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Christian care in action

KEEPING THE FAITH

RETAINING CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY PROJECT



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RETAINING CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY PROJECT



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INTRODUCTION

In the past months I have visited numerous projects around the country and listened to people tell their stories of the work they are doing. Key words emerged about what Christian distinctiveness is and what this means for the work of churches and community projects across England.

Context is important. I have been in the same city, listened to project leaders use the very same words, and yet witnessed an entirely different (though equally valid) practical outworking of their faith.

We live in a time of an increasingly lively cultural diversity. For those living and working in estates in the outer, predominantly white, suburbs of a city, it can feel very different from the busy, crowded, inner city areas bustling with various ethnic minority groups. The concept and language of faith is necessarily different, and so working in that context could look different.

Internal factors also influence how church projects are run: a variety of emphases are placed on understandings of God as a result of people's upbringing, life experiences, and theology.

This resource does not assume that Christian projects are better than other faith-based or secular community work. However it does recognize that faith in Christ, his word and his actions, can and should have a knock-on effect on the way

Christian projects understand how to love their neighbours and serve the poor.

The hope is that this resource, rather than dictating any absolute response to what Christian distinctiveness looks like, will instead encourage discussion and reflection around this vital concept.

This resource is divided into three self-contained sections:

- Theological reflections on the importance of distinctly Christian community work
- principles and pressures facing community projects (taken from Livability's excellent We Don't Do God training day)
- practical issues around being distinctly Christian (for instance managing staff, fundraising), with case studies and scenarios to aid discussion and reflection

Susie Probert



1

KEEPING THE FAITH REFLECTIONS



WHY IS CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS IMPORTANT?

'In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' Matthew 5:16

Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount show how important it is that the people we meet understand who we are and what we do in the context of God's love for them.

We want our lives and our community projects to meet people's practical needs, but being distinctly Christian also enables us to offer transformative emotional and spiritual support.

Being distinctly Christian is also important in its link with our call to be holy and to reconcile people with each other and with God.

Again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges God's followers not to lose their saltiness, their distinctive and recognisable 'flavour'.¹ Followers of God should stand out for their attitude to others, the way they pray, fast and give. Our faith is a light in the darkness that should not be hidden.

There is a tension – that of being distinctive and yet acting as an agent of reconciliation between people, and between people and God – but it is a tension that church community projects can work within and, in doing so, can create powerful messages relating to holiness, hospitality and love of neighbour.



BEING DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN – REFLECTIONS FROM THE TRINITY

Unique to Christianity is the concept of the Trinity, the idea of the oneness of God existing in a three-fold relationship. It provides a helpful image of community, interdependence and of love being constantly given and received:

*'The boundless life and perfect love which abide forever in the heart of the Trinity are sent out into the world in a mission of renewal and restoration in which we are called to share...we are sent to engage with our neighbours as agents of God's mission to them.'*²

This resource draws from the nature of the Trinity a number of themes within Christian distinctiveness that are witnessed, discussed and analysed repeatedly during visits to projects:

- **Love:** inclusive, generous and relational
- **Incarnation:** part of the community, long-term
- **Servant-hearted:** vulnerable, not always holding on to power
- **Defending the poor:** speaking up for justice and change
- **Transparent and honest:** willing to explain our faith
- **Prayer:** for ourselves and for others
- **Transformation:** helping people find a new way of living

This is by no means an exhaustive list of themes, but it begins to piece together the complex jigsaw of factors that define Christian distinctiveness.

LOVE: INCLUSIVE, GENEROUS AND RELATIONAL

*'We're not whipping people into God's kingdom. We're just showing God's love.'*³

God the Father introduces a **fatherly love** that welcomes all, regardless of race, age or employment status. *'So God created mankind in his own image'*⁴ which includes, among others:

- those without a home
- men and women in prison
- people experiencing mental illness
- those struggling with addictions
- children and teenagers who have been permanently excluded from school
- others whom society deliberately casts aside

This fatherly love not only includes everyone, but also recognises the individual. The community projects we support know the names of the people they work with and can tell stories of commitment shown to each one. All have seen lives begin a process of transformation.

SECTION 1 KEEPING THE FAITH — REFLECTIONS

The love is **generous**, not just materially but in terms of time and hospitality. Often, individuals have needs that cannot be met during working hours or issues that require more than just a short conversation.

A family living on an estate in Hull open their house every other Monday night and welcome in anyone who wants a hot meal and a chat. The house is busy with young children running around, adults gathering around the food, and the murmur of conversation. The visitors are blessed, but also bless – keen to help wash up, make cups of tea and listen to one another's stories. It has become a sacred space where people can experience a glimmer of the Father's love.

The Trinity exists in a **relationship**, loving and being loved. This is the ideal model for the life being lived by project workers and co-ordinators. As they bless, they too are blessed.

Forming relationships is the lifeblood of what project workers do. Facilities and equipment can help, but ultimately it is the strength of relationships that enable transformation to take place.

*'Not many people can do what a faith-based organisation can do – it's all about relationships.'*⁵



INCARNATION: PART OF THE COMMUNITY LONG-TERM

'he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.' Philippians 2:7

Churches have an **incarnational** presence in their parishes and within communities.

Christ not only became human, but lived alongside people, fully experiencing their lives and culture. Rather than hiding away in the temple and living amongst the self-professed religious, he made friends with the locals and spent time with the lost.

Today, the concept of incarnational living and the commitment to a particular area is a powerful tool. Many local services enter and leave the community each day. In contrast, churches are a long-term presence and can support and nourish the communities that grow around them.

It is through the incarnation, that the **resurrection** can be experienced – an expectation that the kingdom will start to be made manifest. You can see glimpses of this in the actions of a young teenager staying for the whole of a youth group session for the first time without getting into trouble and being sent home, or in an elderly lady who leaves her flat for the first time in a year for the promise of a hot meal and friendly company.

SERVANT-HEARTED: VULNERABLE, NOT ALWAYS HOLDING ON TO POWER

In Christ's incarnation, we are also faced with **vulnerability**. God willingly empties himself of power, 'taking on the nature of a servant' and going to the cross.

There can exist in the best of us a desire to hold on to a project tightly, yet Christ's example challenges us to be humble: to esteem being **servant-hearted** over being powerful, to participate in his vulnerability.

From the perspective of a community project, this might mean linking with statutory services, which may go on to influence the way the project is run, or by sharing the use of a community building with another group.

Whatever it looks like in practice, the concept of being open and available to other people or groups becomes ever more relevant as funding becomes a major problem. Many projects will find themselves needing to downsize or adapt in order to remain sustainable. Project workers need to be prepared for change and, where necessary, to welcome it.

The incarnation of Christ also reveals that **suffering** (as well as resurrection) should be an expectation in the work that is being done: *'Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning'* (Psalm 30:5).

To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to experience the highs and the lows, to be realistic and compassionate (to ourselves and others). Even though the light is greater than the darkness, the darkness still exists, this side of heaven.



DEFENDING THE POOR: SPEAKING UP FOR JUSTICE AND CHANGE

'He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner among you, giving them food and clothing.'
Deuteronomy 10:18

God the Father is the **defender** of the poor and he demands the same attitude from his followers, commanding us to *'act justly and love mercy.'*⁶

Social outreach is not just an act of goodwill, but a necessary expectation as a follower of God. This underlies the commitment, the continued effort and the daily sacrifice of many project leaders, staff and volunteers. Acting justly and loving mercy is an integral part of their worship and relationship with God.

'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.' Proverbs 31:8-9

Alongside the need for action is the need to **speak up** for those who are not given a voice, whose cause is not heard.

For people working with and in a community, this might mean being part of a think-tank that contributes to policy work, organising a protest, or writing letters to a local council or government.

It means creating and using opportunities to speak up about the work being done, to share experiences and to discuss what impact this might have locally and further afield.

The church is also called to be **prophetic**. The Old Testament includes stories of many prophets who spoke of God's intended actions in the world, and of his intentions for us; how we should live to honour each other and him.

In the same way, church projects demonstrate a way of living where individuals are valued and cared for, providing services that best serve the needs of the whole community.

TRANSPARENT AND HONEST: WILLING TO EXPLAIN OUR FAITH

By means of the incarnation and with confidence through the resurrection, there is a calling to **proclamation**. 1 Peter 3:15 says:

'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.'

We should be ready to explain what we believe, and we should do this respectfully. It is proclamation based on **transparency, honesty** and openness, filled with **integrity**.

'The greatest reward in caring for older people is seeing them come to know Jesus; not by preaching at them, but by demonstrating the love of God in action.' Mo Smith, founder of Regenerate-Rise, a charity helping the elderly.

SECTION 1 KEEPING THE FAITH — REFLECTIONS

The outworking of this might vary in practice and the language used needs to be relevant to the community. In the Church of England document *Sharing the Gospel of Faith*, a project based in a multi-faith area explains:

*'If our motivation is genuinely loving and we are careful to be ethical in the way we evangelise, we don't need to be apologetic about sharing who we are and what we have discovered in Christ.'*⁷

For example, talking about the Christian nature of community project might mean leaving church leaflets with details about services on a table where a crèche runs, or letting teenagers at a youth group know there is a Bible group they can join if they wish. It may also include a talk in a meeting, or a sermon. These too need to be done sensitively and wisely, being aware of the context and audience.

A member of a youth group, new to the church, commented at a youth event:

'It's not so much about the length of the sermon but the way it is said. It needs to be told in a way that is clear and easy to get hold of so that everyone can take something away from it.'

One project runs a large mums' and toddlers' group in a heavily Muslim area. Once a year the toddlers dress up, perform the nativity and sing songs. This is a very popular event in the year, but it has not come about by getting Muslim women and children into church and then revealing to them

why they are there. It has grown through complete honesty about the activity. It is in such a transparent atmosphere that people find themselves wanting to come along and take part.

'People do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' Matthew 5:15-16

As well as being open and honest within community work, there is value in individual workers of volunteers sharing some of their own vulnerabilities. As one project leader explains: *'Transparency with your life can be a bit messy, but you need to show you are also in need.'*

PRAYER: FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS

The Holy Spirit is described as a helper and a comforter who provides much needed refreshment and renewal.

Without making an effort to create space and to engage in prayer, Christian community work will not be sustainable. Burning out is an all-too-common experience for many community workers. Spiritual refreshment is essential both for individual workers and projects as a whole.



'We need to pray more', a couple of youth workers told me. Prayer is one of the most important parts of the work, and the easiest to leave out. Jesus' ministry required him to get away from the crowds and be alone. Prayer needs to be discussed more frequently, and space put aside to allow it to happen.

Through prayer, we can ask God to protect us against cynicism and jadedness. He enables us to retain our compassion and empathy over the long term.

'Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.' Isaiah 40: 29-31

Prayer is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit. Christian distinctiveness brings prayer into the church's community work, supporting staff, people who the project serves, and for the future direction of the work.

TRANSFORMATION: HELPING PEOPLE FIND A NEW WAY OF LIVING

*'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'*² Corinthians 3:17-18

God's work through the Holy Spirit is **transformative**. Change becomes possible, and enacted; many projects see this in the individuals they work with.

The Spirit empowers us to witness to Christ's resurrection and to speak of **salvation**, redemption and **transformation**, that in Christ no situation is too hopeless, no person unreachable.

The hope that the Spirit gives us enables us to live our lives with perseverance and commitment. It makes possible *'liberation from oppression'*⁸ and new life – new life for communities, projects and their staff, and the people who seek help from projects.

¹Matthew 5:13.

²Anglican Consultative Council (London, 2008), *Generous Love, The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue, An Anglican Theology of Inter-Faith Relations* p.1.

³Project worker from Church of the Good Shepherd, Farnborough.

⁴Genesis 1:27.

⁵Richard Cooper, *The Source*, Aldershot.

⁶Micah 6:8

⁷Sharing the Gospel p18.

⁸Kuhr, J. *'What does Salvation Mean in the Urban Context?'*, in Davey, A. (ed.) *The Crossover City*, London: Continuum (2010).p.77



CONCLUSIONS

For all church and community-based projects, now is a time of change. Creativity is increasingly important, and new ideas need to be sought, learnt, and integrated into existing work.

Church-run projects can and often do become an integral and valued part of community life, but part of their role is to reflect and challenge local norms. The constant challenge of the church is to be a prophetic voice, and to be innovative, creative and consistent. Fred Ratley, Director of Community Regeneration in Birmingham, says that it is time to 'celebrate the church'.

As funding is becoming all the more difficult to secure, there is a greater need around utilising church space, involving congregations and community members and modelling a society that values people and skills above commodities.

It is time to value genuine small-scale transformation above growth, and for distinctive, incarnational living that transforms communities.

2

KEEPING THE FAITH PRESSURES AND PRINCIPLES





The **Implicit-Explicit Circle** was developed by **Livability** to visualise the range of ways a charity or organisation's Christian ethos can be lived out throughout its life – from highly implicit to highly explicit.

EXPRESSING AN IMPLICIT OR EXPLICIT ETHOS IN PRACTICE

Explicit (light): 'We are very open with everyone. People know we are Christians and we integrate our faith openly into the practical service we give.'

As the word suggests, the project's explicit faith elements are highly tangible and easily identifiable.

Implicit (salt): 'Our Christian ethos informs and infuses all our work. It is not always immediately apparent but it underpins and sustains all we do.'

The implicit elements of a project's faith basis may be far subtler but can be just as important in determining the nature and direction of the project's work.

The aim of this model is to help project workers to be **intentional** in expressing the Christian ethos of their work in a way appropriate to their context. The aim is not necessarily to make everything explicit but to show how at differing times, in different elements of work, faith can be seen and experienced.

GOOD PRACTICE, LOVE, QUALITY OF CARE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ARE HERE INSPIRED BY CLEAR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.



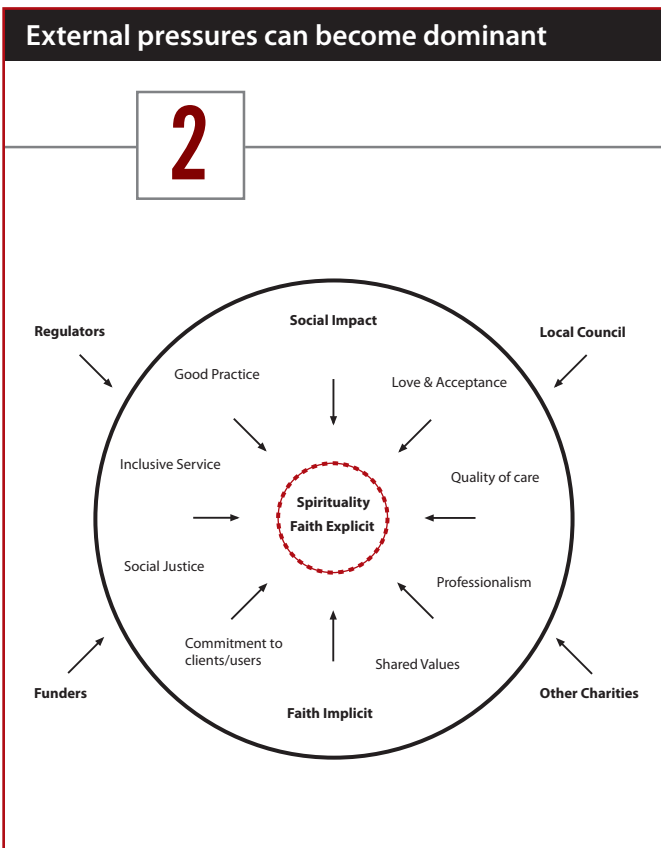
SECTION 2 KEEPING THE FAITH – PRESSURES AND PRINCIPLES



CIRCLE ONE – LIFE-GIVING FAITH AT THE CORE

The first circle shows what a healthy Christian ethos could look like in practice. One example of this could be a church project or Christian charity with a living and dynamic Christian spirituality expressed through prayer, articulated theology, specific events, explicit wording, signage or actions. For projects where the Christian basis of the work is to the fore, these explicit faith elements should make sense outwardly through accessible language and creativity. While a grant-maker or local authority commissioner may not attend a prayer meeting for example, every explicit activity should be explainable so others can begin to see how these elements bring life to the local context.

The core of the circle in the diagram could be described as an engine at work in an organisation, bringing life to the important values shown outside the inner circle. Values such as good practice, love, quality of care and social justice are here inspired by clear Christian theology, and a positive outworking of this might, for example, result in a project gaining a reputation for inclusivity welcoming a wide range of clients because it is modelled on the radical inclusion of Jesus seen throughout the gospels. However, subtlety is needed to prevent what could be interpreted as Christian chauvinism; there is a temptation slip into defensive language such as 'We are a Christian project but inclusive of all people'.



The key stakeholders identified on the outside of the circle may not necessarily understand or place a high value on the core explicit Christian ethos, but will be keen to see the actual positive values being lived out. Internally, it requires a clear and shared confidence across the organisation as to how Christian beliefs truly shape the work. The skill is often in articulating the connection between the explicit beliefs and the project's values – what it believes and what it does to enact its beliefs – in a way that makes sense to people unfamiliar with Biblical language or church jargon.

CIRCLE TWO – FEELING THE PRESSURE

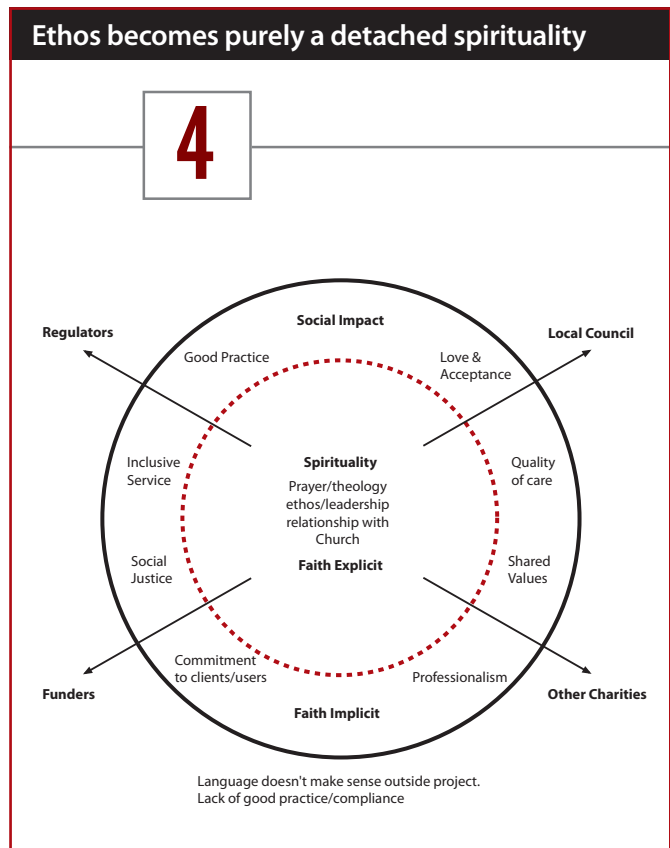
The crucial difference between circles one and two is that in circle two the dynamics have changed dramatically; in this stage, the leaders/staff/trustees or volunteers of the church project are squeezed by external pressures such as funders stipulating tight restrictions on the 'volume' of faith. Shrinkage of a project's explicit Christian values is often caused by or leads to a real lack of confidence in leadership. Alternatively, it may be that a key person (possibly the founder) moves on, or that the faith roots of the project have become irrelevant and detached over time. Revisiting ethos statements, vision documents and strategic plans can help ensure that the motivating and inspiring role of faith is maintained.

CIRCLE THREE – EXTRACTING THE FAITH

In the third circle, the project’s Christian ethos has actually been removed altogether. Where this happens in practice there might still be an expression of Christian faith within the project, but it may be limited to one person on the staff, one trustee or perhaps via an external partner organisation. In this third circle, the stakeholder influence becomes the dominant force. Good practice, for example, is no longer driven by a commitment to Christian teaching but to fulfil secular requirements. Whilst the loss of a project’s Christian values may happen due to external or chance factors, it is important to recognise that it can also happen intentionally.

CIRCLE FOUR – SPIRITUAL SHOUTING

The last variation of the cycle illustrates the situation when an inappropriate spirituality pervades a project and negatively impacts on good practice. In this instance, a lack of accountability for safeguarding or financial regulation is defended by ‘God being in charge’ and the hope that praying and coming to God will solve the key issues. Clearly the Spirit does move outside of human intervention but Christians are also called to be transparent, to work hard and be wise. For a Christian organisation, this could also mean staying focussed on the main objectives – caring for people and communities – and wisely and prudently managing finances and resources.



3

KEEPING THE FAITH PRACTICAL ISSUES



Keeping faith central to a project is an on-going challenge; a natural tendency can be for it to slowly dissipate. The struggles around retaining Christian distinctiveness can be divided into the following main issues:

- a) Ethos, values and governance
- b) Staffing/volunteers
- c) Funding
- d) Partnership with statutory services
- e) Managing buildings
- f) Links between community project and church

The following case studies show how various projects have made their Christian distinctiveness work in practice in a range of different local situations. Included with the real-life case studies are scenarios which you can use to generate discussion and thought on these issues. Linked with this, a checklist at the end of the document can help you identify strengths and weaknesses for your project's expression of its Christian distinctiveness.

3A) ETHOS, VALUES AND GOVERNANCE

Often when church projects or Christian charities start, the faith ethos and values are clearly felt and shared by a small team of people. Because this ethos is so fundamental and foundational to the project, it can be taken for granted and the assumption may be that the original ethos and values will just naturally continue. Over time, though, the foundational Christian ethos can be lost due to external pressures or organisational change.

A key way of protecting a project's Christian ethos and values is by creating a Christian Ethos and Values statement, which:

- enables a project to be more effective in communicating and retaining its vision, particularly as founding members move on
- encourages shared identity and common purpose, which often makes projects more focused and effective
- allows trustees and project leaders to confidently and clearly articulate their Christian values without sounding defensive or discriminatory
- is crucial if an organisation wants to employ workers with a Christian faith (see following section)

For further useful information, see Christian Distinctives (www.christiandistinctives.org) and Faithworks (www.faithworks.info).

Linked with the issues of Christian ethos and values is project governance. Often projects begin as part of a church structure, but as they grow a decision needs to be made whether the project should register as a charity in its own right.

Advantages and disadvantages of registering a church-based project as a charity:

Advantages of charity registration:

- It is usually easier for grant fundraising, as it's easier to show that work is not for internal church purposes
- It protects churches from the financial and staffing liabilities of a large community project
- It can enable a project to make quicker and more focused decisions

Disadvantages of charity registration:

- Without care, communication and pastoral links with the church can break down
- As a separate charity, a project can be viewed as no longer the church's responsibility and so is not given sufficient attention by church leadership
- It takes time and money to register as a separate charity
- It increases administration and the need for additional trustees.

When looking at the governance of a charity, you need to take time to consider how the Christian ethos should be reflected in your Memorandum and Articles of Association. You also need to decide on the make-up of the trustees. Should they all come from the church? Should there be representatives from other churches, other faith groups or local community groups (eg residents' association)? Should trustees have to sign up to a Christian ethos/values statement? Should there be no restrictions?

DISCUSSION

Your church project has been running for two years and you want to write down the project's Christian ethos and values. All the volunteers are Christians.

Who needs to be involved and consulted in this? What methods could be used to bring out and document the existing ethos and values? How do you ensure the ethos and values are clear and simple to understand?

3B) STAFFING/VOLUNTEERS

When a small church social outreach initiative starts up, it is the vision and passion of those running the community work that brings it into existence.

As the project grows and new staff members are employed there is danger that the unique character of the initial outreach might be lost. A tension can emerge between the need to be flexible and most effectively reach vulnerable people, and the need to retain a unified vision and link with the local Christian community that started it.

SECTION 3 KEEPING THE FAITH – PRACTICAL ISSUES

Questions can arise concerning who to employ, whether to employ someone of another faith or no faith at all, and to what level of seniority in the Christian project it is right to have someone who does not share the faith.

The Equality Bill in 2010 allows for jobs to have an Occupational Requirement, where the post-holder must belong to a particular faith. You need to show there is 'legitimate aim'. For most faith-based organisations the legitimate aim would be to maintain the organisation's ethos. The Christian (faith) element of the role must be 'determining and proportionate'. In such cases, the list of duties on the job description will reflect this; they will usually make up in excess of 50 per cent of the list of duties. Where a decision has been made that a job must be performed by a Christian, the job description should show this.

Almost all projects will require volunteers. These can be a wonderful asset to the work, creating a bigger and more meaningful community within the neighbourhood of the project.

However there are things to consider when using volunteers. Since there are no job descriptions for volunteers, it is more difficult to be specific about faith expectations. However it is still possible to ask them to attend staff prayer, and ensure the work they help with will not mean the charity ethos is compromised. It is also possible to advertise for volunteers strategically, placing adverts in churches and Christian newspapers for example. The local church congregation is always a great place to begin in sourcing volunteers.

CASE STUDY

Non-Christian staff – Holy Trinity Church, Oldham

The community worker at Holy Trinity Church, Shabs, is a Muslim. She was brought up near the area and is now employed by the church but line-managed by Barnado's Asha Project. In just over a year, she has been successful in achieving her vision of seeing all the different classes (including healthy eating, fitness, ICT) being racially mixed. The vicar, Nick Smeeton, stresses that without the vision and commitment of Shabs, the community work would not be the success that it is.

What's good – Having a Muslim community worker means that the Muslim women have quickly got on board with the work. They will cross the busy road and enter the church to attend classes. This would not have happened before Shabs was employed.

To think about –The project is committed to serving the needs of the parish, which among other challenges, revolves around the issue of mixed ethnic groups. Think about whether you can achieve your vision by employing someone of a different faith or none in a position of seniority. It may also mean the church leader will need to spend more time with the congregation communicating the work and acting as a bridge between the community worker and church.

CHANGE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF ANY SUCCESSFUL PROJECT





CASE STUDY

Mixture of Christian/non-Christian staff – Springfield Project, Birmingham

The Springfield Centre has a mixed staff team. One means of retaining its original distinctively Christian vision is a decision to ensure the Head of the Centre is a Christian and that part of this role is to keep links with the church. Once a term the staff goes away for a day. In opening reflections, someone will share an idea related to their faith, for example the concept of forgiveness. This will then be discussed openly and freely, allowing people of different faiths and walks of life to share their ideas.

What's good – Working in a predominantly Muslim area, it is helpful to have staff from both Christian and Muslim faiths to be able to relate and understand some of the issues facing this community. It also encourages a model of church that is hospitable and generous, that both respects and welcomes the local community.

To think about – You need to keep on asking questions relating to your vision, and how this is being outworked. Change is an important part of any successful project if it is going to reach out effectively. However, consider what in your vision is disposable or movable, and what you consider integral. If some roles have an Occupational Requirement for a Christian faith, ensure that this is clear to other staff and volunteers, and that the reasons for this are justifiable. It is much better for non-Christian staff/volunteers to be aware of this from the start rather than for them to work at the project for years, apply for a role when it becomes vacant and only then realise that they are excluded from the role.

CASE STUDY

All staff are Christian – Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

One of CAP's core charitable objectives is to advance the Christian faith. Therefore, they believe that in order to represent the charity with integrity you need to be of the Christian faith. CAP uses the Occupational Requirement (OR) to confidently argue that for at least 90% of the jobs, you need to identify yourself as a Christian. Where it is more difficult to argue this, job descriptions and interviews will stress the importance of being on board with the Christian ethos.

What's good – The stress on the importance of having a Christian team has helped prevent any kind of mission drift. This has been especially significant over the past few years when there has been considerable expansion of the organisation. The atmosphere in the office is positive, and they are able to continue with acts of prayer and worship each day.

To think about – As an organisation grows, it is more difficult to place a demand to be a Christian on new employees. Consider if, like CAP, you need a fully Christian team to fulfil your vision, or if you can employ a mixed staff team strategically to ensure the necessary part of the vision is not compromised.

DISCUSSION

- 1 You take your team away for an away-day. Although all the staff is Christian, you have volunteers of different faiths and none.

How might you incorporate your organisation's faith basis in a way that is appropriate and inclusive? Are there ways of including prayer or spiritual reflection in the away-day?

- 2 Your church is used extensively by the local community and the centre manager (who is also a member of the church) is retiring after ten years. There is a mixed staff and volunteer team. The centre administrator is a non-Christian from the local community and has worked there for 6 years. You need to find a replacement for the centre manager.

How do you decide if there is an Occupational Requirement for the manager to be a Christian?

If there is an Occupational Requirement, the centre administrator is angry that he isn't eligible for the job. How do you handle this?

SECTION 3 KEEPING THE FAITH – PRACTICAL ISSUES

3C) FUNDING

Creativity pops up time again as a key concept in relation to funding. There is no reason to rule out secular funding for your project. It might be necessary to do your research demonstrating why your project should be funded and use language carefully depending on the funding request, but there should not be a need to completely deny a faith connection.

Council and government funding, when it fits in with your vision, can and should be seen as an opportunity. The Department for Communities and Local Government set out information in March 2010 about funding as a faith-based organisation (the resources section at the end of the document provides some more information).

At the Springfield Project, accepting council funding has meant having to spend time ensuring that as well as ticking the government targets, you create your own targets based on relationships and individuals. However there can be a danger of losing what is distinct about your project in accepting all funding available, and it is important to be aware of this.



Andy Weir, a freelance Christian consultant, sets out some questions to ask when applying for funding (see resources section for link to the article):

- Have I been completely truthful in what I've said?
- Whose agenda are we serving? Whose empire am I building?
- Would another organisation be better placed to deliver this project?
- Are we staying true to our original vision?
- Do we really need this money?

He refers to Matthew 6:33:

'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

The verse highlights a need to combine vision (his kingdom) with character (his righteousness) and trusting that God provides.

As a distinctly Christian project, recognise as well that vulnerability is not a bad thing. After all, a central premise of the gospel message is about strength in weakness. If you do what you do well, then it will not take too long for funders to recognise this. For example, although the vast majority of CAP's money comes from individuals and churches, around 6 per cent comes from banks and credit organisations. CAP's work at eradicating debt has been noticed, and its service is an advantage to these organisations if it continues.

Some funders can be suspicious of Christian groups and often don't want to fund anything that can be viewed as 'furthering promotion of religion'. Here are some tips for gaining funding while retaining your Christian distinctiveness:

- Be clear that you are a Christian organisation and that your service is open to all, regardless of belief
- Don't use Christian jargon
- If you are fundraising for work in church halls, look again at your name. For instance, St Peter's Community Centre sounds much more inclusive and outward-looking than St Peter's Parish Hall
- Be clear about links with local statutory services – include quotes/letters of recommendation where possible. Demonstrating that you are trusted by local government helps show funders that you can deliver community work appropriately and inclusively to your community
- If your main website is the church website, make sure that the community work is well promoted within the website (and is easily accessible from the front page).

CASE STUDY

Christian funding – Church of the Good Shepherd, Farnborough

The Church of the Good Shepherd (COGS) has been running community projects since 1993. A decision was made that the work would remain as part of the church, as an expression of its social outreach. All of its funding comes from Christian sources, including the diocese, and through a link with a local wealthier Parish Church.

What's good – COGS is not tied by external targets towards which some projects are have to work constantly. It means the work can remain grassroots, focussed around relationships.

To think about – COGS has applied for secular funding, but with very little success. Relying solely on church-based funding makes it likely that projects will stay fairly small. You need to consider the nature of your project and what your expectations of growth are.



CASE STUDY

Mixed funding – The Narthex Centre, Birmingham

The Narthex Centre was originally started by St John's Church, in Birmingham. In 1998 the charity 'Narthex Sparkhill' was registered. It was decided to make it a separate charity from the church in order to improve the management of the social outreach and better target the work they were trying to do. This has made it easier to apply for and receive funding, as it is not applying as a church. When applying to faith-based funding, Narthex can stress its connection to the church and the importance of its Christian values. In applying for secular funding, greater emphasis will be laid on the importance of meeting physical needs, and concepts can be stressed that relate more to dignity and fullness.

What's good – More funding is potentially available to you, allowing your project to more quickly obtain what it needs. There is an increased likelihood of the project growing, as other statutory services get on board and join in making the work even more attractive to funders.

To think about – Secular funding will often include lists of formal targets and expectations you need to apply to your work, and an expectation to demonstrate how you have achieved these. As well as being time-consuming, it can sometimes mean you lose focus on your vision for the project.

DISCUSSION

- 1 You are a church leader and your church has a successful church youth group. The church wants to get involved in more community-focused youth work. There is some trust-funding available but they do not fund religious activities.

How can you make the distinctions clear between church and community youth work? Does the community youth worker need to be a Christian? If so, how might you justify this? Who needs to be involved in drawing up this application?

- 2 You work for St Peter's Church, heading up the community work which mainly takes place in the church hall. The activities on offer have been of interest to people of many different faiths and none. You would love to expand the work, but it has been very difficult to access funds from the council or other secular funding charities.

What could you do to try and be more appealing to council funders?

2D) PARTNERSHIP WITH STATUTORY SERVICES

Partnership can be important for many projects if they are to reach the people in greatest need, while providing the best service. Inevitably this involves compromise, and the more organisations you begin to work alongside, the bigger this issue risks becoming. Questions might be raised about how best to work alongside secular or other faith-based organisations, and how to ensure this is and remains a positive thing. The concept of *missio dei* can be a helpful one here. This is the idea that the church is there because of God's mission that has preceded it, not vice versa. Partnership will inevitably result in compromise, but there is a bigger picture in which the church is following after God, which means that collaboration can be used to help point to and bring in the kingdom of God.

CASE STUDY

A vicar's involvement – St Luke's, Canning Town

Rev Dave Wade attends various local area meetings and sits on the management committee of other community services.

What's good – There tends to be a high turnover of staff in leaders/project workers of other local services. The church here has a key function that, once noticed, is taken very seriously by others. Dave Wade notes that as someone that has lived in the area for over 10 years, he has a role with the local council and others as a 'critical friend'. In this way he can ensure the voice of the most vulnerable is being heard.

To think about – In order to be taken seriously, you'll need to show a complex understanding of the issues affecting your local area. If you are particularly new to the area, this can take time. You will therefore need to be committed to investing in such a role, and in order to do this most effectively, it would need to be long-term.



CASE STUDY

Partnering with secular agencies – Holy Trinity Coldhurst, Oldham

Holy Trinity Coldhurst has an integral link to Barnardo's Asha project. The community worker originally worked for Barnardo's, but was encouraged to apply for a role at the church. Although she is now employed by the church, she is line-managed by an employee from Barnardo's. The community work run in the church also works in partnership with Lifelong Learning. This local service is Oldham-based, but in another part of the area. Therefore the relationship is important since the local community would not leave the area to attend classes.

What's good – The church is able to afford to pay a community worker, but there is no one on site to line-manage; this partnership ensures the best possible job can be done. It also makes the project much more appealing to funders. Most of the church's funding comes from Christian funds, however the partnership with Barnardo's means it shares some of this funding.

To think about – Having such a close partnership means you will expect a lot of your targets to be set by the other service. You'll need to think about how much autonomy you want and how much you're prepared to give up in order to best reach those you are trying to serve.

DISCUSSION

You have been running a homeless evening shelter for the past year. It is small, but has successfully built relationships with many of the homeless people who attend. It currently runs out of the church hall, twice a week, with a few volunteers from the congregation. Its good work has been noticed by a secular national homeless charity who wants to work alongside you and would pump a lot of money into the work, allowing it to expand considerably. However they would have a say in all decisions, and would consider moving the project out of the church and into a nearby recently refurbished community facility.

What would be the advantages and the disadvantages of accepting this offer?

What would be the important questions to ask?



2E) MANAGING CHURCH BUILDINGS

In 1995, the Church of England produced a document entitled *Communities and Buildings* which talks extensively about the theological concept of a sacred space, and considers what this might mean practically. It provides an interesting starting point for this discussion:

‘What matters more than anything is the intention of Christians concerning the use and disposal of their buildings.’

The way church facilities are used therefore will be a product of the community in which the building finds itself.

It should also be noted here that, in most cases, it is not the decision of the centre manager alone to consider the way the church building is utilised. This is best done as a group, through a PCC if that is possible, or the equivalent.

For instance, the Springfield Project in Birmingham had the option to drastically alter the church hall, extending it to create a new Children’s Centre. The decision to proceed with this build was made with the church and PCC. As a result, the church, church offices and Children’s Centre are able to run amicably day-to-day alongside one another.

As has been raised by a few community workers, with the cuts taking effect, now is the most important time for churches to take note of the great asset they have in their building, and to make it available for community groups. This will be vital to the survival of many community groups, and will also allow the church to be more visible in the work it is doing and in encouraging its community.

CASE STUDY

St John’s, Sparkhill, Birmingham

St John’s Church is currently undergoing some serious building work. In part this is intended to improve the community facility, the Narthex Centre. The community project is considered to be the mission of the church, and thus the building is treated in a way that reflects this calling. The hope is that its work will be more effective as a result of the building improvements.

What’s good – *Communities and Buildings*, in discussing the use of sacred space in the New Testament, states as one of its conclusive points:

‘The presence of God is now linked with the bringing in of the Kingdom... The decision we now have to make about the use of our church building should depend on what we think will promote the values of the kingdom.’

St John’s Church understands the work it does within the majority Muslim area as an integral part of its mission. The church is not only a spiritual centre, but a commodity that can help achieve ‘loving its neighbour’ more effectively.

To think about – It is important to have the congregation on board for this to run smoothly. St John’s Church understands the missional giving of the building and are therefore standing alongside this vision. A commitment needs to be made to enable the empowerment of congregations in such work, that they understand their place and value in the work.

SECTION 3 KEEPING THE FAITH – PRACTICAL ISSUES



CASE STUDY

The Thornbury Centre, Bradford.

The quotation above from Communities and Buildings concerning the Christian's intention provides a key context in which to understand the Thornbury centre. The church was part of a very complicated parish community, comprising three distinct Muslim groups, two Sikh communities, three white estates with a heavy BNP influence, and a group of Hindus. Believing that Scripture says God wills unity and that as Christians we must love our neighbour, the church felt a calling to address the conflict in this community. An interfaith project was started in the church centre, which would address local community issues with representatives from the different faith groups.

As this became more established in the centre and the positive benefits of the work were being witnessed, the church felt it was right to give the centre to the community: 'It was a sacrificial giving', Paul Hackwood (vicar at Thornbury Centre at the time) explains. Whereas it was previously owned by the PCC, a management committee was set up which was multi-faith. However, as it was a gift, the church still considered it was their responsibility to raise whatever future funding was needed for that centre. The centre was used for a variety of interfaith work as well as community events, including Muslim weddings, and as a meeting place for a Sikh faith group.

What's good – There was an obvious need in the community for some kind of unity, and the church had the resources and skills to begin to address this.

To think about – This was a specific calling on a church that found itself in a unique context. It presents a challenge however to question what this means for a church or community building in other communities, and consider new ways the buildings might be best utilised to meet the needs in that area.

DISCUSSION

- 1 The church is situated in a majority Muslim area and, as a result of the project, a number of positive relationships have been built with local Muslims, and a few Imams. Recently some arsonists set fire to the local mosque, and it is now undergoing repairs. The Muslim congregation has asked if they can use the church hall for Friday prayers until their mosque is repaired.

What do you do?

Who else can you discuss this issue with?

- 2 You are on a church leadership team and you've received a complaint from a church member about a new Community Film Club that is renting the church hall. The member feels that the club is showing inappropriate films (eg one of the films was an 18 Certificate and had some explicit sex scenes.)

What do you do?

For future times, what sort of guidance should you give a church administrator about the lettings in the church? Who should decide this guidance? Is there a difference between what can happen in the church and the church hall?

2F) MAINTAINING LINKS WITH THE CHURCH

As a community project, a good relationship with the church can be a great asset. However to create such a partnership, investment needs to be made in the relationship. With the new political climate, this connection will become increasingly important.

The church has the potential to provide a more stable environment from which volunteers can be sourced and buildings can be used. Some projects will put up information boards in the church, and a few times a year may have the opportunity to take part in the service. This raises awareness. Sponsored activities can be run to raise money, and word spread by congregation members.

However, it is very easy for congregations to lose contact with community projects – what happens on Sundays can simply run parallel to the rest of the week without having any impact. The case studies below provide some examples of ways to invest in a mutually beneficial relationship.

IT IS VERY EASY FOR
CONGREGATIONS TO LOSE CONTACT
WITH COMMUNITY PROJECTS

CASE STUDY

The Springfield Project, Birmingham

The Springfield Project was started by the church community, but is now a separate charity. Its links with the church however are considered integral by both the church and the community project. The church itself is a part of the community work during the week, as a venue for mums and toddlers. The church offices are a part of the community building, and so church staff and centre staff work alongside one another. Out of a congregation of around 120, 40 members are either employed by the centre or volunteer. This means that between the church and project, there is a genuine flow of conversation that keeps alive an awareness of the work active during the week and on a Sunday. Story-telling is an important part of this.

What's good – The church genuinely understands the community work as an outworking of worship. The work can be prayed for on a Sunday, and talked about and discussed without any forcefulness or awkwardness. Where important decisions are made, the church is comfortably a part of that. Individuals are empowered, so even if those in position of leadership were to leave, there is enough of a buzz and vision for things to keep going.

To think about – As projects grow and decisions are made to make a separate charity, there can be a natural drift as the project and church move away from one another. A decision needs to be made for them to remain well linked. This might include having members from the PCC on the management committee, prayer slots during services which talk about the work, and having boards up in church with information about the project.

CASE STUDY

Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

Although CAP is a national organisation, its vision is to reach those in need through empowering community churches. This is not a suggestion but a mandate for them. The centre manager and church leader sign an agreement to say that they will raise awareness, report back to church, and once a year hold a CAP Sunday service that ensures the congregation know what is happening and prays for the work. The outworking of the project is such that voluntary support workers are necessary to meet clients, and it is hoped that the clients can be welcomed into the church community.

What's good – As a national organisation, working locally imposes new challenges. CAP's explicit commitment to empower local churches, and to agree clear expectations, is crucial to the success of this initiative. It allows the church to play a part in its social outreach, and prevents the work from only belonging to one individual.

To think about – This is an interesting example, but it is not the norm for most projects. It is helpful to think about how CAP gets the church on board, and different ideas that are in place to encourage this. There is an important point made about the mandatory need of having the church fully involved. Its actual outworking might take a bit of time to make sense of and establish in a different context.



CASE STUDY

Ascend, South Oxhey, Watford

Ascend was started 14 years ago, when the new vicar looked at the community she had come to, and was struck by its needs. Sensing a call from God to serve the area, her passion and actions were a strong force behind the work. Following her resignation, the interregnum six years ago was a difficult time. It was crucial that whoever was hired would be on board with the work, and the church needed to be prepared to say no to those that did not fit that role.

The project manager, Christine, explained that potential candidates would all have a meeting with her in which expectations could be laid out and the passion from the applicants could be gauged, as part of the application process. This led to the church welcoming Pam Wise as the new vicar. She has since proven to be an excellent choice as someone showing obvious commitment to the project, demonstrated in her role as chair of the trustees.

What's good – The community project made a deliberate effort to ensure the needs of the project were understood by the church, and thus had a strong role in the appointment of the vicar. The links that exist between the church and the project are important in providing mutual support. Having the vicar so closely involved ensures this can remain the case.

To think about – For a project that has come out of a church, this can be seen and used as a huge opportunity. A number of projects, when becoming a charity, write into their constitution that the chair of the trustees/ some of the trustees must be a part of that church whether as a vicar, church elder, warden, PCC or congregation member. This is a really easy way to be deliberate about the church and community links.



DISCUSSION

- 1 As church leader, you arrive on Sunday morning to an irate church volunteer – the Friday youth project has left the kitchen in a mess and there have been breakages and spillages in the church. The Youth and Community Worker is a Christian but attends another church. The volunteer is complaining that the worker is a waste of money and does nothing to help the church itself.

How do you resolve this issue?

How can communications be improved?

- 2 You've been running an advice centre in your church for the last 6 years. You have a small team of volunteers (mixture of church and non-church). The original church leader who supported your centre has left and a new church leader has taken up post.

How do you build a relationship between the project and the church leader?

What might some of the leader's concerns be?

CONCLUSION

The case studies presented provide some creative, interesting and important ways of doing things, as well as highlighting some of the obvious difficulties. A final word here though is necessary. Trying to tick all the boxes, running projects well, looking attractive to funders, employing the right people and so on, means very little without the right attitude. St Paul puts it bluntly:

'If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.' 1 Corinthians 13:3

All of the words written in this resource mean nothing without the right motivation. In fact these words and various themes could be summarised in one simple idea – Christian distinctiveness is learning to love and live like Jesus did.

⁹Information available on Church Urban Fund website, Just Employment section – <http://cuf.org.uk/act/resources-projects/just-employment> (1st February 2010)

¹⁰<http://www.oldham-chronicle.co.uk/news-features/27577> 1st February 2011

¹¹<http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=107&p=0>

¹²Weir, A http://www.communitymission.org.uk/resources/articles_booklets_to_download/funding_applications_and_integrity.aspx 1st February 2011

¹³Board of Mission's Inter-faith Consultative Group and Board of Mission of the General Synod of the Church of England. (1995) *Communities and Buildings, Church of England Premises and Other Faiths*

¹²Ibid. 3.68:9

¹²³65

- **Community Mission Team Training: 'We Don't Do God' – Keeping faith in your community project**

<http://www.communitymission.org.uk>

Excellent interactive training to help church leaders and project managers think through the issues of how their projects can keep their Christian distinctiveness over the long-term.

- **Church Urban Fund, Just Employment**

<http://cuf.org.uk/act/resources-projects/just-employment>

Just Employment, produced by Church Urban Fund in partnership with the diocese of Chester, Liverpool and Manchester, is designed to help projects employ both paid staff and volunteers, with a duty of care that embraces both the employers' legal obligations and the moral and ethical standards expected of the faith sector. The resource includes guidance on recruiting and managing staff and volunteers, practical advice, case studies and examples, and over 50 templates for letters and documents.

- **Christian Distinctives Trust**

<http://christiandistinctives.org/>

The Christian Distinctives Trust exists to empower Christian organisations to be more distinctively Christian, whilst retaining their professional excellence. The Trust provides organisations with help, support and resources to help them to achieve this. The website provides more information. There are also links to Aspire, a resource that can be used by an organisation to look deeper into the effectiveness of the Christian values in that workplace, and 'Distinctives', a book which is designed to help organisations think about their Christian ethos, and look for areas of improvement.

- **Faithworks Charter**

<http://www.faithworks.info/about-us/faithworks-charter>

The Faithworks Charter, produced by Oasis Faithworks, is a set of 15 principles for churches and Christian agencies to sign up to, that demonstrates a commitment from the organisation to retaining their Christian ethos, while delivering an excellent service in their local community. The Faithworks charter helps these charities to deliver excellence and thus taken seriously in the area by the government and other public services, as good providers of local services.

CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS IS LEARNING TO LOVE AND LIVE LIKE JESUS DID.

- **R Sudworth, 2007, Distinctly Welcoming – Christian Presence in a Multifaith Society, Bletchley, Scripture Union**

This book is written by Richard Sudworth, who is based in a Muslim-majority area of Birmingham. It is an interesting introduction to how Christians live alongside those of other faiths, while retaining their unique identity. It can be read independently, or could be used in a small group setting.

- **Communities and Local Government – Faith-based organisations myths-busting**

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/ensuringalevel?view=Standard>

Produced in March 2010 by the Communities and Local Government, this document summarises the dos and don'ts when faith-based organisations are applying for government money.

- **The Funding Game and the Path of Integrity**

http://www.communitymission.org.uk/resources/articles_booklets_to_download/funding_applications_and_integrity.aspx

Taken from the Community Mission website, Andy Weir is a freelance consultant who has plenty of experience in funding applications. This interesting article challenges applicants to step back and think about how the aims and ethos of the organisation can be affected by accepting or declining funding opportunities, and retaining integrity in what can be a fairly brutal process.

- **Religion or belief and the workplace – guide for employers and employees**

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1856>

This is ACAS guidance on complying with the Equality Act 2010 in conjunction with faith and belief.

KEEPING THE FAITH — CHECKLIST

This checklist reviews what mechanisms you have in place to help your community project retain its Christian distinctiveness. Not all these options are appropriate in every situation. This is best as a team effort (e.g. with management team, church leadership or PCC) rather than one person filling it in. It is through discussion that issues can be raised and different people can take responsibility for different areas. From this, you can build up a plan of action and identify key priorities.

| ISSUE | YES | NEEDS WORK | N/A | NOTES |
|--|-----|------------|-----|-------|
| a) Ethos/values/governance | | | | |
| Is there a public ethos/mission statement referring to the Christian faith? | | | | |
| Is the link with church/s formalised in the charity structure (e.g. % trustees from church)? | | | | |
| Is there a clear Christian values/ethos statement? | | | | |
| Do Christian trustees have opportunities to pray together for the project? | | | | |
| b) Staff/Volunteers | | | | |
| Are there posts that are crucial to be run by Christians – is this clear and formalised in the job description/person requirement? | | | | |
| Are there regular opportunities for group prayer? | | | | |
| Are the links with Christianity/local church reinforced through staff/volunteer training and awaydays? | | | | |
| With mixed teams, are there opportunities for people to reflect and articulate their motivations including people of other faiths and none? | | | | |
| With mixed teams, if there are posts that have Occupational Requirements to be Christian, are these clearly understood by the whole staff/volunteer team? | | | | |
| Are there appropriate and non-invasive ways of offering prayer to non-Christian staff and volunteers? | | | | |
| c) Fundraising/Communication | | | | |
| Is it clearly stated that the work has a Christian basis and offers services freely to people regardless of belief? | | | | |
| If your main website is a church website, is the community work clear and well represented? | | | | |
| If your main website is community focused, are there clear links to local church? | | | | |
| Do you keep record of recommendations/letters of support from statutory services? | | | | |
| d) Statutory relationships | | | | |
| Do you spend time building relations with statutory services and local community groups? | | | | |
| Can you clearly articulate and quantify the community benefits that your church offers? | | | | |
| Do you invite local councillors or officers to relevant church community events? | | | | |
| e) Church Buildings | | | | |
| Have the church leadership/PCC given clear guidance to administrator/centre manager as to what is appropriate use of the building (e.g. can it be used for worship by other faiths)? | | | | |
| Are the church congregation supportive of their buildings being used by the community? | | | | |
| f) Links between Church and Community Project | | | | |
| Are there clear displays (inc. photos) in community areas about church services and events? | | | | |
| Are there clear displays (inc photos) in the church about the community projects? | | | | |
| Are there regular opportunities for the community work to report back to the church (at least quarterly, pref monthly)? | | | | |
| Are there “celebration” events where community project and church can come together (e.g. Christmas party)? | | | | |
| Are there simple low-cost volunteer opportunities for church members to get involved (e.g. helping prepare food for event etc)? | | | | |
| Does the church thank the workers and volunteers of the community project? (e.g. an annual thanksgiving service, cooking them a meal, handwritten thank you card from the vicar) | | | | |



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