

# Looking after one another:

The safety and security of our faith communities

- Respond jointly – an attack on one is an attack on all
- Build on existing good inter community relations
- Calm in times of tension



# The safety and security of our faith communities

In general, the UK is a place where there are good inter faith relations and where there is respect for the traditions of different faiths and for the beliefs and practices of different communities and for their places of worship.

In times of tension, however, faith communities may find themselves vulnerable in a number of ways. Those who are visibly identifiable as members of a faith may sometimes be verbally or physically harassed or attacked. Hatred or suspicion of a particular faith may be incited. Or the cause may be mindless vandalism. Places of worship, community burial sites and religious symbols may be defaced, damaged or destroyed or precious artefacts stolen. In such situations there needs to be a firm response by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the public and the faith communities themselves.

As faith communities we appreciate the vigilance and support of the police, the fire service and the public at difficult times and note the many positive ways that organisations are working for community safety at national and local level.

We, as faith communities, also have a role in responding to emergency situations and to inter community tensions, both as individual communities and – very importantly – **together**. In our shared society we are deeply interconnected. An attack on one is an attack on all. These short guidelines have been produced by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, in consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Chief Fire Officers' Association, to assist in responding together as communities to increase our safety and security.

## Respond jointly – an attack on one is an attack on all

Some attacks or threats of attack appear linked to racist or religious hatred or designed to stir this up. We believe that it is vital for faith community organisations and places of worship to respond jointly and to show solidarity. Some ways to do this are:

- Faith leaders go together to visit any faith community property that has been attacked or is under threat
- Faith groups contact one another by email or telephone in any time of crisis or tension for mutual support and assistance
- Take action - of a kind agreed with the faith community directly affected - in support of a place of worship which has been attacked or vandalised
- Meet with police, representatives of the local fire and rescue service and local authorities to discuss and implement appropriate measures to provide reassurance for the community or communities affected
- Encourage swift reporting of the incident to the police. Some offences, such as criminal damage and assault, now receive higher sentences if the convicted person demonstrates, or is shown to have been motivated by, hostility based on faith. When reporting an incident to the police, it is important to make clear at the time of reporting that you consider this to have been the case.
- Contact the local media and ask them to give publicity to the joint efforts of faith communities to support each other and respond jointly to the situation
- Agree and issue joint statements in response to crisis situations to support the affected community and defuse tensions (but only if the community wishes this)
- Work with local inter faith groups and others to arrange 'clean up' teams to go and assist if buildings have been defaced or damaged and the community in question would like help in this way
- Work jointly to sponsor fund-raising efforts in response to crises
- Where appropriate, in particularly serious circumstances, hold events such as vigils for people to come together to pray, each in their own tradition

## Build on existing good inter community relations

Joint responses to attacks on community properties or inter community tensions are most effective if they are built on an existing process of strengthening communications and building trust.

- Develop good relations with neighbours
- Build long-term personal relationships between faith community leaders
- Develop opportunities for members of different communities to meet one another, to learn about their different faiths and to encourage personal friendships
- Always challenge misperceptions or misrepresentations of one another – ill informed stereotyping is damaging to us all
- Ensure that local inter faith structures are strong, have active involvement from senior figures of all the local faith communities and are well-resourced
- Run programmes to promote better understanding between people of different faiths – and, in particular, between young people of different faith backgrounds
- Establish regular meetings with police and local authorities to keep relevant issues under review and develop partnerships for joint practical action
- Ensure that each place of worship has a list of the faith bodies and places of worship in the local authority area and a way to contact them in times of crisis by email or telephone
- Develop a communications strategy – what might we want to say if problems arise? Who might carry the messages (for example through co-ordinated sermons and local newspapers and radio)?

## Calm in times of tension

Problems of the kind discussed in this leaflet can be the result of a range of factors from racism to social exclusion. They are rarely the fault of faith communities. Sometimes, however, situations can unintentionally be exacerbated by comments from within our faith communities themselves as rumours spread at times of tension or attack about the likely culprits or perpetrators. In such circumstances, trusted members of communities can help calm some situations and lessen the likelihood of inter community misunderstanding.

- Check out the accuracy of stories with trusted contacts in other communities and ensure that inaccurate rumours do not spread
- Do as we would be done by - if people in our own communities have been involved in disrespectful or dangerous behaviour towards members of other communities, make it clear within the community and more widely that this is not condoned.
- In the event of distorted or misleading interpretations of other faiths which may be contributing to tensions, tackle these as strongly as we defend the appropriate use of the symbols and beliefs of our own faith
- Be very careful in the language we use - avoid generalised, exaggerated or simplistic expressions about other faiths or groups which can cause or inflame tension
- Ensure that our members are regularly reminded of the importance of good community relations and give community recognition to the peacemakers and bridge builders

**Don't under-estimate your contribution – our partners such as the emergency services may be stretched during times of tension. The help of faith communities could be vital.**

## Resources

### **Inter Faith Network for the UK**

8A Lower Grosvenor Place  
London  
SW1W 0EN

Tel: 020 7931 7766  
Email: [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)  
[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

### **Association of Chief Police Officers**

25 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0EX

Tel: 020 7227 3434  
Email: [info@acpo.police.uk](mailto:info@acpo.police.uk)  
[www.acpo.police.uk](http://www.acpo.police.uk)

### **Crown Prosecution Service**

50 Ludgate Hill  
London  
EC4M 7EX

Tel: 020 7796 8000  
Email: [enquiries@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@cps.gsi.gov.uk)  
[www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk)

### **Commission for Racial Equality**

St Dunstan's House  
201–211 Borough High Street  
LONDON  
SE1 1GZ

Tel: 020 7939 0000  
Email: [info@cre.gov.uk](mailto:info@cre.gov.uk)  
[www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)

### **Chief Fire Officers' Association**

9–11 Pebble Close  
Amington  
Tamworth  
Staffordshire  
B77 4RD

Tel: 01827 302 300  
Email: [enquiries@cfoa.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cfoa.org.uk)  
[www.cfoa.org.uk](http://www.cfoa.org.uk)

### **Home Office Cohesion and Faiths Unit**

1st Floor  
Seacole (NE Quarter)  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Tel: 020 7035 0350  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

## Websites

See [www.crimereduction.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk) and [www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk](http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk) for practical pointers on strengthening security.

Other useful sites are [www.nationalchurchwatch.com](http://www.nationalchurchwatch.com) and [www.churchsafety.org.uk](http://www.churchsafety.org.uk)



The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between people of different faiths in the UK. It links over 100 organisations including: representative bodies from the different faith communities; national and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies. It provides information on faith communities and on inter faith affairs; advises on multi faith projects and inter faith issues; publishes materials to aid work in the religious and inter faith sectors; fosters inter faith co-operation on social issues; and holds regular meetings where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together.