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## **Staying present and engaging faithfully**

### **A report to General Synod**

*Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; 1 Peter 3:15 (RSV)*

#### **Executive Summary**

This report is brought to General Synod by the Presence and Engagement Task Group of the Mission and Public Affairs Council at the midpoint of its mandate from the Synod's resolutions of July 2005. The Task Group hopes that Synod will appreciate the opportunity to discuss the overall approach that it has adopted and looks to take forward as it moves into the second part of its programme..

The report has four broad sections:

#### **Part 1**

This section provides some background to the Presence and Engagement programme and to this paper (paragraphs 1-6); some developments in the national context since 2005 (paragraphs 7-13); and a summary of the three strategic strands to the Church's work in this area (paragraphs 14-17). The section concludes with an summary of the theological underpinning provided by the document: *Generous Love – an Anglican theology of inter Faith relations'* (paragraphs 18 -23)

#### **Part 2**

The section offers a broad description of the current context of inter Faith relations (paragraphs 24 – 35) including the role of Government (paragraphs 36 – 40) and some reflections on the public role of the Church of England in a society which perceives itself a being increasingly multi religious (paragraphs 41-44)

#### **Part 3**

This section turns to the third strategic strand, that of the Presence and Engagement programme and the four components of the programme: first, communications (paragraphs 50-55); secondly, equipping the local church which includes the development of Presence and Engagement Centres (paragraphs 57- 64); the learning pathways and grids (paragraphs 65 -72); and the codes of practice (paragraphs 73 – 78); thirdly the work on encouraging scriptural reflection (paragraphs 79 -85) and fourthly, facilitating diocese to reflect strategically (paragraphs 86 -96).



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## Part 4

The final brief section (paragraphs 97-98) commends to Synod three key understandings of the Presence and Engagement Task Group and asks Synod to adopt the motion before it.

## Introduction

1. In recent years the Church of England has increasingly encouraged initiatives which seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to that end has developed a range of national projects including the Decade of Evangelism, the Mission Shaped Church initiatives and most recently, Fresh Expressions.
2. In recent years also, the increasing presence in this country of people and communities of other religions than Christianity has raised questions about the best ways of exercising the Church's pastoral and evangelistic ministry in multi religious contexts. There have been a series of initiatives to address these questions, notably for example through the Synod's Presence and Engagement programme<sup>1</sup> and the recent publication of *'Generous Love – an Anglican theology of inter Faith relations'*<sup>2</sup>.
3. Since the early 1970's, Synodical structures have included advisers and advisory committees on inter Faith matters, notably the Inter Faith Consultative Group, chaired by Bishop John Austin and currently the Presence and Engagement Task Group, chaired by Bishop David James. Through these and in other ways, a range of resources, advisory documents and reports have been provided for the life of the Church<sup>3</sup>. General Synod has also from time to time debated issues connected with the Church of England's pastoral and evangelistic ministry<sup>4</sup>.
4. In addition there have been documents which have addressed some of the basic theological issues presented by engagement with other Faiths. Notable amongst these has been the Doctrine Commission in its 1996 work: *'The Mystery of Salvation'*, with its chapter on salvation and other Faiths.<sup>5</sup> Other approaches addressed by the wider

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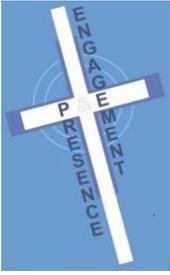
<sup>1</sup> Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi Faith society. 2005 GS 1577. An account of the meaning of the term 'Presence and Engagement' is to be found in paragraphs 52ff below

<sup>2</sup> Generous Love: The truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue: an Anglican theology of inter faith relations. <http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/index.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> Multi faith worship? - questions and suggestions from the Inter-Faith Consultative Group. Church House Publishing 1992. Communities and Buildings: Church of England premises and other Faiths. Board of Mission of the general Synod of the Church of England. Misc 1185.1994; Guidelines for the celebration of inter Faith marriages in church'. Inter faith Consultative Group of Mission and Public Affairs Division. 2004 <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/interfaith/>

<sup>4</sup> Private member's motion from the Revd George Kavour: " *this Synod, whilst valuing and affirming the importance of cultural and religious diversity, is convinced that the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is for all and must be shared with all including people from other faiths or of no faith and that to do anything else would be to institutionalise discrimination.*"

<sup>5</sup> *The Mystery of Salvation: The story of God's gift.* A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England (Sept 1996)



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Anglican Communion have included 'The Way of Dialogue' from the 1988 Lambeth Conference<sup>6</sup> and further resolutions from the 1998 Conference. These important matters have also been addressed in a myriad of publications, seminars, formal and informal dialogues, national and international conferences, training days and courses in dioceses, parishes and chaplaincies. Most recently a background paper on the Church of England's approach to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation has been produced to provide background material for the February 2009 Private Member's Motion.<sup>7</sup>

5. Following an extensive period of research and consultation led by the Inter Faith Consultative Group, General Synod received in July 2005 the Report: *Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi Faith Society*<sup>8</sup> and adopted the following resolution:

'That this Synod

*re-affirm the Church of England's commitment in partnership with Christians of other traditions to resourcing ministry, witness and mission in multi Faith areas;*

*urge dioceses to review and develop their long-term strategies to equip and support clergy and congregations in multi Faith areas;*

*commend the report Presence and Engagement for study and action in dioceses and parishes; and*

*ask the Mission and Public Affairs Council to take forward the Presence and Engagement agenda and report back to Synod in the next quinquennium.'*

In response to the fourth clause, the Mission and Public Affairs Council appointed a Presence and Engagement Task Group to take forward the work under the chairmanship of the Rt Revd David James, Bishop of Bradford<sup>9</sup>. Since then the Group has developed a substantial work programme and at the mid point of its term, brought the first results to a conference in May 2008 of representatives from 35 dioceses.

6. These initiatives<sup>10</sup> and many more, have provided a solid foundation for the Church's continuing theological reflection and for pastoral and evangelistic ministry in the context

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<sup>6</sup> Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/the-holy-land/info/lambeth.cfm>

<sup>7</sup> Dr Martin Davie has produced for the House of Bishops' Theological Group a more extensive paper 'A Church of England approach to the unique significance of Jesus Christ' which will be available on the General Synod section of the Cof E website.

<sup>8</sup> GS 1577

<sup>9</sup> The Rt Revd David James (Chair), Canon Guy Wilkinson (Secretary), Mrs Clare Amos, The Revd Dale Barton, The Revd Dr Fergus Capie, Mrs Bonnie Evans-Hills, The Revd Dr Toby Howarth, The Ven Michael Ipgrave, Canon Arun John, Dr Philip Lewis, The Revd Jay Macleod, The Revd Bill Musk, Dr Anthony O'Mahony, The Revd Denise Poole, The Revd Mark Poulson, Dr Helen Reid, Dr Anne Richards, The Very Revd Bob Wilkes, Canon Andrew Wingate, The Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, The Revd Rachel Weir.



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of people and communities of other Faiths. There are four particular reasons for bringing this material to General Synod at this point:

- The Presence and Engagement Task Group has reached the point in its programme of work, and following its Conference in May 2008, where it would be helpful to have the endorsement of the General Synod for its overall approach..This will enable it to move confidently into the second half of its programme, which has primarily to do with implementation through the dioceses and with adding to the materials developed.
  - Much has moved on even since 2005 in the wider contexts of inter Faith relations. Concerns about diversity, cohesion and security have led to a vast range of new inter Faith and multi Faith organisations<sup>11</sup>, to many new government policies and structures and to complex shifts in the underlying cultural attitudes to religion and society. This has also led to anxieties about the ways in which consciously or unconsciously, churches and other Faith communities are being moulded and shaped by these factors.
  - There has been a rising level of discussion in many contexts about the place of Christian witness, of evangelism and of the converting work of the Holy Spirit. This has occurred in inter religious contexts; within the life of the Christian churches; and within the wider debates of civil society in relation to cohesion, human rights and equalities.
  - The particular place and role of the Church of England has increasingly been in discussion both within and beyond the Church and particularly in the context of the presence of other religions and their leadership<sup>12</sup>
7. The Synod debate in July 2005 coincided with the terrorist bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July. The impact of the bombings on the environment within which the Presence and Engagement programme developed, has been profound. The increasing anxieties underlying public perceptions of 'Faith communities', the severe impact of security concerns on the government's Cohesion and Faiths agenda and a complex set of developments between the Faith communities, - all these have created new and unfamiliar challenges for local churches, chaplaincies and Christian organisations. The complexity and unfamiliarity of these developments have substantially increased levels of anxiety across all sectors of society about religion, including about the place of Christianity in general and the Church of England in particular in our national life.

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<sup>10</sup> And those of other Christian Churches with whom there has been close collaboration in these matters

<sup>11</sup> There are now 263 organisations recorded in the Directory of Inter Faith Organisations by the Inter Faith Network for the UK

<sup>12</sup> The leadership of other religions in this country have constantly acknowledged the positive role of the Church of England both in the way in which establishment represents the place of religion within the constitutional arrangements; and in its practical presence and leadership locally and nationally



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8. A further factor has been the homogenisation<sup>13</sup> of public discourse about religion. The 2005 *Presence & Engagement* report commented on the increasing undifferentiated use of the term 'faith' in references to 'faith communities', 'faith schools' and much else<sup>14</sup> and this has continued apace. For a variety of reasons, public bodies are often reluctant to acknowledge the significant differences in beliefs and their manifestation between religions and in the scale and extent to which Christianity more than any other religion is embedded in the culture. Many elements in current culture go to strengthen this lack of differentiation: a general culture of choice and pluralism; an approach by public authorities that tends to elide a proper neutrality as between Faiths and denominations with a more general secularism the impact of equalities and anti discrimination legislation; a fearfulness of entering unknown religious territory with consequent offence or disorder; the retreat of Christianity from the public institutions and a loss of knowledge and understanding about the place of Christianity in the history and culture of the nation. All these have, with other wider factors, contributed to a reduced willingness or ability to make distinctions beyond a superficial level.
9. The 2005 *Presence and Engagement* report referred to identity, confidence and sustainability as being the necessary to underpin positive attitudes to the church's mission and ministry in multi religious contexts. The general climate of anxiety which has developed since then has made it all the more necessary to promote these characteristics in the local church. These anxieties go well beyond the multi religious contexts of presence and engagement parishes and are particularly acute in parishes where other Faith communities are present only 'virtually' through the media rather than actually in human form.

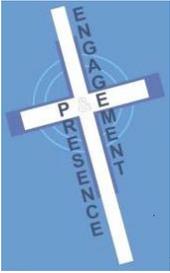
Anxiety, whilst pervasive, takes many forms and inhabits many different groups within society. Government initiatives and policies are overwhelmingly coloured by anxieties about security and the consequences of further terrorist incidents; middle England is anxious about what it perceives as the rise of inter religious conflict<sup>15</sup> and an increasing inability to recognise the place of the Church of England amidst other religions; secularist organisations have raised their anxieties that religion is re-entering the public spheres of civil society; and the media in general increases the levels of anxiety by its limited vocabulary and its insistence upon conflictual approaches to reporting.

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<sup>13</sup> ie the tendency in much public discourse to treat all religions as if they are the same – a failure to take proper account of the real differences between them

<sup>14</sup> Paragraph 29ff

<sup>15</sup> Largely as a result of external world events and their interpretation - the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the continuing lack of settlement in Israel/Palestine, the religious rhetoric from Iran, the language of fundamentalism, and much else - religion of whatever kind is strongly associated with conflict and violence in the public mind, with little differentiation between different forms of religion. Rightly or wrongly, there is a strong association in many minds of Islam with violence arising from association with religiously motivated suicide bombings, and in particular the events 9/11 and 7/7, violent responses to perceived offensive events: the Danish cartoons and The Pope's Regensburg lecture and perceptions about sharia



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10. Amongst the religions, anxiety has manifested itself in a variety of ways: in Muslim communities an uncertainty about their place and status, engendered by the carrot and stick policy approaches of government; by the ignorance of secular perceptions and by cultural and geographical separations. In Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities amongst others, the perception that government ignores their positive contributions is widespread, as is anxiety about Muslim and Christian evangelistic agendas. Jewish communities are anxious about the rise in anti-Semitism and the impact of the politics of the Middle East on their relationships within British society. As for the Christian churches, anxiety expresses itself in concerns that there is uncertainty about evangelism, about 'islamisation' or 'dechristianisation' of the public space and about how the particularities of the gospel should best be understood.
11. One effect of this anxiety has been an increase in some intra religious tensions, in tension between wider society and all religions and in some contexts, between the different religions. In the context of anxiety, misunderstandings about actual facts and the mistaken attribution of motivations are constant features. The misunderstandings about facts can be easily seen in the common perception that there are hundreds, even thousands of schools in the maintained sector of Islamic religious ethos, whereas in fact there are just 12, by comparison with 3,700 Church of England maintained schools.
12. There is also a too ready assumption, understandable perhaps, given the pace of change in recent decades, that Britain can be categorised as a 'multi-faith' society<sup>16</sup>. The statistical reality is that only 5-6% of the population are of all other Faiths together. Of course some communities tend to concentrations in particular neighbourhoods and the age profile can be comparatively young, but the perception is well ahead of the reality and is enhanced by simplistic 'multi-faith' rhetoric. The unfounded attribution of negative motivations is equally easily seen in the mistaken assumptions by secular organisations that Christian religious manifestation is offensive to other religions, particularly to Islam.
13. Against this complex background, the general task of the Presence and Engagement programme is to offer means to churches, chaplaincies and other organisations by which anxieties can be allayed and confidence encouraged; and means by which other religions can be reassured that the Church of England is still there to provide a Christian presence in every community, available to people of all Faiths and none<sup>17</sup>.

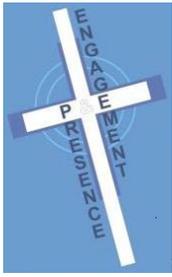
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<sup>16</sup> The particular emphasis in some media tends also to add to such misperceptions

<sup>17</sup> From the Presence & Engagement Report para 45:

**The building up of confidence for engagement with local communities.**

Rapid change in the surrounding context has been the norm for most parishes which are now in or moving towards a minority Faith position in the neighbourhood. In such situations anxiety and loss of confidence can sap the ability of a congregation to remain people of outgoing hope and hospitality and turn them inwards. True confidence lies not in numbers or in power but in the way of incarnation, the Cross and resurrection. The loss of status and position can be crucifying, but can also be the means for local churches to lead people back to a confidence in God rather than in inherited structures and ways of doing things. (Presence & Engagement Report para 45)



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14. Three main strands have formed the basis of the Church's approach at national level to these realities in recent years:

- Inter Faith relations
- the public role of the Church of England
- Presence and Engagement.

This approach is rooted in the perception that effective and sensitive work for positive inter Faith relations is one aspect – though only one aspect - of the mission of God. The Church's calling is to be “present and engaged” in all communities and no less in those where there are significant communities of people of other Faiths.

15. 'Inter Faith relations' in this context is taken to refer to the Church's<sup>18</sup> responsibility under God and in the service of the people of this country, to lead in the work of enabling mutual understanding and peaceable relationships for the common good in the neighbourhoods of this country. Such mutual understanding and peaceable relationships are both a gospel command and the most effective witness to its power and attractiveness.

16. The 'public role of the Church of England' refers to the specific identity and responsibilities of its leadership in the public framework of other religions and their leadership.

17. 'Presence and Engagement' refers to the ways in which the Church equips itself more generally for mission and ministry in multi religious contexts. The language of 'presence and engagement' was developed because it carries a depth of rooted Christian meaning and resonance: 'presence' with its undertones of Christ's real presence with us; and 'engagement' with its hints of close encounter between human beings and with God – encounter which can be either loving or conflictual. The phrase can include 'dialogue' which is, of course, wholly compatible with witness and evangelism<sup>19</sup>; it speaks clearly of the primary purpose of the local church and it speaks of individuals as well as of communities

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<sup>18</sup> Although the primary focus of this paper is the Church of England, it should be clearly understood that in all possible cases the work is undertaken collaboratively with partner Churches either in formal structures or by collaborative working. The Churches' Inter Religious Network brings together all Christian Churches on a systematic basis through the CTBI, the inter Faith advisers of the churches meet regularly, the bilateral dialogues such as the Council of Christians and Jews and the Christian Muslim Forum have an ecumenical Christian representation, as do also the Trustees of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The Presence and Engagement Task Group membership includes Roman Catholic and Methodist representation and the Presence and Engagement Centres – St Philip's and the BCDD are ecumenical in their Trustee bodies

<sup>19</sup> The Roman Catholic document: 'a doctrinal note on some aspects of evangelisation' takes a comparable view. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben16/cdfdoctrineevang.htm>



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## Generous Love

18. Each of these three strands must co-inhere, both internally and in their grounding in a common theology of inter Faith relations. Such a theology is set out in the document '*Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue*', which although not directly the work of the Presence and Engagement Task Group, was drafted by some of its members and expresses well its theological understanding of inter Faith relations<sup>20</sup>.
19. Generous Love sets out why Christians – and specifically Anglican Christians – should seek to engage with people of other Faiths, and the range of ways in which they should do so. It draws both on the insights of other Christian bodies, as well as seeking to respond to recent initiatives made by people of other Faiths<sup>21</sup>.
20. Generous Love begins by locating inter Faith engagement in the setting of the Trinitarian mission of God. It then explores briefly our contemporary context and our Anglican heritage, acknowledging that as Anglicans we are called to discipleship in many very different situations today – and that these contexts inevitably shape the different ways we respond to people of other Faiths. It then moves on to consider the principles which have shaped our Anglican insights, the foremost of these being our rootedness in Scripture: both the Old and the New Testaments came to birth in contexts in which the people of God were faced with the challenges of religious plurality. But tradition and reason/experience also play their part and there is a respected Anglican history of developing theology for mission and dialogue through inter Faith encounter. The lived experience of Anglican concern for the welfare of the whole of society also provides a significant impetus.
21. Generous Love suggests that our churches around the Communion can be renewed in their life and mission when they commit themselves to presence among and engagement with other Faith communities. It suggests there are three dynamic patterns at work in such engagement and explores each of these in some detail.
22. The three patterns are:
  - Celebrating the presence of Christ's body: when we maintain our presence among communities of Faiths, perhaps particularly in situations in which Christians are a

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<sup>20</sup> Generous Love is the result of a widespread consultation process, drawing particularly on insights from three consultations which NIFCON (the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns) either organised or were involved in: Bangalore (India, 2003), Oslo (Norway, 2003) and Kaduna (Nigeria, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Generous Love is a theology of inter Faith relations and does not directly address the issue of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. A background note for General Synod on this matter has been prepared concerning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation for the human race.



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minority, very costly though it can be at times, we are abiding as signs of the body of Christ in each place.

- Communicating the energy of the Spirit: as we engage our energies with other groups for the transformation of society we are being sent in the power of the Spirit. We also acknowledge that the Spirit may choose to work within the hearts of individuals to bring them to faith in Christ, and when that happens we will rejoice.
- Practising the embassy and hospitality of God: we believe that there need to be two poles in our relationship with people of other faiths, a movement 'going out' and a presence 'welcoming in', that these are indivisible and mutually complementary, and that our mission practice must include both.

23. Generous Love concludes by noting that, taken together, these three patterns reflect the reality of the God who is Trinity. It suggests both that in our encounters with people of other Faiths we are called to mirror the life of the Trinity, and also that through such encounters we find ourselves led deeper into the very heart of God. The final paragraph of the report puts it like this:

*'Theology is always in tension with experience, and in inter Faith relations we need to live with provisionality, paradox and disappointment. Nevertheless, as people who find healing through the broken body of Christ and confidence in the daring venture of the Spirit, we must not be deterred by the risk of failure or rejection. Even in our sin, weakness, fear and timidity, we are constantly challenged by the God who calls us to abide with our neighbours as signs of his presence with them, and who sends us to engage as agents of his mission among them. Through prayer and worship the triune God forms us to be a people called to newness of life in our inter Faith encounter.'*

## Inter Faith Relations

24. 'Faith' is now the standard language for referring to virtually any religious identity or affiliation. Increasingly in popular usage and in public sector terminology, it is being used without differentiation to refer as much to Pagans, Mormons and the Unification Church as it does to Christians, Muslims or Sikhs. Faith language risks becoming the indiscriminate portmanteau into which so much is packed that much loses its particular identity and all become associated with concepts and issues that are specific to one or other.

25. The Church of England continues to insist on clarity of language and classification in this matter for practical and theological reasons. The Church holds to a clear distinction between Christianity and the eight other world religions<sup>22</sup> practised in this country on the

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<sup>22</sup> Of course within each of these religions there are many traditions often in tension. The inter faith structures seek to work with the mainstream traditions of the religions. The eight religions are: Bahai, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Jainism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism



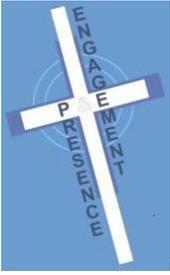
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one hand, and New Religious Movements (NRM) and Alternative Spiritualities on the other<sup>23</sup>. This is not so much a negative value judgement on NRMs so much as a desire to maintain some coherence in this complex and shifting scene.

26. It is however a distinction which is under pressure in a public sector culture which often simplistically applies concepts of inclusivity and exclusivity to this domain; which is mesmerised by indiscriminate understandings of plurality and diversity; and which is anxious about the issue of religion in general. There is in addition, significant pressure from some NRMs who consider themselves unfairly excluded from the perceived benefits of being defined by the public authorities as a Faith community.
27. At present Christianity and the eight other world religions form the membership of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, the Regional Faith Forums and the government's Faith Communities Consultative Council. The Church of England's position on these definitional matters is shared by other Christian Churches and with most of the eight other religions. With the steady increase in the number and variety of local Faith Forums and Councils it will be necessary to make provision for clear guidelines for formal membership of such bodies.
28. A further distinction has emerged particularly within the public sector, between 'faith or religion' on the one hand and 'belief' on the other. In this context 'belief' refers to non religious beliefs and philosophies. Organisations defining themselves in this way include humanist and secularist societies which in general press for inclusion or parity with religious groups within the inter Faith forums and councils. Although very open to discussion and debate in a variety of appropriate forums, the Churches and other Faith communities resist this approach, considering that there are fundamental differences in purpose and outlook. Humanist and secular organisations need to explain and justify their approaches in their own terms separately from inter religious or multi religious organisations.
29. Taking account of these definitions and related consideration, 'Inter Faith relations' refers to the Church's task of leading in the work of enabling mutual understanding and peaceable relationships for the common good in the neighbourhoods of this country. The Church of England has taken very seriously its role in initiating positive relationships between communities, locally, at diocesan and regional level as well as nationally and internationally. It has done so for a combination of reasons and fundamentally because it understands the task of developing trusting inter Faith relationships as being wholly consistent with its task of evangelisation – both are comprehended within the mission of God.

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<sup>23</sup> The Church of England has a national Adviser on New Religious Movements and Alternative Spiritualities, Dr Anne Richards and a Network of Diocesan Advisers. The Bishop of Tonbridge is the Archbishops' Adviser <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/newreligious/>



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30. The Church's public self understanding which underpins the continuing commitment to the concept of a national Church is rooted in its mission to serve the people – the parishioners - without categorisation. This in turn is based upon the dominical commandments which integrate love of God and love of neighbour. It is a twin understanding which holds together two propositions: first that the common good is best served by the peaceable and trusting relationships which can exist across wide religious difference; and, second, that an understanding that commitment to pastoral and evangelistic ministry are essential aspects of the mission of God. Dialogue and witness go hand in hand with the common good.
31. The development of positive and trustful inter Faith relationships is a complex and delicate task. It requires patience, sensitivity and a wholehearted commitment to the full humanity under God of all people, whatever their faith or belief. It is however, not just a task for specialists and experts, although there is a real need for Christians who are committed to deep understanding of other religions. 'Dialogue' is a normal aspect of the life of every person and for Christians is an expression of the hospitality and openness of God. It can be purposeful and structured or it can be serendipitous and arise from the activities of daily life at work and in the neighbourhood. A useful approach speaks of the dialogue of life – arising from the casual encounter in the street or at the checkout; the dialogue of the common good – arising from joint actions and initiatives which cross religious boundaries; dialogue of mutual understanding – often undertaken in formal and carefully constructed structures; and the dialogue of the spirit – which involves a mutual exploration of prayer and worship.
32. The Church of England's involvement in inter religious dialogue and relationships generally is deep and extensive. It takes place locally through parishes, chaplaincies and schools; at diocesan levels through the work of bishops convening Faith leaders' groups and through Diocesan Inter Faith Relations Advisers. Nationally, the Church of England has initiated and supported a limited number of 'multilateral' approaches, and particularly the Inter Faith Network for the UK. It has also emphasised national bilateral structures such as the Council of Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum and the Hindu Christian Forum. Successive Archbishops of Canterbury have played leading role in encouraging these structures since Archbishop William Temple initiated the CCJ with Chief Rabbi Hertz in 1942.
33. The development of a deep knowledge and understanding of the religions, the different traditions and organisations within each of them and the position of individual leaders and scholars is of great importance and across the Church of England there is the greatest bank of such knowledge and understanding in the country, built on study and scholarship and on personal encounter and friendship.
34. It is worth noting that the structures and relationships built up in this country are intimately connected with those developed in other parts of the world and especially



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across the Anglican Communion. In a globalised world with instant electronic communications, positive and negative events in one place impact immediately in other parts of the world. The rise of religious nationalisms and fundamentalisms in one country affects relations between religions in another.

35. Advocacy and support for persecuted Christians around the world must continue openly and strongly. The Archbishops of Canterbury with the Network of Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) of the Anglican Communion have fostered a number of international inter religious dialogues, including with Al Azhar University and with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel<sup>24</sup> and through international organisations such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

## **The place, role and impact of Government**

36. It is not possible to provide even a broad sketch of the context and structures of Faith in this country without some account of Government policies. Amongst the factors which have in the past decade greatly increased the involvement of central and local government - and public authorities generally - with religious communities are:

- the increasing size, visibility and concentration of, amongst others, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities
- the policies of the late 1990's in relation to urban regeneration and the invitation to religious communities to be the recipient of public regeneration funding
- from the 2001 disturbances, a concern with cohesion in contrast to earlier emphases on diversity and plurality
- from 2005 an overarching concern with security related issues and with Islam

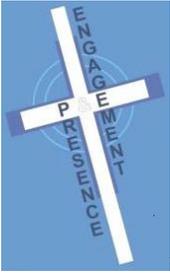
37. These factors, and especially security concerns, have given rise to the most extensive set of policies, programmes and administrative structures<sup>25</sup> and their concomitant financial resources, that have been seen in modern government. Government has sought to hold together several aims: its domestic concerns with resilience and security in relation to Muslim communities; its desire for understandable commercial and foreign policy reasons to relate positively to the wider Islamic world; and its intention to be seen to be relating equally to all religions.

38. Increasingly, however, aspects of Government initiatives are giving rise to a widespread sense of unease about their negative effects, particularly those directed to 'hearts and

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<sup>24</sup> The recent 'Common Word' dialogues and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Building Bridges Seminars of Christian and Muslim scholars are further examples

<sup>25</sup> For example, the formation of the Cohesion and Faiths Unit in the Department of Communities and Local Government following on from the Inner Cities Religious Council formed in the late 1980's; the development of Faiths related and Prevent structures in most Government departments; the formation of the Faith Communities Consultative Council as a consultative body between Faith communities and government.



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minds' under the Prevent<sup>26</sup> policies. They are perceived to benefit particularly Muslim organisations, individuals and communities; to have little impact on core security concerns; to give rise to additional tensions within and between Muslim and other Faith communities and to bring government into the arena of defining acceptable and unacceptable theologies<sup>27</sup>.

39. If there are grounds for unease, there are also however, grounds for satisfaction that religion in general is taken increasingly seriously as a relevant force in public policy making. There are also counter trends, especially where particular policies come up against deeply held religious convictions. Whilst the motivation for increased concerns and awareness is partly connected to the pervasive sense that religion is a key cause of social conflict, nevertheless more positive motivations remain present within political thinking and the government has for a variety of motivations consistently recognized this. The contributions of religious communities to social capital formation, sometimes referred to as 'faithful capital'<sup>28</sup> are widely acknowledged<sup>29</sup>. The current discussions about the contribution of Third Sector organisations, including religious ones, in the delivery of welfare are a particular illustration of a more positive regard.<sup>30</sup> However, the apparent reluctance of the public sector to acknowledge openly the vastly greater scale of the contributions of the Church of England and other Christian Churches, quite apart from their particular place in the cultural, legal and political underpinnings of our society, remains a matter of concern<sup>31</sup>.
40. These factors are currently of the very greatest significance in creating the environment within which the Churches and other Faith communities carry forward their lives and relate to each other. Amongst the many subtle and not so subtle impacts a number in particular may be discerned the following:
- The powerful administrative and bureaucratic cultures of the public sector – Government Departments, Local Authorities and other public services. Through grant schemes and their associated conditions, through consultative initiatives, through the language of 'faith', through the desire to separate doctrinal and practical

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<sup>26</sup> 'Prevent' is one of the four strands of the overall Government policy known as 'Contest'. The four strands are: Pursue, Protect, Prepare and Prevent. The Prevent programme itself has numerous strands, including the Preventing Violent Extremism programme and Fund

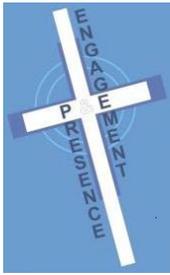
<sup>27</sup> For example, the use of terms such as 'moderate', 'radical' and 'extreme'; the preference for multi Faith approaches over others; support for the scholars of particular traditions through the Radical Middle Way programme and equivalent FCO programmes; and implicit disapproval of evangelism

<sup>28</sup> 'Faith as social capital', Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2006; 'Faithful Cities: A call for celebration, vision and justice 2008 Church House Publishing

<sup>29</sup> Each of the English regions has now published studies of the contributions of Faith communities to social capital

<sup>30</sup> Positive reference has frequently been made by senior politicians to the Churches contributions to raising awareness of international development issues, particularly in relation to debt and to the Millennium Development Goals

<sup>31</sup> The report 'Moral but no Compass', commissioned from the Von Hugel Institute in 2008, commented on this aspect.



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aspects for policy instrumental purposes, and in a myriad of other ways, Faith communities, especially locally, are increasingly shaped and moulded internally.<sup>32</sup>

- Government's need for policy reasons to address Faiths, and particularly Islam, differentially. This has played into a set of already existing, even longstanding historical difficulties between Faith communities. A complex set of unintended consequences is coming to the fore in some quarters including an increasingly strident language of religious identity, often over and against another particular religious community. In some respects some relationships between Faith communities have become more fragile.
- Emphasis on the need for "Inter faith dialogue". This risks compounding the many other factors which have made for the popular association of religion and conflict: religions need to talk to each other because inter religious violence is an ever-present threat as in the dictum of Hans Kung that there will be 'no peace among the nations without peace among the religions'<sup>33</sup>
- For a variety of reasons noted above, public bodies find it very difficult to acknowledge significant difference between religions<sup>34</sup>.

## The public role of the Church of England

41. In these circumstances, the Churches in general and the Church of England in particular have an important and challenging task in seeking appropriate ways to exercise authentic leadership in the presence of other religious leadership and of a growing reluctance to acknowledge that the historic and established roles of the Church of England remain relevant. To express it differently, how can the Church of England earn a respected place in the religious landscape – respected both by other religions and by wider society – given that previous history and constitutional arrangements are seen by many no longer to be of great significance?

42. There are a range of responses to this challenge which must be lived out in local, diocesan and national contexts. First and foremost is the need to maintain a continuing universal presence on the ground in the parishes, schools and chaplaincies of Christian

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<sup>32</sup> Dr Luke Bretherton, Senior Lecturer in Theology & Politics and Convenor of the Faith and Public Policy Forum at King's College London, has commented on this in: 'A New Establishment? Theological Politics and the Emerging Shape of Church-State Relations' in *Political Theology* 7.3 (2006), 371-392

<sup>33</sup> He summarized his view in four propositions: "no peace among the nations without peace among the religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions; no dialogue among the religions without common ethical standards; and finally, no peace without a global ethic."

<sup>34</sup> The Church and other Faith communities are currently negotiating a major 'Religious literacy training project' for the public sector with the Department of Communities and Local Government. The project was initiated through discussions between Bishop Stephen Lowe and the then DCLG Minister



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communities committed to engaging humanly with the lives of the people around them in the name of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

43. Further responses relate to the maintenance of the distinctive Anglican identity and way of being Church; to a confident intellectual and practical engagement with presenting public issues and concerns; to continuing to exercise a convening and initiating role amongst the religions; and to strengthening the effective communication of the Church's scale, particular self understanding and governance.
44. The Church of England has played a leading role in the past two decades in openness and hospitality to other religions, in convening religious leadership, particularly through the Bishops' Faith Leaders' groups, in facilitating Faith forums and councils, in initiating and sustaining dialogue bilateral and multilateral structures and in the positive roles played by the Archbishops<sup>36</sup>. The Church cannot rest on these laurels. But neither should it undersell the role it is playing.

## Presence and Engagement

45. The foregoing paragraphs have attempted to provide a broad indication of the wider context within which the Presence and Engagement programme of General Synod has sought to carry out its mandate. The three-stranded perspective outlined above - inter Faith relations, the public leadership of the Church and the Presence and Engagement programmes - attempts to provide an analytical approach to the different tasks the Church faces within our society: how to relate to other religious communities, how to exercise the sort of leadership that an established Church should provide and how to facilitate the pastoral and evangelical mission of the Church under God through the parishes, chaplaincies and schools<sup>37</sup>.
46. The term 'presence & engagement', was coined in the 2005 report to encourage a recognition of the fundamentally important asset that the lived experience of churches in multi religious contexts brings to the whole church. The phrase includes 'dialogue' which can include witness and evangelism; it speaks clearly of the primary purpose of the local church and it speaks of individuals as well as of communities. Remaining present in the midst of the religious 'other' is both an incarnational witness of the greatest importance,

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<sup>35</sup> This encompasses the important work of Fresh Expressions in finding new and appropriate ways to engage in multi religious contexts

<sup>36</sup> In 2008 for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury 'convened' other Faith leaders on three major occasions: the visit of the Dalai Lama, the Lambeth Conference Walk of Witness in support of the Millennium Development Goals; and the visit to Auschwitz- Birkenau

<sup>37</sup> There are 3700 'Church of England' schools, and these form a very substantial and important aspect of the Church's 'presence' in multi religious contexts. The Presence and Engagement report and the subsequent programme has focussed particularly on parishes, but this is not to imply that the ministry of schools and also of chaplaincies is not also of vital significance. The national Inter Faith Relations Adviser works collaboratively with the Board of Education and Chaplaincy advisers



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and also enables the church to speak with integrity into the complexities of the close encounter of religions in our neighbourhoods. Moving from simple presence – valuable as that is – to a mode of engagement which is rooted in the gospel gives strength and content to presence.

47. The term was applied in the 2005 report to the then 900 parishes in which more than ten percent of their parish population were people of other Faiths at the 2001 Census. The numbers have moved on significantly since then and there are now many more 'Presence & Engagement' parishes, although we shall not know the extent of the change until the 2011 Census<sup>38</sup>.

48. Since the report, the presence of the churches – indeed of everyone - in the midst of populations of other Faiths has taken on a new dimension. Through the media, people of other Faiths, and particularly Muslims, are virtually present to all churches. However unlike the lived experience of actual presence and engagement, virtual presence encourages an engagement that lacks authenticity, with all the attendant risks of misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

49. It is to this third strand that this report now turns in order to provide an account of the work of the Presence and Engagement Task Group in the two and a half years since it received its mandate from General Synod and from the Mission and Public Affairs Council. In

### **St Christopher's, Springfield, Birmingham**

Springfield is a parish of 29,000 people with levels of deprivation in the top 20% and with one of the city's highest infant mortality rates. There is a rich ethnic mix in the community, with an increasing proportion of Asian people, the majority of whom are Pakistani Muslim – now around 60% of the parish population. There are also Hindu, Sikh, African and Afro-Caribbean people with a small number of Polish, Irish and indigenous Birmingham people.

St Christopher's is a thriving evangelical church (<http://www.springfieldproject.org.uk/>) which exemplifies the Presence and Engagement approach. It has maintained and grown its presence in Springfield and is engaging in a wide variety of ways with the very diverse and strongly Muslim population of the parish and particularly through the Springfield Project.

**Youth Encounter** is run by Andrew Smith, who is a member of St. Christopher's Church. It is a Scripture Union project which exists to help Christian young people in Britain to live out their faith amongst Muslims. This is done in two distinct ways:

- running Faith and Young People Events that bring together Christian and Muslim young people for dialogue,
  - providing training and resources to help churches equip Christian young people to live out their faith confidently and humbly amongst their Muslim friends
- Youth Encounter also provides training for churches and Christian organisations working with Muslim young people.

### **Family Centre**

In 2005 the church was approached by Birmingham City Council to consider entering into a partnership to deliver extended services to the community under the umbrella of a Children's Centre.

Following consultations the church agreed to proceed with partnership arrangements with Birmingham City Council to fund a purpose-built building for the delivery of dedicated children's and families' services to the community. The City Council has now invested £1.8m in the completed centre which is physically part of the church building and under the management responsibility of the PCC. The Springfield centre was opened in October 2008 by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The project is based on the desire to deliver God's love to the community. 'God is the god of the impossible and He has taken the project from small, humble beginnings to a new centre in seven years,' says Yvonne Gordon, a trustee of the centre. The Christian ethos behind the project is key, as director Angie King says: 'We have a £1.8 million new building. People ask how we did it and we say it was God who opened the doors'.

The Springfield Centre is making a real difference in one of the most deprived parts of Birmingham. 'It is open to all community members,' says Matloov Hussain from the local mosque, 'and is an example of where the church is providing for the whole community'.

<sup>38</sup> The ONS has now recommended to Government that the religious question be included in the 2011 census in the same terms as in 2001



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seeking to assist in the equipping of the local church, the Task Group has focussed its work on four themes:

- Communications
- Scriptural and theological reflection
- Training and equipping
- Assisting dioceses to reflect strategically on their responses to the changing religious environment for their mission.

In all of these, the central perspective is that the Presence and Engagement programme exists to assist the local church to fulfil its vocation as much in actual or virtual contexts of religious plurality as in any other context.

## Communications

### The Presence and Engagement Website ([www.presenceandengagement.org.uk](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk))

50. In the electronic world, websites provide the most powerful instrument to communicate widely, both openly and confidentially. The Task Group has therefore commissioned the setting up of a website which though under the responsibility of the Church of England's Inter Faith Relations Adviser, is not an official website of the Church of England as it hosts a number of discussion network Forums<sup>39</sup>.

51. Its purpose is threefold:

- to provide a 'one stop' open source of relevant resources for the work of churches, chaplaincies and schools in multi religious contexts;
- to provide a means through which initiatives, stories and good practice can be shared;
- to provide for a number of confidential forums for particular interest groups.

The resources include bible studies, codes of practice and guidelines, religious composition statistics from the 2001 census for all parishes in the country, publications and a range of links to relevant Christian websites. The website is in the earlier stages of its development, and will be widely publicised amongst the churches in 2009.

52. The confidential forums hosted by the website include those for the Diocesan Inter Faith Relations Advisers, the Christian Contact Group on Islam and the Christian Women's Inter Faith Group. In each forum are discussion 'rooms', 'library' and a 'noticeboard'. As with the website generally, the forums are in process of development but it is hoped that they will provide a positive and encouraging resource for the Church.

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<sup>39</sup> The inter Faith pages of the Church of England's official website are at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/interfaith>



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## Contact Groups and Networks

53. In the past ten years, the National Inter Faith Relations Advisers have initiated and supported a network of Diocesan Inter Faith Relations Advisers, now numbering around 50 across all the dioceses of the Church of England. An annual conference maintains connections which are supplemented by monthly visits to dioceses by the national Adviser. 2009 will see further development in their role and support. The dioceses in Greater London<sup>40</sup> have each nominated an Archdeacon with particular responsibility for Presence and Engagement and Inter Faith Relations and this is proving an effective means to co-ordinate approaches which enhance the leadership of the Church of England across the capital.
54. In recent years the desirability of being able to draw upon the extensive experience and knowledge of Christian practitioners and scholars in relation to Islam has become increasingly evident. To this end a 'Christian Contact Group on Islam' is now in existence, meeting regularly and with the use of the website forum. The Contact Group exists to provide a means for scholars and practitioners to reflect on current issues and to undertake research; to provide a deep source of advice and comment; and to encourage a new generation of recent scholars and practitioners. This last is a particular priority made more urgent not least by the retrenchment of many mission societies on whom the Church of England has often relied for such expertise
55. In recent years also, there has grown a sense that the many Christian women whose work is particularly in multi religious contexts, face a range of particular issues and complexities, including cultural/religious attitudes to gender and gender roles. To this end a network is in process of development and is facilitated by a website forum.

## Equipping the local church

56. The Presence & Engagement Task Group has focused on supporting three areas of work in relation to ways of assisting in equipping the local church: support and encouragement for the development of three Presence & Engagement Centres; the drafting of a range of 'Learning pathways'; and the revision and development of a series of Codes of Guidance for practitioners.

## The Presence & Engagement Centres

57. The *Presence and Engagement* report called for a new generation of Christian Centres to provide strategic resourcing for teaching and learning about mission and ministry in multi religious contexts. These were to provide a different type of resource than those

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<sup>40</sup> London, Southwark, Chelmsford and Rochester



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provided from a more explicitly academic perspective at such Christian institutions as Heythrop College (Centre for Christianity and inter religious dialogue) and the London School of Theology (Centre for Islamic Studies)<sup>41</sup>.

58. It was noted that precisely at the time when multi religious contexts are increasing, the number of Christian centres for inter religious studies has been decreasing: the loss of the United College of the Ascension, Crowther Hall and the Edinburgh Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies, together with the changing ethos of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian Muslim Relations at Birmingham University. At the same time, the number of confessional and academic centres for the study of Islam has increased markedly
59. The need expressed in Presence and Engagement was for a network of centres which would be rooted in the lived experience of the local church in multi religious contexts over the past thirty years. The vision was to provide a limited number of Centres which would be able to speak to the needs of an increasing number of churches looking to be better equipped for the mission of God in their contexts. Such Centres would also offer their resources to theological colleges and dioceses which would not normally be able to provide these for themselves.
60. This was reinforced by the inclusion of other Faiths related requirements in the 'Outcome statements' produced by the Hind report. The Centres were to be ecumenical and also to develop partnerships with other Faith institutions in such a way as to be able to offer joint courses and programmes to the public sector authorities.
61. Two dioceses, Bradford and Leicester have given a very strong lead in responding proactively to this proposal and have encouraged and supported the development of the Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity (BCDD) and the St Philip's Centre for study and engagement in a Multi Faith Society respectively. In addition, the four dioceses of Greater London have come together to develop a related initiative to assess training needs, to provide systematic information on what is available and to commission additional material where it is needed. The Archbishop of Canterbury is a patron of the St Philip's Centre, expressing thereby the encouragement of the national Church for these initiatives which are for the benefit of the whole Church nationally. The three Centres work collaboratively to ensure a full national perspective

**St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society**

[www.stphilipscentre.co.uk/](http://www.stphilipscentre.co.uk/)

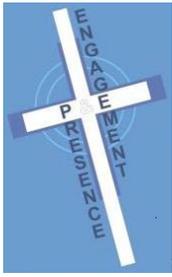
**Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity**

[www.bcdd.org.uk/](http://www.bcdd.org.uk/)

**The London Presence & Engagement Network**

[www.theology-centre.org/PEN.htm](http://www.theology-centre.org/PEN.htm)

<sup>41</sup> Although St Philip's Centre now provides an MA programme



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62. The Centres in Bradford and Leicester are charitable companies with an ecumenical Board of Trustees although they retain strong links and support from the Anglican dioceses which initiated them. Their funding has been achieved from a mix of grants from churches and trusts, from earned income and from substantial support from the dioceses in which they are located. There has so far been no financial support from the national church although the Centres are resourcing churches regionally and nationally<sup>42</sup>.

63. The Centres now have three years of experience and have built up a substantial reputation, both with the churches that they serve in the United Kingdom and also abroad. Each is a specifically Christian centre drawing on the lived experience of churches in multi religious contexts and offering this to the wider Church in the form of courses and programmes, placements, information and expertise for the building up of the churches mission in multi religious neighbourhoods. With partners of other Faith communities, they also serve local public authorities and provide an increasingly valued resource in the raising of religious and cultural literacy. They represent a supremely valuable strategic asset for the Churches and for the country more widely and need now to enter a new stage in their development if they are to be strongly rooted and able securely to play their full part in equipping the churches for this essential aspect of ministry and mission.

**St Philip's Centre**  
**Jesus and the Christian Gospel for all?**  
**How to offer the challenge of the Christian faith to our Hindu, Sikh or Muslim neighbours.**  
**Led by Canon Dr Andrew Wingate and Revd David Newman**  
**Saturday 24th January 2009,**

64. The work of the Centres now needs strengthening in two ways:

- **Stronger and clearer national recognition and endorsement.**  
The Church of England nationally and partner churches should be encouraged to recognise the Centres as having a key role in providing training and equipping for ministry and mission in multi religious contexts.
- **Broader acceptance of their role and use of their resources**  
Building on such recognition, dioceses, Boards of Education, colleges and chaplaincies need to consider on a systematic basis how they make use of the Centres in their programmes

<sup>42</sup> Discussions are taking place with the Trustees of the Church Urban Fund towards a partnership in which the Fund would support the work of local churches in key Presence and Engagement contexts



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## **National contribution to further development**

Because of the importance of the contribution these Centres make regionally and nationally, it would be appropriate for the Church at national level through the Mission and Public Affairs Council to explore ways in which it can help to resource them.

### **The Learning Pathways and grids**

65. The Presence & Engagement Task Group has developed a number of 'learning pathways' which aim to set out in an accessible way the qualities, skills and experience that need to be taken account in equipping people for various forms of ministry and discipleship, particularly bearing in mind the concerns relating to 'Presence and Engagement' in the life of the Church today.
66. These learning pathways are an example of the increasingly-used 'Outcomes Based' model of education. In this model, the primary question is not 'What does a person know?' but 'What qualities and skills does the learner need to be able to demonstrate in order to be able to fulfill this or that task/job/vocation?' The required qualities and skills can be gained in a variety of ways.
67. One of the features of 'Outcomes Based' models, therefore, is that they offer considerable flexibility – which means that they are appropriate models to offer for the varied Presence and Engagement contexts in England. 'Outcomes Based' models of education (as here) also seek to value the different dimensions of training: intellectual, practical, emotional, and spiritual. All are important as part of a holistic framework for theological education.
68. Although these learning pathways were originally designed in relation to the Church of England's Presence and Engagement programme they can fairly easily be adapted for use by other Christian churches.
69. The learning pathways are set out in the form of tables, each divided into two columns – the first relating to the early period of ministry, and which can form a checklist of training needs during this period. The second relates to ongoing ministry, and outlines the abilities, skills and qualities which will develop or be exhibited through the experience of a number of years. The various tables relate to different forms of ministry and/or discipleship. These are:
- Senior leadership (such as Bishops, Archdeacons, Deans, and leaders in other Christians Churches etc)
  - Ordained ministers
  - Licensed Lay Ministers (this is understood to include lay people holding an episcopal or diocesan licence or commission to exercise a ministry such as that of Reader, Lay



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Reader, Evangelist, Pastoral Assistant, and corresponding ministries in other Christian churches)

70. Through these learning pathways, it is made clear that the education and training of ministers needs to continue in some overt form for at least the first three years in which a person exercises ministry and that there are certain qualities and skills that need to be demonstrated before a person takes on a post of particular responsibility in the Presence and Engagement context.
71. The tables are intended to offer an explicit set of benchmarks in relation to the qualities and skills required for ministry, especially bearing in mind the Presence and Engagement context of contemporary Britain. They will be useful in a number of ways to assist with meeting training needs.
- An individual minister may use them as a personal checklist – particularly if they are considering ministering in a Presence and Engagement context.
  - They will be useful for those responsible for designing and administering diocesan Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) programmes.
  - They can be used by the specialist Centres to assist with creating tailor made courses for specific groups of ministers<sup>43</sup>.
  - They may be of use for those responsible for making appointments, particularly in relation to ministries that will be exercised in Presence and Engagement contexts.
72. The learning pathways have been developed in consultation with Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council and will in 2009 be circulated to all chaplaincy departments and theological courses and colleges as well as being offered to the dioceses for their programmes.

### **Codes of Practice**

73. The extensive development of inter Faith relationships over recent decades has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the number and type of occasions when those of different Faiths come together for a range of different purposes. These may include multi Faith forums and councils, civic services of various kinds in different locations, multi faith chaplaincy arrangements in education, hospitals and prisons and at a more personal level, marriage and funeral services across religious difference.
74. Within the bounds of its historic formularies, the Church of England's tradition is rooted in a generosity towards others and in an openness towards possible developments in good relations where these are indicated by local context. There have been very many initiatives led or supported by the Church of England. There is a real need to ensure

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<sup>43</sup> Such courses are now being offered for Bishops, Archdeacons and Deans



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both that this openness is fostered and also that it takes place within the context of the doctrines and Christian witness of the Church of England.

75. The need to hold these in balance has long been recognized, and codes or guidelines for good practice have been drawn up for a number of frequently arising circumstances<sup>44</sup>. Two examples are the documents drafted by the Inter Faith Consultative Group on the theological, liturgical and legal parameters applicable to worship involving people of other Faiths and on the use of churches and other buildings for such purposes. These were published in 1992 and 1996 respectively and have proved of great service to many churches and individuals since then.
76. In more recent times, as circumstances have changed and new initiatives and new legislation has been introduced, a need has arisen for the revision of existing guidelines and for the introduction of guidelines in new areas. Both of the guidelines cited above are in need of revision for these reasons. In addition other areas have emerged where the establishment of guidelines would be desirable<sup>45</sup>.
77. In some dioceses guidelines for one or other of these contexts have been drawn up and are used locally; in others there is no common practice. This naturally leads to a diversity of approach, which whilst it may have creative aspects, can also lead to confusion in the minds of Christians and people of other Faiths or none.
78. The Task Group has included within its programme of work and for consideration by the House of Bishops, the production of guidelines on these matters in a single volume to be available electronically on the Church of England and Diocesan<sup>46</sup> websites.

### Encouraging Scriptural reflection – “Encouraging Reading”

79. The 2005 *Presence and Engagement* report emphasised the importance of scriptural study and reflection but regretted that “although there is some quite excellent material available to resource (scriptural) study and reflection, it is not widely known, and there is a more limited range of focussed material than we had hoped “. The Presence & Engagement Task Group therefore attended to this matter and has developed a selection of Bible studies on texts from the Old Testament, designed particularly for use in ‘Presence and Engagement’ settings. The intention has been to provide illustrations

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<sup>44</sup> A list of existing codes of practice and guidelines is provided at [www.presenceandengagement.org.uk](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk)

<sup>45</sup> These include: the appropriate involvement of Church of England clergy or the use of Church of England premises for multi Faith civic services; the use of non consecrated premises such as church halls for use in worship by other Faiths or for practices such as yoga, reiki or alternative approaches to healing or meditation; the use of scriptural, prayer or other material from non Christian sources alongside Christian material; the design, furnishing and use of single spaces for multi Faith worship or prayer; the development of partnership or link relationships with other Faith communities; formal involvement in multi Faith forums which also include New Religious Movements.

<sup>46</sup> The intention would be to co-ordinate this work with other Christian Churches



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and examples of the ways in which scripture speaks into the multi religious contexts of ordinary parish life in the hope that this will encourage and stimulate the development of further resources from local churches and other sources. The bible studies will be printed, but are also to be found at [www.presenceandengagement.org.uk](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk) where there will also be a growing number of such studies.

80. The Task Group chose a number of texts of different kinds, approached by different methods, to illustrate some of the possible ways in which the Old Testament can resource the Church in this area. The passages aimed for a balance across a number of the different genres represented in the Old Testament. There are passages which clearly lend themselves directly to multi Faith contexts, while the connection of others is less immediately obvious; there are 'hard' passages which challenge the risk of smuggling modern assumptions, whether liberal or conservative, into our readings of the text, and other passages which resonate instantly with contemporary presuppositions.
81. The Old Testament is sometimes seen as of lesser importance to Christian faith today, and in some churches it may only rarely be used in worship or teaching. The Task Group considered it crucial to reclaim the place of the Old Testament in church life. The way in which the chosen passages speak to the whole range of human life – to individuals, families, and societies; in times of stability and of disruption; in promise and warning, in reassurance and rebuke; strengthening convictions and undermining assumptions is striking.
82. The 'multi faith' context of the Old Testament is all pervasive, and heightens its emphasis on the one true God, providing the normal backdrop to all the genres of its literature – law, prophecy, history, psalms, wisdom. The studies attempt to show that an attentive and engaged reading of the texts can highlight alternatives, raise questions, and even subvert apparent meanings.
83. The studies can be made available in a number of different ways in such parishes – for example, in the context of worship, as material for an established series of group meetings, or at events particularly focused on Presence and Engagement themes. They can also be of use in deanery, diocesan or other wider contexts for training programmes or study days. We hope also that they will be of interest in places where the visible presence of other faith communities is not marked; the impact of inter-religious questions extends to every part of our society and our world, and therefore it must be of concern to every part of our Church.
84. As these Bible studies are intended to resource the local church for ministry and mission, the Task Group also hopes that they can issue in practical action and relationship-building. Sometimes this may take the form of addressing an immediate issue in the local neighbourhood; sometimes it may result in getting to know better the



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members of another Faith community within a parish; sometimes it will challenge to engage in evangelism, at other times in dialogue.

85. When churches do engage in these ways with their local communities, it is good to keep bringing the resulting activities back into the context of Bible study, so that scriptural text and contemporary context both read and interpret one another.

### **Facilitating Dioceses to reflect strategically**

86. The 2005 Presence and Engagement Report recommended that:

*'Dioceses need to have explicitly worked through strategies and policies ...not just in relation to parishes in multi Faith contexts, but to the wider range of questions raised in this report so that there is an integrated approach across diocesan departments for mission and evangelism, training, buildings and pastoral reorganisation.'*<sup>47</sup>

87. The Presence & Engagement Task Group has initially attended to this recommendation by a questionnaire to all dioceses which aimed to provide a snapshot picture of how dioceses are responding to this challenge. It aimed to consider how far dioceses are thinking through the many different issues which multi Faith contexts pose for parishes and dioceses in a systematic way. The full analysis of the questionnaire will be circulated to dioceses in 2009, but some elements are mentioned below.

88. The questionnaire was in two parts: a quantitative approach in the first part and a qualitative approach in the second part - inviting stories so as to get a deeper insight into how things are playing out on the ground. What was clear from the responses was that the overwhelming majority of dioceses had experienced *local* events or issues which impacted on inter Faith relations in their area. Presence & Engagement is not something that can be limited to a few areas of the country and the issues that arise affect all areas of the country and need to be addressed by all dioceses.

89. The questionnaire asked about the roles played by different people in the diocesan structures. In relation to the role of the bishop for example, the responses showed that a majority of diocesan bishops are involved in a lead role in Faith Leaders' Groups or in Councils of Faith. In relation to the place and role of the Diocesan Inter Faith Relations Adviser, the responses showed that whilst there is a DIFA in virtually every diocese, their circumstances vary very greatly. In some there is a part time adviser with a specific responsibility; in others it is included within the portfolio of a diocesan officer; and in others it is attached to the work of a parish priest or chaplain. In addition there was little clarity about the relationship between Presence and Engagement and Inter faith relations.

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<sup>47</sup> P&E report para 204

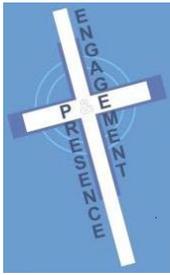


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90. In some dioceses<sup>48</sup>, a member of the bishop's senior staff has the overall lead responsibility for Inter Faith Relations and Presence and Engagement matters and this makes for good co-ordination with the DIFA who is not normally on the senior staff. Where there is no lead person questions are raised about the degree to which the issues and experience of Presence and Engagement parishes are able to be brought to the heart of diocesan decision making.
91. There appear to be two dimensions to an effective Presence and Engagement support structure. There is an advisory dimension which requires expertise in the twin aspects of inter Faith relations and Presence & Engagement which may best be provided by an expert group managed by the DIFA.. There is, however, a second advocacy dimension which requires access to the bishop and the senior Councils of the diocese so that relevant issues are heard at the heart of the institution.
92. There is much to be said for this latter role being held within the bishop's senior staff, although it may also be effectively held within the wider diocesan staff. These two dimensions need to be held together to provide an effective nexus of communication both within and beyond the diocese and to avoid a sense of isolation when the DIFA is neither a diocesan officer nor a member of senior staff. Several dioceses have two individuals working closely together to provide these roles and this seems a sensible approach, but other arrangements may also work according to the situation.
93. Around 2/3 of the responding dioceses have or are developing a diocesan group for inter Faith/Presence and Engagement issues. Engagement in inter Faith issues in civic life and structures featured strongly, largely via the role of the Bishop and existing institutional frameworks. It was interesting however that according to the responses, Pastoral Committees do not, on the whole, seem to take specific account of the contexts of Presence & Engagement parishes in their considerations about pastoral plans.
94. Very few dioceses have formal policies for P&E related issues even on matters relating to other Faith contexts: mission, evangelism and conversion; the use of churches or church-owned premises by other faith communities; culture and ethnicity and previous experience of clergy appointed to multi faith parishes; gender issues that may arise for Church workers in a multi faith context; provision of training for clergy and lay people in relation to mission and ministry in other faith contexts.
95. The seeming weakness in theological and scriptural reflection in relation to churches in a multi religious context noted in the 2005 report to Synod appears not to have changed greatly and it seems that little ongoing theological reflection relevant to multi Faith contexts of the local churches' ministry and mission is currently provided within the great majority of dioceses in any systematic way.

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<sup>48</sup> The four dioceses in Greater London each have a nominated Archdeacon



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96. The Presence and Engagement Task Group will in 2009 and subsequent years seek to engage directly with as many individual dioceses as possible recognising the great variety of different circumstances. The aim will be to offer opportunities to bishops and their senior staff to reflect on the issues arising from the questionnaire and in the light of the work of the Task Group and the issues raised in this report. The Task Group hopes that this approach will be welcomed.

## **Staying present and engaging faithfully**

97. The Presence and Engagement Task Group offers this report to General Synod in which it has sought to highlight some of the ways in which the local church can be supported and resourced, albeit recognising that the key tasks are to be worked out locally.

98. The Task Group commends to Synod in particular its understanding that:

- **The mission of God shown in the unique life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ encompasses both dialogue and evangelism in a seamless whole and is the eternal source of hope for the world.**
- **The witness of the local churches, chaplaincies and schools in remaining present and engaged in multi religious contexts will be a key test of the Church of England's commitment to and support of an authentic universal ministry and that this will be a most important element in retaining the respect and goodwill of wider society and of other religions.**
- **The resourcing of the local churches through the Presence and Engagement programme and its further development remains a priority for the Church.**

The Task Group therefore asks Synod to take note of the Presence and Engagement programme contained in this report

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