra clothes we had and kept what we were wearing. We had some food left in the van, so we wrapped it in a jacket. You could not give it openly without getting mobbed. I remember very clearly that I ran towards these three people, a very elderly lady and her son, who was very sick, (I think he was blind) and her husband. I just gave her the clothes and turned to run back to the van. But she grabbed me and put her hands on my head. I knew what she was saying, even though I couldn’t understand it. That was very heart breaking. She must have walked over the mountains to get where she was, just sitting there, absolutely tired out. I reflected a lot on this incident on my way back to England.

Then, later, the Turkish earthquake occurred. So we sent a team out to the area with medicines and water purification tablets. Though we are only a small charity, we do have a lot of support from the community for our charitable work. Then there was the cyclone in Orissa and we went down there too. We are from Punjab in the west of India and were going to eastern India. So we put out feelers in the Sikh community to find out if they knew anyone

in Orissa. We have never had to stay in hotels to this day on our trips to disaster areas. We met a Sikh in the armed forces who introduced us to many people in India, one of whom became our guide. We went to the main town in Orissa and we stayed with some Sikhs from the Punjab who were already there helping. That gave us more hope. In the devastated area where there had been a village it was like a flat space with nothing left. Just a bit of ground with no trees, nothing. On 31 December 1999, when everyone here was preparing to celebrate the Millenium, we were out there in the fields in Orissa. The worst of it was that after three months there were still bodies on the farms, in the peat bogs, in the marshlands. Where there was water in the fields, perhaps first a pond, there were still bodies there. Most of the bodies were of people who had tied themselves to one another, trying to save each other. So that they could hold on. So four members of the family might be tied together to hold on to a tree, but when the water rose up twenty to thirty feet, it swept the whole family off the tree and you could see them all still tied to one another.

There were some swamis there from the Swaminarayan mandir in Calcutta who were actually cremating the bodies alongside some Sikhs. This was very, very good work and we could not praise it enough.

Recently we went to Gujarat and again, we made use of the Sikh community there, which helped us immensely. Wherever we wanted to go, they were our guides. So we have learned to use the international network of our community around the world. There might be very influential Sikhs living in Kenya, so if Ethiopia is struggling and there is a famine there, then we should utilise that community in Kenya. Sometimes people will ask us why our charity doesn't help Sikhs. The answer is that there is no natural disaster at the moment in the Punjab. The Sikh community doesn't say to us that they are not going to help because you are helping people who belong to other faiths. They haven't done that and the day that someone does say that to me, will be a source of shame.

We are all young men. I'm not young any more! I will be 32 this year, so I'm getting a bit grey haired! We're all young men. We all have a professional employment – either in IT or some other business. We don't get paid for our charity work. This voluntary service is, in our language, 'seva'. 'Seva' is selfless service. In this country I will never starve. We have come from the Punjab which from time to time needs help. But we are now able to help others. Every one of us can help, because in this country there is a lot of support, not only from the Government, but from the wider community.

There is also the hope that we learn from our own experience. You go to another country and you give them everything you have to give and wish you could do more. What we can do is just a drop in the ocean. What can you take with you for this work? What you take with you is hope. On our recent trip to Gujarat, we got to a town in the middle of the night called Anjar, which was the first town we reached. It was absolutely devastated or most of it was. We still remember the fires burning in the open air, because people wouldn't sleep inside their home even if it was still standing, for fear that it would collapse on them. A lot of people were living in shock. You can just go to any area of devastation in the world like this and put your hand on their back and say "We will do what we can to help. We can see you are in need. We are from a land that can help". Do you know how much hope that gives someone? It's absolutely amazing. You can really lift their spirits. If I am down, someone will pick me up and there is no gloom in my life any more but hope for the future.

So the Sikh way of life for us youngsters, which inspires us, is the belief that we must fight for justice and the fight for justice is a personal commitment. What I say to everyone is that, whatever community you are from, each faith teaches us we must look after each other. We

must draw on that support to work together. Like I said, what we do may be a drop in the ocean, but together we can actually make a difference. I think each individual can make a difference. We have raised awareness and that is important. So the inspiration for Khalsa Aid was there for us. It's there for you. Everything that we do is inspired through our teaching. My partner in business is an Egyptian Muslim. I have recently become partners with him but he made it a condition that I carry on with my charity work. I told him that I had to come to Birmingham today. So he said, go. We can work together, and if there is a disaster anywhere in the world to which I need to go, for example in Gujarat where we have a building programme, then I can go anytime. We are here in a better situation than many other people have. Let's make the world a better place. That is what inspires us and we will make a difference if we try.

Unfortunately, we do encounter a lot of corruption. We were threatened many times in many countries. Recently in Gujarat we were warned that if we didn't hand our money over to this person, or that person, we would be put inside prison. But to me as a Sikh, the Khalsa, means 'Tun, Mun, Dun'. 'Tun' is your body, 'Mun' is your mind, your spiritual side and 'Dun' is your worldly materialistic goods. When you take the amrit, or baptism, you pledge all three to the service of humanity. I am sure there is an initiation ceremony in most faiths. Your body, your mind, your worldly goods, are working for the Lord twenty four hours a day. What are you going to fear? A bullet in the chest, or letting people down? We believe in God. We believe that we have been under his protection so far. Wherever we go, we take our hearts with us and we take the blessings of our people with us.

In discussion following the two presentations, the following points were made:-

- a. There is a need to develop better support networks for women, particularly in Asian communities, with good quality advice on medical and domestic problems. The concerns of women have too often been neglected by faith communities in the past.
- b. A project called SCAN has been launched in Slough in which members of Khalsa Aid and others are involved. It aims to provide counselling and health advice to women working in a variety of South Asian languages, as well as in English. A particular social problem is the difficult situation in which widows in the Asian community often find themselves. Faith communities can play an important role in providing social support systems for people in this and similar situations;
- c. In the Jewish community too, very often widows find themselves marginalised in social activity. Increasingly, synagogues and Jewish community bodies are recognising the need to deal with their concerns.

FAITH AND VOLUNTEERING

Priyya Lukka, Institute for Volunteering Research

The Institute for Volunteering Research in London is part of The National Centre for Volunteering and aims to provide support for volunteering as a powerful force for change in society. I am here to talk with you today about the link between faith and volunteering and a new project at the Institute, which we are very excited to begin. This will be the first in depth exploration into the voluntary activity of different faith groups in England and has been kindly funded by the Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust.

I am sure that you all already know how much voluntary action underpins much of the activity in faith communities. Volunteering and service to the community are tenets of many religions, which extol being virtuous and helpful to those in need. In many faiths, values advocate that believers should give of themselves, through volunteering as part of their religious obligations and congregational duties. We can also see how congregations can provide a forum in which people form relationships that can lead to voluntary roles and caring activities. Indeed, having grown up in Leicester, a melting pot of different faith groups, I have seen for myself how communities have flourished and strengthened through support from their local places of worship and other faith links.

For the Institute, our work in the area began, when it became clear that, although we are a lead organisation for volunteering, we had limited understanding of faith-based voluntary action. With my colleague Mike Locke at the University of East London, we began looking for work of any kind on this area. We very quickly found that most of the work was dominated by American scholars looking at faith-based initiatives in the US. From this we learnt a great deal about how faith values, translate into voluntary action. Research suggests that the congregation is a value-fostering environment. Evidence also pointed out that having a faith can and does inspire and instill altruistic behaviour in people, such that they feel that ought to act in ways to help others.

We begun to understand how religious beliefs and institutions were frameworks that enable people to understand the meaning and consequence of altruism. Indeed many popular faith parables, such as the story of the Good Samaritan in Christianity, are part of the cultural repertoire of society. It was argued that this, and equivalent or similar stories in other faiths, offer the language that increases the possibility of human kindness in a society of strangers.

Looking at what motivates a faith-inspired person to volunteer showed a range of influences. These were things like:

- Having strong moral inclinations
- Volunteering being an extension of faith beliefs or a way to share the love of God
- Being part of a culturally bound faith community which takes its roots in shared purposes and volunteering
- Working to make the local community they live in, a better place.

In addition to this, research shows that places of worship are in effect, community centres which are ideally placed to promote volunteering.

From our research we wrote various papers and journal articles on faith-based volunteering. We were able to understand that attending places of worship can provide interaction with

others, the feeling of belonging to an organisational structure and can create a structured relationship that facilitates volunteering. However, we were as yet unsure as to how things really are in the UK. What types of faith-based volunteering do we have? What is the range of activities that faith groups in the UK are involved in? What is the ethnic make-up of local congregations?

As the line up for the afternoon workshops shows, there are a vast range of projects, from social initiatives to overseas aid work, to care for the environment.

Coming back to our work, as more people read our articles, I began to receive emails and calls from faith leaders and groups and community workers involved in faith-based initiatives. All of them expressed how nice it was to see faith-based volunteering being recognised and discussed. Learning of their individual projects and voluntary work made me realise how many interesting and unique examples there are, of how faith groups engage their communities. Many raised the concern that they had little understanding of what other faith groups were doing. Others spoke about needing help with re-examining their approach to involving different communities. Many said that there was room for a stronger partnership with the mainstream voluntary sector.

From here we developed our idea for the faith-based volunteering project, that we are about to begin, through consulting with faith groups and other contacts. We hope that the project will uncover how different or maybe similar things are in the UK, compared to the US. Through talking with faith groups and representatives we hope to map ways in which different faith communities engage in voluntary activity and to develop an understanding of how voluntary activity is organised and resourced in some faith communities. We also hope to prepare the groundwork for further research, on how faith communities can respond to public policies to promote community involvement.

In particular, we are also aware that when faith-based voluntary action overlaps with racial and ethnic identities, it creates even stronger patterns of involvement. I am aware that many of the most disadvantaged and least heard people in Britain are members of minority faith communities. This is important, as faith communities' are good at 'accessing their people' through offering support and grassroots services, to those who have been traditionally socially excluded.

We also think that this is a timely piece of research, particularly with the Government's intention to engage willing faith-based voluntary organisations, with a role in delivering public services. Also, with their aim to develop Active Communities and promote self-help, the Government is also aware that faith groups collectively represent a large and well-resourced part of the country's voluntary and community sector. The policy significance of faith-based volunteering is clearly increasing with the Social Exclusion Unit recognising the valuable resources of faith groups in terms of mutual aid, service provision and community development.

However, in looking to the future, I think that there needs to be some consideration to how the partnership between faith groups, the voluntary sector and the Government is developed. Such a partnership needs to be nurtured in a way that all parties can talk to each other on equal terms and are respectful to each other, in uniting joint aims of serving the community. I hope that through our project we can build greater understanding of faith-based voluntary action in different communities, and at congregational, local community and international levels. At the Institute, we hope that this can help to build more understanding and respect between different faiths, cultures and ethnic groups - something that is very much needed in

Britain and Northern Ireland at a vulnerable time in race relations. I also hope that we are able to continue the ethos of the Inter Faith Network of mutual respect.

Finally, I would like to draw to your attention that the National Centre for Volunteering is holding an inter faith service in October at the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, as part of our National Convention, which you would all be most welcome to attend. I look forward to your workshops and if any of you are interested in finding out more about the project or the Institute, please do talk to me in the afternoon. I would like to thank you for listening to me today, and I leave you with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, possibly one of the more famous faith-inspired volunteers of our time. He once said that:

“True service of society is that whereby society, that is all its members, are uplifted”

For me this sums up what many faith groups are doing in their communities today and I hope you can join me in wishing good luck to the future of this work.

In discussion, the following points were made:-

- a. In Scotland, local authorities are often reluctant to engage with local faith communities and are unwilling to fund their projects. However, faith communities are providing valuable services and it is hoped that local authorities will be more forthcoming about funding in future. This is already the case in some parts of Britain.
- b. Public funding for a project run essentially by volunteers can make it more bureaucratic as part of the requirements of accountability for the use of public funds.
- c. There is a need for the Churches, and possibly other faith communities as well, to review their own structures and practices to make sure that they are not discriminatory in racial or gender terms. It has proved difficult to persuade congregations to respond sympathetically to the problems of asylum seekers and refugees.
- d. The Institute for Volunteering hopes to hold workshops in the coming months involving faith community members, both regionally and nationally.
- e. The national government is now much more open to the support of faith-based organisations and is keen to encourage volunteering schemes. The Millennium Volunteer Programme sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills is a potentially valuable development.
- f. Faith communities should encourage their members to take up volunteering opportunities. It would be helpful if periods of volunteering could come to be recognised as an important part of a person's CV when applying for paid employment.
- g. The value of volunteering to help with local inter faith work should not be overlooked.

WORKSHOP 1

FAITH-BASED SOCIAL INITIATIVES IN THE UK

Facilitator: Mr Jehangir Sarosh, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Mr Lakshman Singh spoke about the work of the Curry Project in Bradford. The title of the project was adopted as one which could unify the work of people from different faiths, rather than adopting a term relevant to any particular one of these. When it began, charitable work in Bradford was largely in the hands of Christian organisations. The new initiative began by making available ready prepared meals which were distributed to homeless people in a car park. Now it has expanded into a much larger organisation with a number of social workers funded by the Church Urban Fund and provides between 12-15,000 meals a year. All those who help to prepare and distribute these meals are volunteers drawn from Bradford's different faith communities. The project also delivers blankets for homeless people, although not all its clients are homeless. They include asylum seekers, refugees, alcoholics, drug addicts, the lonely, the disadvantaged and the dispossessed. Some clients can be abusive and violent, especially those indulging in solvent abuse. So it can be tough work.

His colleague Mr Ash Sharma stressed the multi-faith and multi-ethnic character of the project. Minority groups are often not represented sufficiently in work in the voluntary sector or in statutory social services. Volunteers come from all over the north of England to help, offering one hour of their time when they are able to do so. The project has a common ethos of respect for humanity, whatever people's needs. The project has used the facilities of the Anglican Cathedral in Bradford and the local YMCA. Around 70 people are fed and there are a number of sittings. There is no preaching at them. It is possible to refer individuals with particular needs to the relevant authority, for example for accommodation. Funding comes from schools and churches and support is also given by shop-keepers. The projects' clientele are the socially excluded. Inevitably, there are many problems associated with dealing with vulnerable, disadvantaged people. There can be personal attacks and drug users can scatter their syringes around the venues which the project uses. It was emphasised that the recent disturbances in Bradford did not arise as a result of differences between different faiths. It was unfortunate that these recent events marred the image of Bradford as providing a model for a multi-cultural community. The Curry Project would be willing to help any other organisation which wants to operate on similar lines.

Mr Ian Dixon works for the Salvation Army in Birmingham. Its work with the homeless and other people and based on Christian principles. His divisional office covers Staffordshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and part of Powys, along with all the Metropolitan Boroughs around Birmingham.

The Salvation Army was founded in 1878 by William Booth who felt the call to be an itinerant preacher and established the East London Christian Mission ten years or so earlier. William Booth's social work arose out of his Christian beliefs. He felt there was no point in trying to preach to someone who had cold feet or toothache! In its early days the Salvation Army engaged in practical social work as well as trying to find accommodation for poor women, many of whom were pregnant and for the homeless. Bramwell Booth opened an old warehouse as a centre for the homeless to be housed. Ironically, at the time there was concern to ensure that every cab-horse received food, shelter and work, but poor people received less consideration. The Salvation Army tried to teach people a trade. For example, its match

factory produced the first non-phosphorous match. William Booth published his plan for a comprehensive Social Service in 1890 with his book *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. This book was used as a blue print for the present day welfare state set up in 1948.

A book published in 1999 entitled *The Paradox of Prosperity* sets out the agenda and the challenging issues facing society over the next ten years and the Salvation Army's response and how the Salvation Army will meet them. It is the largest provider of social work service apart from the Government itself. In the West Midlands it has just opened a new care home for the elderly at a cost of £3.2 million which provides all the non-nursing care that those coming out of hospital need. There are hostel facilities in Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke through which it seeks to re-settle and rehabilitate homeless people. It helps those with learning difficulties to learn basic skills and works in co-operation with various other agencies. It also runs a unit for those affected by domestic violence, and will shortly be developing a new centre which has some 20, two and three bedroomed flats. Local residents were concerned about this being opened in their area, underlining the difficulties still involved in tackling social problems.

In discussion, the following points were made:-

- (a) A day centre in Stroud is doing valuable work in catering for those with mental health problems was mentioned.
- (b) Increasingly local authorities appear to be willing to give financial support to faith-based organisations.
- (c) The project of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, launched in 1974, provides meals for homeless people, serving 500 a day in London six days a week.
- (d) It was noted that faith can also play an important role in healing and in offering guidance and counselling to patients.
- (e) A number of local inter faith groups have been consulted by public services in their areas about ways in which help can be delivered to those in need.

WORKSHOP 2

FAITH-BASED OVERSEAS AID WORK

Facilitator: Mr Brian Pearce, Director, The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Mr Aflak Suleman of Islamic Relief described how the organisation had been set up by Dr Hanny El Banna in Birmingham in 1984 when he was still a student. He had been deeply moved by the plight of those suffering from famine in Ethiopia. The first donation was just 20p. The charity is now active in 27 countries alleviating poverty and suffering. Initially, it focused its efforts on emergency relief for victims of conflict and natural disasters, for example in Afghanistan following the earthquake and in Bangladesh following the floods. Now it is also engaged in longer term development work, for example in Bosnia and in Kosovo. A major focus of its work is on the borders of Chechnya, to which many refugees are unable to return. It has worked with Oxfam in Ethiopia and with Cafod (the Catholic aid agency) in El Salvador and has close working relationships with the Department for International Development. Its Secretary of State, Rt Hon Clare Short, recently attended the launch of Islamic Relief's study pack for schools on *Reacting to Poverty*. It is mainly a volunteer organisation but now has some full time staff. It receives nearly 85% of its income from individuals and the balance from organisations and in 2000 it had an income of £14million. Its charitable work is not confined to Muslims. For example, it has worked in El Salvador and has helped Hindus and Christians in India and a few of its volunteers are not Muslims. The basic concern of the organisation is to meet human need.

Mr Nitin Palan of the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission [SHM] described the work of BAPS, which provided emergency relief after the cyclone in Orissa and the earthquake in Gujarat. The disaster in Gujarat, which is the central homeland of the Swaminarayan tradition, was on an immense scale. The town of Bhuj was almost totally destroyed, even though the mandir, while damaged, still stood erect. The first priority for relief work there was to provide food and medicine and within a matter of hours aid was arriving. The Swaminarayan community was helping to feed 40,000 people three times a day and in the UK it raised £4million within the space of six weeks. It had 4,500 volunteers in the area and UNICEF and Red Cross were supplying help as well. Donations from the Swaminarayan community were supervised by their swamis. A great deal of housing in the devastated area was destroyed or damaged and work has gone on to build new villages, to provide new schools and medical centres. This charitable work is based on the belief that "In the good of others, lies our own".

In discussion, questions were asked about media reports that aid had been withheld from untouchables. It was mentioned that a team from Khalsa Aid had encountered discrimination in relief work according to caste distinctions. Mr Palan acknowledged that these difficulties did exist in certain areas. However, SHM carried out its work without any discrimination and has been internationally recognised for its efforts in Muslim and Dalit dominated areas. SHM was also involved in helping out in areas where such difficulties were experienced. Furthermore, in the presence of monks such discrimination was less likely to be displayed, as they would immediately put a stop to it.

Mr Mike Hawkes of Christian Aid said that his organisation is the official overseas aid arm of the British and Irish Protestant Churches, paralleling the work of Cafod in the Catholic Church. Forty Christian denominations see Christian Aid as their chosen vehicle for overseas aid. Its funds come through donations from the Churches institutionally, from church congregations and from fundraising within the wider community, principally during Christian

Aid Week which raised around £12 million in 2000. Some funding also comes from the government through the Department for International Development. In addition to its direct relief work, Christian Aid engages in development education to raise awareness of the causes of poverty and international debt. It has collaborated with other organisations in the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief and also produces prayer and worship material for use in Christian church services. Christian Aid does not employ aid workers overseas but works with local organisations in the country concerned. Local churches there are its natural partners, even though it has links with other faith communities as well. The policy of Christian Aid is to offer help to everyone regardless of their religion. It tries in particular to reach the poorest of the poor and seeks to put into practice the injunctions of the Christian faith which urge the pursuit of social justice.

In the subsequent wider discussion, it was noted that there could be criticism of faith-based overseas aid organisation, on the one hand if they limited their aid efforts to adherents of their own religious faith and on the other hand if they offered help to those in other faith communities, which might be seen as a form of covert proselytism. In general, faith-based agencies do wish to relieve poverty and distress on the basis of helping those in the greatest need. However, the identification of faith-based relief agencies as religious organisations might make the general public less willing to fund them than, for example, organisations like Amnesty or Oxfam. It was suggested that to overcome this problem faith-based overseas aid relief organisations could possibly organise joint collections from the general public to supplement those within their own communities.

It was noted that there can be difficulties arising from different perceptions on the part of an overseas aid organisation and those belonging to its faith community with whom it is working in an overseas country. For example, in India some of the local Christian churches are reluctant to focus on the need to help the untouchables or Dalits. There are instances now of faith communities in this country co-operating on overseas projects; for example a Hindu organisation in Berkshire concerned at the drought in Rajasthan has been helped by local churches in this country to provide wells. There is a basis on which people can co-operate across faith boundaries on the basis of supporting humanitarian activity. It is unfortunate that some organisations, particularly conservative Christian organisations from the United States, have appeared to combine overseas aid work with proselytising activity in India and in Bangladesh. One possibility would be for the various overseas faith-based agencies to work together on a common agreed statement of their principles and practices in this regard.

It was reported that the Department for International Development has been working in partnership with faith communities and with other organisations in an attempt to educate people about aid and development issues and hopes to be able to extend its work with faith communities in this area. Various initiatives by the government are designed to enlist the co-operative support of non-government organisations, including faith-based agencies, in seeking to eradicate child poverty by 2050.

WORKSHOP 3

COMMUNITY OF LIVING BEINGS – SERVICE TO ANIMALS AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Facilitator: Mrs Peggy Morgan, Shap Working Party on World Religion in Education

Mr Nitin Mehta of the Young Indian Vegetarians introduced the topic from the perspective of the Jain tradition, which stresses both non-violence and compassion. He said that over time the human race has regressed in terms of its treatment of animals and its willingness to inflict cruelty on them, which is a stain on humanity. The next step forward in human civilisation must be the recognition of animal rights alongside human rights. We are all aware of the extent to which experiments are conducted on animals in the name of medical and commercial research and the development of factory farms which are a blight on the countryside. If we commit violence against other people and other creatures then it will rebound on us. Jains hope that those in other faiths will help combat the mistreatment of animals. The belief that animals have no souls has led to acceptance of cruelty to them. As one positive step, the Jains have established a number of animal sanctuaries.

In discussion, it was noted that Nazis had treated Jews as if they were animals on the basis that, having been dehumanised, they could then legitimately be killed.

Ani Rinchen Khandro of the Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Scotland described her community's project to establish a retreat centre on Holy Island off the Scottish coast. It had been sold to her community by an Irish lady who had received a vision of the Virgin Mary instructing her that she should offer it for sale to the Buddhists of Samye Ling Tibetan Centre. On Holy Island one senses sacred space. The Buddhists respect Holy Island as a sacred place and have made it available for people of all faiths to visit and enjoy its pure environment, which is perfect for retreat, contemplation and inter faith dialogue. It is also recognised as a Sacred Site in the UK by ARC, the Alliance for Religions and Conservation. The aim is to develop "pure minds in a pure environment". According to the teachings of the Buddhist tradition all things are inter-dependent and it is not possible to consider humanity as separate and distinct. All parts of reality have their proper place: animals, plants, rocks and water and there is a need to maintain a balance between their different interests. If one hurts others then, according to the doctrine of *karma*, one hurts oneself.

In discussion, the following points were made:-

- (a) Buddhists are usually but not necessarily vegetarians. One of their vows is to refrain from harming all forms of life.
- (b) In modern life there is a problem resulting from the lack of connection to the natural world and the reality of the inter-relatedness of all things.
- (c) There is a need for Western religious traditions to recognise the richness of Eastern traditions. While appreciation of these is developing, a sense of superiority is still prevalent in the West.
- (d) It is not only the Buddhist and Jain traditions that teach concern for animals and the need to take ecology seriously; other religions, too, embody these messages, including

the indigenous Pagan traditions in Britain. There is, however, a risk of over-idealising religious teachings.

- (e) In the East, there are both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, just as in the West. Sadly, just as the tobacco industry is targeting the third world, so are McDonalds.
- (f) It is possible to care for animals without being vegetarian.
- (g) There is recognition now that deliberate cruelty to animals is wrong, for example as in bear-baiting, but there can still be a general lack of empathy with the suffering which animals can be caused through treating them as objects of humanity's needs and desires.
- (h) There is a need to take a fresh look, in the light of our religious traditions, at the ways in which animals are treated in our society.

WORKSHOP 4

SERVING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH ONE'S PROFESSION

Facilitator: Mrs Saraswati Dave, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)

Mrs Kathryn Delpak MBE is a Chartered Physiotherapist and Chair of the Baha'i Council for Wales. She is also involved in the Cardiff Interfaith Association. She explained that she has been a member of the Baha'i faith for many years and she began by referring to two of the teachings of Baha'ullah: "Work that is prompted by the highest motives and done in the spirit of service to mankind is considered to be worshipping God."; "Attaining perfection in one's profession can be considered as giving praise to God".

She said that she felt a three fold responsibility, to her patients, to her employer and to her staff. With patients, she feels committed to providing the best care she can and values the time she spends with them. To her employer, the NHS, she is committed to maintaining the highest standards in her work. As a manager, she works with a spirit of service towards her staff, as she feels that in order to achieve the best results it is very important to care for them. She draws upon the teachings of her faith in all these three areas. For example, the Baha'i teachings warns against "back-biting". It would be unethical to do so with patients and to do so with staff would sour the working atmosphere. "Back-biting" about her employer will not achieve very much when there is a proper procedure for handling complaints.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- (a) On issues relating to medical negligence, it was suggested that the medical profession is often seen as covering up its mistakes. In response, Mrs Delpak said that staff have a responsibility to be truthful and must combine loyalty to their employer and to their patients.
- (b) It was suggested that there are frequently no guidelines as to whether information on the religion of patients should be recorded or not. In response, Mrs Delpak said that the religion of patients is always recorded for in-patients, but this may not be the case for out-patients.

Mr Noshir Avari said that by faith he is a devout Parsee Zoroastrian and offered a brief introduction to his community and its religious tradition. He explained that by career he is a Tax Investigations Consultant, having worked in the Inland Revenue from 1968 to 1988. It might have been easier to explain the connection between his work and service to the community if he were an eye surgeon! During his period as Inspector-in-Charge of Investigations in the West London region it was one of the top tax districts in the country in terms of the tax yield that it managed to secure through its tax investigations programme. Under this, a small number of the accounts of self-employed people and companies with which it dealt were selected for detailed review. In 1988 he set up his own firm. Given his Zoroastrian upbringing, a cardinal motto of its work from the outset has been to encourage each client to be completely honest and straightforward. Problems over income tax or VAT can arise as a result of many pressing financial difficulties, including problems with cash flow. When a client is subjected to a major tax enquiry to defend the client's interests properly it is vital to explain their circumstances carefully and truthfully to the tax authorities.

Naturally it is to be hoped that the tax authorities will be pragmatic in their approach when they are in full possession of the facts and will take account of the client's circumstances.

While he might be seen by some as a gamekeeper turned poacher, he does not himself see it in these terms. The firm aims to bring to any tax enquiry the finest accounting principles and to ask the tax authorities to apply fairness, justice and reasonableness. A Zoroastrian is expected to speak the truth, which is what the tax reports of his firm aim to do. Its success has underlined the value of maintaining high moral standards of truth and integrity. In speaking truth there is always triumph!

In discussion, the themes of repentance and reconciliation were briefly discussed.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS

Sarah Lindsell, Director, Catholic Agency for Social Concern

Introduction

I am very pleased to be here with you today. These are new and exciting times for faith based organisations who want to try and meet social needs in different ways. But we have got a great deal to learn, particularly now that central and local government seem to be throwing money at us and this worries me slightly. But I do not think we are new to this and we are not treading this path alone. I do not think we can learn from the United States: I do not think that what is happening there is happening here. The people I think we can learn from are those in the voluntary sector in this country because the path they were treading 20 years ago is much the same as we are doing now. So as you are developing your services over the next five years or so, I would like you to think back to what the voluntary sector was going through.

I therefore wish to talk about being part of a jigsaw, its pieces being people and organisations trying to meet social need. When those needs are met you end up with a rather beautiful picture. For the first time we are not only being asked to be one of those jigsaws as faith based organisations, but are, I think, being asked to be part of the jigsaw-makers, helping to put the parts of that jigsaw together. That is quite new for faith based organisations trying to provide services to meet the needs of people in need.

The Current Situation

I would like to talk about government funding and its implications for faith based organisations. Initially I need to say that this isn't new. We *have* been doing this already for some time, providing a huge range of services. We run residential and day care for people with learning difficulties and with disabilities; we provide residential care for older people, luncheon clubs and offer home visiting schemes. We provide marriage and relationship counselling; a huge range of support for homeless, including hostels, housing support and day centres; and run projects to help travellers, refugees and asylum seekers. We run mental health projects; befriending schemes and work with drug and alcohol abusers and prostitutes. We run adoption and fostering schemes, schools for children with special needs, secure units, "early years" services, family centres and support schemes as well as mother and baby units.

So there is a wide range of things that faith based organisations are already doing. But we often label them differently and tend not to be involved with statutory planning and policy making as faith based organisations (FBO's).

We tend to conceal or down-play our faith base. I know that, particularly in the public eye, there are a number of Catholic charities which have changed their names and taken the word "Catholic" out of their title, because to do so has meant that they can secure funding and that they can meet needs more effectively and have better partnerships and better participation. They have had to do this over the last twenty years but now maybe things are changing. Faith based organisations find it very difficult to access secular funding. We tend to be more orientated in our approach to service delivery and to projects than to community development. Funding and involvement tends to depend very much on the attitude of the individual local authority – what we now call 'post-code participation and partnership'. But it should not be

dependent on the whims of a particular local authority. Until now I would say that we have been seen as part of the voluntary sector and not as faith based organisations - a distinct category.

Future Opportunities

We do have some fantastic opportunities opening up for the future. Both central and local government are inviting us to participate and work in partnership as faith based organisations for the first time. We have been excluded from that “puzzle table” for quite some time, however, we are now being asked not only to get our pieces out, but to help put them together, to plan what this jigsaw is going to look like. I suspect also that in a few years’ time we are going to be asked what we think about that pattern, which is unique. We need to think about grasping that opportunity, if we want to do so. It is a choice though.

The Reasons for Government Funding

In local authority guides we often see a statement which goes something like this:

“Public funding is not available to support the propagation or maintenance of a particular faith. But public authorities can and do fund certain activities run by faith based organisations which have wider community benefits.”

So why should the government fund faith based organisations? They do need to reconnect with local communities. They have been absent for some time at a very local level. They are beginning to recognise that faith based organisations have a significant and very distinct contribution to make in meeting local needs and that faith groups play a major role in enhancing social cohesion. Funding faith based organisations increases inter faith co-operation and understanding, and at the end of the day they get value for money. Faith based organisations work at the grass roots level, and as central and local government have found out, they are working there now. FBO’s do not need to think about who the local community is, they often gave the local communities, the local knowledge and the local contacts and that is essential to current government strategy. With all of that, FBO’s can actually be responsive to local needs. Also, central and local government are aware that these organisations have a large constituency which is aware that there is some funding around.

The Case Against Government Funding

If we really are so good at providing services, why haven’t governments been funding faith based organisations until now? We go back already to the statement: “Public funding is not available to support the propagation or maintenance of a particular faith.”. That has been the main, and very valid, reason why they have not been funding faith based organisations. No matter how central government tells us it is making changes, that is going to be a major concern to overcome at a local level: to prove that the work of a faith based organisation is not about the propagation or maintenance of a particular faith. Some local authorities in particular feel that faith based organisations can be very unprofessional; that they are too informal; and that they lack expertise, knowledge and skills. We have this awful label, particularly in Christian circles, of being “do-gooders”: or the “God-squad effect”. We have to overcome some of these labels, and acknowledge that we have got them, as the voluntary sector did 20 years ago. These labels equally applied to them then. We are seen as being

inexperienced in handling grants and contracts. We have a historical path that we have trodden, of traditions and culture which means that faith based organisations are seen as being rooted in faith, not on action or service. This is going to be a significant barrier to overcome. I think we also have to acknowledge that religion and the needs of vulnerable people do not always mix. We need to accept that for some groups of particularly vulnerable people, for example groups with mental health problems, coming to a faith-based scheme may not be helpful and to acknowledge that there are kinds of service needs where we have to say “No, it should not be a faith based organisation providing for that particular need; it should be a secular voluntary sector charity or a statutory authority”. We need to be very clear about whose needs we can meet. Unfortunately, there are some very bad examples of where faith based organisations have tried to meet the needs of vulnerable people and it has gone wrong. We need to accept this.

It is going to be very difficult to prove that there are no “strings” attached, that we are not interested in faith promotion, and this is not why we would be providing a service. I am not sure that many local authorities actually believe that right now, so we have got quite a lot to prove. However, if this is what you want: if you are about faith promotion, then maybe providing and meeting social needs is not for you. We all need to think long and hard in our own communities and be aware that we may need to ‘opt out’ because government funding is not for increasing propagation. It is not a back-door way of increasing the number of people in our faith communities. If that is what is in our minds, then we need to get rid of this idea because it is actually about meeting the social and welfare needs of the most vulnerable people in our society.

The Role of Faith Based Organisations in Meeting Social Need

With or without government funding, the role of faith based organisations is very similar to that of the voluntary sector. We are about being complementary to existing services, about supplementing these, whether they are statutory or voluntary. We are about being innovatory. We can do things in different ways because we have a faith base, and we should move forward and take inspiration from that. But we also want to provide a critique of public policy: as campaigners and advocates. Taking government funding makes that more difficult. Can we say on the one hand that we criticise and dislike what they are doing and on the other receive money to provide a service? We need to think carefully about balancing these roles. We do have a role, as a faith based organisation to offer a critique, to be an advocate and campaigner, to be a guardian of values and to highlight the concerns of the poor. We are an active stakeholder now in the way that social needs are met. So what will that mean for the future?

Implications of Government Funding

So what are the implications of government funding? I certainly think there are far more questions than there are answers. Are we simply chasing money? Are we resource-led? Have we always wanted to meet social needs as communities, but never had the capacity and resources to develop appropriate responses? Are we clear what is being asked of us and why? What is the motive behind a local authority which has ignored us as a community for years and suddenly thinks we will be the best at providing a service? We need to ask those questions.

What is our own track record? Have we been good at providing services? How do we share this with our potential funding decision-makers, to prove that we can deliver effectively and that we are not about increasing our congregations? Do we actually relate effectively amongst ourselves? How do we relate to other organisations in the voluntary sector? How will government funding impact on these relationships, on the relationships we currently have with government, with business, with the community and voluntary sector? How prepared are we actually to receive government funding? Who would be providing what, for whom and why, and with what skills, with what professionalism? What impact will government funding actually have on the community within which we are placed? Why would we want to do that to them? How would we retain our identity, autonomy and role if we received statutory funding?

Many voluntary sector agencies have found this very difficult. We have therefore a lot to learn. Do we want a contract for providing the service, or do we want a grant? Do we have the choice? What impact will either have on us? Will we need to become a registered charity? Can we do that? What effect will it have on other funding sources? If we have been receiving money from people within our faith community, will that suddenly dry up because they think the government are providing all the funding that is needed? That would have serious implications for any faith community. Will funding be time limited? What happens if there is a change of government? You cannot just move on, sell up and say “No, we are not going to provide that service”, and shut up the church, or mosque or synagogue. We are still going to be there at the end of 4 years, 8 years, 12 years, 18 years. We need to remember that when we are applying for funding. We are here for the duration!

Please do not think that I am being totally negative. In fact I am not. I think that government funding is to be welcomed, although with our eyes open. It is good that the government is finally recognising that we can provide services well and that we can meet social needs well and innovatively. For the first time we are going to be empowered. It is going to enable us to put our faith into action to serve our community. We can do this in flexible, innovative, and inspirational ways. We can respond to local need in a variety of ways. It is also going to be about capacity building, which means that our knowledge and our skills as faith communities are going to be increased, which will enable us to meet social needs far more effectively and appropriately. It places us firmly in the non-statutory service-providing world, which has to be a good development. Most importantly, it recognises the valuable contribution we can make and enables us to move forward.

Some Disadvantages

But there are a large number of disadvantages. We are not all the same. We are vast. We are different in size, purpose, relationships, professionalism of our volunteers, our skills. That can be very difficult to overcome. Is it about religious identity, or is it about ethnic identity? We need to be very clear when we are talking about faith based organisations, who is actually being referred to? Are you being asked because of the colour of your skin or because of your faith? We need to be clear about this. These are nasty questions to have to ask but we need to do so. We also need to have the courage to say “no”. If you do not want government funding in your community, then you should walk away and not be afraid of saying no. You are not going to lose face, you are not going to lose anything. You can still walk away and maintain the relationship. We do not have to receive money if we do not want it. We are really going to need to be able prove that the money used will not be for the propagation of a particular faith. This is going to be very time-consuming and is going to be about trust, proving that the trust is justified. It is going to take a long time. We certainly need to overcome the

misconception that faith based organisations are well resourced, which most local authorities seem to think they are.

We are also going to need to play their “game”. If they want us to fill in their forms in their particular way and develop to their standards then that is what we have to do. That is the way it goes, and that is the game. If we are not prepared to do that then we may need to say “no”. It could mean we lose our independence. Receiving government money, as we know from the voluntary sector, has huge implications on advocacy and campaigning roles. It has implications for our autonomy. It can make us resource dependent. There is the risk of isomorphism, a technical word which means that you can become like your funder. If they are very bureaucratic with lots of rules and regulations, then by receiving their money, you can end up becoming a bit like that yourself. There is a real danger of this and we need to be aware of it as a faith based organisation. We are going to need to be transparent and accountable. We all know that this is desirable, but actually being transparent and accountable can be very difficult and is even more so for faith based organisations who may have a structure and accountability system which is very different to that in the secular world. Everything we do will need to become measurable and to be evaluated, with rules and regulations to which volunteers have to adhere. But that is the way of the world and if people in need are going to receive the appropriate service, we need to meet these standards. It is good for people in need to have the best standard of service available. If we do not want to meet those standards then we need to be ready to give way, because those standards need to be met.

What about sustainability? That can be a major disadvantage. If we receive government funding, what happens in the long term? It will change our role, change our focus, aim and mission. It also has major implications when we employ paid staff. People underestimate the role of a manager as opposed to a faith leader or preacher. As many of you know, they mean very different things! A really good preacher could make a really bad manager. If you are talking about employing paid staff, what is that going to say to your community? Because you might have people to whom you want to provide a service and therefore you want to employ staff. What is their standing going to be in your community? These are significant factors we need to think about, because central and local government will assume you are going to take on paid staff and if you do not propose to do so, then you will need to be clear about that and how you are going to run your organisation? So we have to think about professionalism and bureaucracy. Do we want it? In addition your relationships with those in need will change because they will ask questions about where your money comes from and when you say it comes from the local authority, this may change your relationship with them?

Some Final Thoughts

The role and status of faith based organisations are changing. We need to be very aware of that. There is the possibility of some impact from changing policies in the US and we should think about this, but I do not see them necessarily affecting us much here. I do think, however, that we need to question the motives of changes in the UK. We know that central government is wanting to give faith groups more opportunities, which is great, but what we see at local level varies a great deal. We need to think about informal versus service provision, whether we take the pastoral or professional route: these are all major issues. I do think we need to sit down at the “jigsaw table”, but we need to sit down with our eyes wide open. We need to know which pieces of that jigsaw we are prepared to put in and why, and who is going to be the person prepared to sit at that table on our behalf with the skills and knowledge to be able to do that. But we have a large constituency in the voluntary sector

which can help us learn, and we need to learn from them. So government funding for faith based organisations can be welcomed, but only with our eyes wide open.

In discussion, the following points were made:-

- a. Very often public bodies, including local authorities, fail to distinguish between faith identity and ethnicity and are uneasy in dealing with issues surrounding religion and spirituality;
- b. There are people who operate in the secular world who have an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life but who may not use religious language to describe this. It is important for faith communities to be ready to work with them, for example, in hospitals and hospices. There can be opportunities for mutual learning in these situations;
- c. Too often government and other public authorities hope that faith communities will carry out work for them “on the cheap”;
- d. Public funding authorities are sometimes not willing to look favourably on requests for financial help to promote services only within the particular community applying for that funding and would look more favourably on funding applications if the service was going to be available more widely;
- e. Funding from Government could possibly promote inter faith co-operation but there is a risk that it will pit different faith communities against one another in a competitive search for funding;
- f. It is important to develop opportunities for mutual training so that faith communities understand better the opportunities and requirements involved in dealing with local authorities and local authorities appreciate better the circumstances of faith communities.

Mrs Rosalind Preston thanked all those who had contributed to the National Meeting as plenary speakers, workshop presenters and facilitators and also participants in the discussions during the day. It had been a very welcome opportunity to share experience and to reflect on the role of faith communities in service to their own communities and to wider society. She thanked the Network office for their work in organising the meeting.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to link inter faith initiatives and to develop good relations between people of different faiths in this country. Its members include the representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies specialising in inter faith relations. It is run by Trustees of all the faiths whose representative bodies it links.

As we enter the 21st century, greater awareness about the faith of others in the UK is crucial. Ignorance can lead to prejudice and even to conflict. With its member bodies, the Network works to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground” and “to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths”. It does this by:

- Holding meetings of its member bodies, where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together
- Setting up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue particular issues in greater depth
- Proceeding by consensus wherever possible and not making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation
- Fostering inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Running an information and advice service
- Publishing materials to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- In consultation with member bodies, helping to provide contacts and participants for inter faith events and projects and for television and radio programmes

Further information about the Inter Faith Network can be found on its website: www.interfaith.org.uk or obtained by writing to the Network office.

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Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2001-2002

Faith Community Representative Bodies

Afro West Indian United Council of Churches
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Buddhist Society
Churches' Agency for Interfaith Relations in Scotland
Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations
(Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council of the UK
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
Muslim Council of Britain
National Council of Hindu Temples
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Quaker Committee on Christian and Interfaith Relations
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Sikh Missionary Society
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of G.B.
Swaminaryan Hindu Mission
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Interfaith Subcommittee
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Inter Faith Organisations

Calamus Foundation
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme.
Council of Christians and Jews
Interfaith Foundation
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Foundation
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Scottish Inter Faith Council
Three Faiths Forum
United Religions Initiative (Britain and Ireland)
Westminster Interfaith
World Conference on Religion and Peace (UK Chapter)
World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Bolton Inter Faith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Inter Faith
Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Inter Faith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Dudley Council of Faiths
Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Harrow Inter-Faith Council
Kirklees and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leicester Council of Faiths
Loughborough Council of Faiths
Luton Council of Faiths
Manchester Inter Faith Group
Merseyside Inter Faith Group
Newham Association of Faiths
Nottingham Inter-Faith Council
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Richmond Interfaith Group
Rochdale Interfaith Action
Sheffield Interfaith
South London Inter Faith Group
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council Inter Faith Panel
Watford Inter Faith Association
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

Educational and Academic Bodies

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation
National Association of SACRE's
Religious Education Council for England and Wales
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations, (Sisters of Sion)
University of Derby Religious Resource and Research Centre

