

GENERAL SYNOD

Resourcing Christian Community Action: Parishes and Partnerships

The Following Motion to the debate on The Big Society (November 2010 Group of Sessions) – a report on action to date

1. During the debate on “The Big Society” at the November 2010 Group of Sessions, Mr Gavin Oldham successfully moved the a Following Motion as below:

‘That this Synod, in recognition of the Coalition Government’s interest in partnering with voluntary organisations in building local communities and the Church of England’s successful existing partnership role in the provision of education throughout England, request the Archbishops’ Council to:

- (a) acknowledge and celebrate all those within the Church who are currently involved in building better neighbourhoods, in either diocesan, deanery or parish bodies, other agencies or an individual capacity, and request their support in the development of new partnerships with government;*
- (b) establish a dialogue with the government and other Churches to explore the potential for new partnerships in a variety of respects, affirming the work already undertaken in this respect as set out in GS 1804;*
- (c) undertake a feasibility study with benefactor funding and in association with other Churches and Christian agencies prepare business templates for various options which could be used by dioceses and others who choose to make such partnerships a reality in their local area without delaying while progress with ‘Near Neighbours’ is assessed, in view of the severe economic circumstances and the government’s need for action; and*
- (d) report to General Synod as soon as such a feasibility study has been completed or during 2012, whichever is sooner.’*

2. This paper reports on the actions taken to pursue clauses (c) and (d). Thanks to Mr Oldham’s efforts, benefactor funding was found and Prof Hilary Russell (Liverpool John Moores University) was commissioned to undertake a comprehensive study of examples of local church initiatives which engage constructively with local community needs. The work was supported by a Steering Group comprising Mr Oldham, Tim Bissett (Church Urban Fund) and The Revd Dr Malcolm Brown (MPA).
3. Its main purpose was to act as a catalyst in bringing together current best practice in Christian care in local communities with the resources and knowledge base needed to multiply those good works across the country. The aim was to include a wide spectrum of examples covering different policy areas, location and types of activity. Although many of the projects included are in deprived areas, Christian community action is called for in any context to demonstrate care for neighbours and new ways of being and to work for personal, social and structural transformation

The Projects

4. Material was drawn from a wide spectrum of examples including:
 - policy areas ranging from homelessness to foodbanks; employment and training to debt counselling; from youth projects to care for the elderly; health to rural isolation;
 - widely differing geographical locations: rural, urban, suburban and coastal;
 - the use of church buildings for community use;
 - different origins and different scales of project;
 - those wholly based on volunteering as well as those with paid workers;
 - local projects linked with national organisations;
 - congregationally-based as well as ‘freestanding’;
 - Church of England, other denominations, ecumenical and interfaith.

Outcomes

5. The full report (270 pages) and website includes:
 - Stories of 34 projects across 27 dioceses written with passion and conviction;
 - Descriptions of 9 infrastructure organisations and 3 strategic policy areas;
 - Templates, resource materials and help with administrative issues;
 - A directory of national and other support organisations;
 - A large range of funding sources;
and presents findings on theological motivation, leadership, volunteering, success factors, barriers to growth and challenges and opportunities
6. All the material is available on-line at: www.how2help.net , including the full report. There’s also a PowerPoint presentation with speakers’ notes for use in meetings such as diocesan or deanery synods. For example, you could try combining feedback on the Study with an opportunity to showcase local projects: where possible, we would be happy to help with diocesan presentations.

Using the Resources

7. The interactive website (www.how2help.net) is designed so that parishes and other church groups can draw on the experience of the numerous projects that form the basis of the research. Users can enter the site from their own starting point – they may be starting with a perceived local need, something they know they have to offer, or a desire to become more active in serving the local community. Following the links on the site, they can discover what other Christian initiatives have done, the possibilities and pitfalls, how resourcing and funding work in practice, and so on.
8. The website together with its downloadable presentation and the full report (being sent to church leaders, Social Responsibility Officers and others closely involved in the Church’s community engagement: further copies can be ordered online) constitute a uniquely rich gathering of experience and wisdom. This is now at the disposal of every parish and church group which may wish to explore this vital aspect of their ministry and mission: evidence of God’s unconditional love for all.
9. **The website and report will be launched at a Synod fringe meeting at 1p.m. on Thursday 9 February in the Abbey Room.** Members are cordially invited to come and see for themselves the fruits of this piece of work, for which they voted so enthusiastically in November 2010.

Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, Director, MPA
January 2012