



# **Faithful Regeneration: The Role and Contribution of Local Parishes in Local Communities in the Diocese of Birmingham**

By the Centre for Voluntary Action Research



Centre *for* Voluntary Action Research



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of Local Parishes in Local Communities  
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**Authorship**

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## Foreword

This study, which has been made possible by a generous grant from the Home Office, arose out of a chance conversation. Ben Cairns, the co-author of this report, and I met following a lecture given by Robert Putnam on social capital at Aston Business School. It was clear to me that building social capital of both the bonding and the bridging kind was what parish churches, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, had been doing for the past 20 years through their community projects, made possible by the Church Urban Fund. What we needed was some carefully researched evidence to show whether this was the case. We needed to know how these projects had enabled social relationships to be developed and what the benefits were to the participants and to their neighbourhoods.

This study more than vindicates the hopes I had for it. It is a testimony to the benefits that the selfless commitment of parish priests and members of their congregations bring to their localities. It demonstrates that successful projects are those which have a clear vision, and a real sense of mission, not to proselytise but to serve and show something of God's love for all. It also shows the crucial role of the parish clergy in giving a clear vision, in recruiting and supporting volunteers and in giving leadership to quite large and complex projects. What is also encouraging is the evidence that users are not deterred from the services offered by the Church and any initial anxieties are soon allayed. It is gratifying to see that both users and volunteers alike speak of the benefits and real pleasure they get by their involvement in these community projects.

Finally, the report is a carefully researched testimony to the unsung contribution that parish churches make to their neighbourhoods. Without these projects their communities would be immeasurably impoverished. It is a cause for celebration of what the Church can do when it is appropriately connected to its local community. May it bring encouragement and confidence to churches everywhere but especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, to go on doing what they are already doing. May it bring confidence to partners and to those who fund these projects whether at local or central government that church projects can and do deliver a quality of care and commitment which is second to none. I am proud of a Church that can produce such projects out of its commitment to God and out of love for its neighbour and neighbourhoods. And I am confident that together we can meet the challenges presented in this Report; support for leadership and management, recruitment and retention of volunteers, development of new inter-faith partnerships and, above all, preservation of all that is distinctive and special about our work.

The Rt Revd John Austin  
Bishop of Aston

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This is an Executive Summary of the Report of the Study on the Role and Contribution of Local Parishes in Local Communities in the Diocese of Birmingham. The Study was carried out by the Centre for Voluntary Action Research at Aston Business School for the Church of England Diocese of Birmingham between June and September 2004.

### Part One: Our Approach to the Study

The Study had one principal aim:

*To develop and promote an understanding of the distinctive features and value of the contribution (for example, tackling disadvantage, supporting flourishing neighbourhoods and contributing to 'social capital') made by local parishes in the Diocese of Birmingham to civil renewal.*

Six target outcomes were outlined in relation to the above aim:

- i) A description of the different and various roles played by people in local parishes (e.g. clergy, lay people from the church, people from church-related organisations) in their local communities*
- ii) A profile of the different contributions (e.g. church-delivered, church-sponsored, church-hosted, diocesan organised) made by local parishes to their local communities (including purpose, theological rationale and value)*
- iii) An understanding of the impact made by local parishes to local communities, in particular the building of social capital (e.g. through community participation in parish-related activities)*
- iv) Understanding of the barriers to local parishes engaging effectively with their local communities and possible ways to overcome them*
- v) A higher profile (both within the Diocese itself and with external bodies, e.g. statutory bodies) for the contribution of local parishes to local communities*
- vi) Evidence to support a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities.*

Twelve churches were selected for detailed study in close collaboration with the Diocese of Birmingham Community Regeneration Department.

We collected our data by means of 26 semi-structured interviews with parish priests and lay people who took a leading role in church-organised or sponsored activities; nine focus groups and three individual interviews with church volunteers involved in these activities, and 11 focus groups with users

of church organised activities. We also gathered written information about each parish.

## **Part Two: The Broader Context**

In Part Two we outline the broader context in which the Study took place. We highlight the concern of central government with 'civil renewal' and with community and social cohesion. We discuss the way in which the development of partnerships between local communities and statutory and voluntary sector bodies is central to both policy streams and note the range of partnerships involved in the current regeneration agenda. We also highlight the way in which the concept of social capital is considered as a resource to facilitate community involvement and to revive local democracy and citizenship.

We describe the way in which central government views faith communities in general as potential partners in regeneration, and as sources of volunteers and community facilities such as buildings. We highlight the long history of religious institutions in providing education, social care and health care, and the way in which the Christian Church sees it as part of its mission to reach out into the wider community. However, we note that some barriers to collaboration and differences of perception exist between the Christian Church and some secular agencies. Problems of capacity within individual churches may also affect the long-term sustainability of activities.

The particular aspirations of the Diocese of Birmingham and the principles underlying the Church's involvement in community regeneration are outlined. We acknowledge the wide range of community activity taking place in the Diocese, both at local and city-wide level. We refer also to work undertaken within the context of the Community Strategy for Birmingham and the establishment of Birmingham as a 'Civic Pioneer' authority.

## **Part Three: Study Findings – Interviews and Focus Groups**

The fieldwork provided an opportunity for consideration of eight main areas.

### **i Understanding of the word 'community' (section 12)**

Study participants interpreted the word 'community' very broadly. They placed little emphasis on parish boundaries, and generally considered the term as being concerned with people and relationships – *'people in the environment in which they live and the relationships between them'* - rather than, or as well as, geographical proximity.

### **ii Perceived reasons for the church's involvement with its local population (section 13)**

Church leaders stressed the importance of mission, of demonstrating and sharing God's love, of service to local people, and of meeting individuals' needs. The idea that *'our faith tells us to be out there'* was a frequently occurring theme. The impetus to *'express God's love in our community'* was seen as a powerful motivating force. Church leaders also referred to the

importance of making good use of church buildings and of providing a resource that could be used by the whole community.

### **iii Reasons for individuals becoming involved in church-organised activities** (section 14)

Church leaders and volunteers referred to the holistic nature of Christian belief – the close link between faith and action – and the Christian concept of service motivating individuals to volunteer: *'they see a need and want to fulfil it as part of their Christian calling'*. Some church volunteers had also been attracted by the nature of a particular project. Both groups also stressed the role of clergy in leading by example and in encouraging individuals to volunteer – *'a central idea of the vicar's has been of service to the community'*.

Project users welcomed the opportunity to have their needs met or to develop new social contacts.

### **iv Challenges and ways of overcoming them** (section 15)

Several projects experienced difficulties recruiting volunteers, and some existing volunteers appeared over-stretched. Recruitment difficulties were particularly noticeable where volunteers were required to take on leadership roles. In some parishes the problem of small numbers of potential volunteers was compounded by a lack of skills or confidence. Those responsible for management of projects were concerned about issues such as securing funding, accountability and aspects of decision-making. In some areas there had been difficulties working with other (mainly secular) organisations, although these problems were not universal and many churches were actively involved in local networks.

Some project users had initially been anxious about participating in a church-organised activity because of concerns about evangelism or previous negative experiences of the church – *'they think they will be told their life is a mess because they aren't Christians'*. These reservations had usually been overcome once people were involved.

### **v Perceived benefits of the church's involvement with the local community** (section 16)

Church volunteers and project users spoke of ways in which involvement in church-organised projects had raised their self-esteem and confidence. There had also been substantial community benefits from the activities and services provided, often in areas with few other resources – *'the biggest benefit of all is that people in desperate circumstances get help'*. In some cases projects acted as a springboard for the development of other initiatives. Individual worshippers often provided a valuable resource to the community through their involvement as volunteers in other organisations. Some Study participants identified an improved image of the church on the part of local people as a further benefit.



Study participants felt that the development of relationships - amongst worshippers; between worshippers and other local people; amongst local people themselves, and amongst local organisations - was a major benefit. One church leader described worshippers' involvement with the wider community as *'an affirmation of bridging social capital, a bridge between different groups of people'*. New friendships developed amongst volunteers and project users, and examples were given of opportunities to establish contacts amongst people of different racial and religious backgrounds.

#### **vi Main achievements (section 17)**

Study participants felt that the development and maintenance of sustainable projects was a major achievement. Their existence enabled a huge range of community services and activities to take place, sometimes in areas with few other resources. *'we provide much needed pre-school facilities for the community and if we hadn't done it 55 children wouldn't be getting it'*. The development of community projects often led to the church becoming more outwardly focused and more accessible to the local community. The idea that *'it is important to move on from traditional ways of being church'* was a view frequently expressed. The development of supportive networks amongst local people was further identified as a substantial achievement.

#### **vii Future plans (section 18)**

Most church leaders hoped to sustain at least existing levels of project activity; some hoped to develop new initiatives in accordance with perceived need. Capacity issues such as physical space, small size of congregation and financial restrictions, however, presented potential obstacles to some desired future developments. Comments such as *'getting the building sorted out is the key to future development'* and *'there is no spare capacity; two families moved away recently and the new ones who have joined are quite fragile and vulnerable'* highlight the resource issues parishes have to address.

#### **viii Factors contributing to successful project development (section 19)**

Church leaders referred to the vital importance of physical, human and financial resources. A long-term vision, shared values and the ongoing commitment of key people, especially leaders, were all felt to be essential – *'the over-arching vision and sense of calling driving the work is very important – without that the Centre would not have volunteers or developed to the point it is at now'*. The ability to work in partnership with other agencies also made a contribution to the services that could be offered.

At the end of Part Three (section 20) we summarise the fieldwork findings and note their contribution to the first four of the Study's target outcomes. We discuss the roles of clergy and church volunteers, and stress the key part played by clergy in providing leadership and in encouraging worshippers to volunteer. We highlight the 'added value' contribution of projects to local communities as a result of their flexible and personalised approach to care and their capacity to forge links between individuals and groups. We note again the existence of some barriers that limit the ability of parishes to engage further with their communities.

## Part Four: Discussion and Conclusions

In Part Four we first discuss the ways in which the fieldwork findings shed light on the desired outcome of a higher profile for the contribution of local parishes to local communities (outcome v). This part of the Report considers in turn seven main areas:

- Social capital and community cohesion
- Social inclusion
- Responsiveness to local needs
- Motivated volunteer workforce
- Leadership by the clergy
- Physical capacity
- Availability of funding.

### i Social capital and community cohesion (section 21.1.1)

The findings show the crucial role that church-organised projects can play in developing links amongst individuals and organisations, and contributing to the establishment of more cohesive communities. While their role in developing *bonding* (e.g. amongst people from similar backgrounds) as opposed to *bridging* (e.g. across different ethnic groups) social capital may currently be more substantial, there is potential for further development of the latter. Links established through participation in church-organised projects were clearly very much valued by both church volunteers and project users.

### ii Social inclusion (section 21.1.2)

The findings show that churches are contributing to project users' feelings of involvement in their communities, and that they are successful in reaching some of the more marginalised or stigmatised community members who had in some cases felt excluded by other organisations.

### iii Responsiveness to local needs (section 21.1.3)

Parishes had adopted a variety of approaches to deciding what services to provide, but all expressed a strong concern to meet local need. In many parishes this was inextricably bound up with a desire to be of service and to demonstrate and share God's love. The ability to be more flexible over use of resources than agencies operating on a more formal contract basis was a distinctive and valued feature of many of the projects studied.

### iv Motivated volunteer workforce (section 21.1.4)

Worshippers' motivations to volunteer were often closely bound up with their religious belief and desire to show God's love in a practical way. This offers a new dimension to the secular understanding of volunteering. Worshippers still, however, often needed to be encouraged to volunteer and were in many instances still subject to the same 'lifestyle pressures' as other volunteers.

#### **v Leadership by the clergy (section 21.1.5)**

The clergy play a vital role in stressing the importance of the church reaching out to its local community, in encouraging people to volunteer and in matching volunteers to projects and activities. This role is often under-played by clergy themselves, but recognised and valued by church volunteers and project users.

#### **vi Physical capacity (section 21.1.6)**

The resource offered by church buildings forms a valuable asset for use as a base for projects to benefit the wider community. In some areas there was no alternative space available for community use.

#### **vii Availability of funding (section 21.1.7)**

The ability to secure external funding was seen as an essential pre-requisite for the contribution parishes were able to make to their local communities. The funding environment is, however, likely to become more complex, necessitating an increased understanding of the demands of funders and the risks of co-option by statutory agencies.

Part Four concludes with consideration of the evidence provided by the Study to support a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities (outcome vi). In this section of the Report we discuss eight issues which need further consideration at both the Diocesan and parish levels:

- The use of church buildings
- The question of evangelism
- The changing focus of the church
- Inter-parish, ecumenical and inter-faith co-operation
- Volunteer recruitment, support and management
- The trend towards formalisation
- Capacity issues
- Models of organisation.

#### **i The use of church buildings (section 22.1)**

The data suggest that more thought might be given to ways in which church buildings can be developed for use as a community resource, as many of the Study parishes have done. Any such development would need to bear in mind both sensitivity to their primary use for worship and also the concerns of some non-Christians about dual use of space.

#### **ii The question of evangelism (section 22.2)**

While evangelism did not appear to be a motivating factor in the development of community projects, and there was limited evidence of project users being deterred from involvement because of concerns about evangelism, some secular agencies had reservations about working with Christian projects.

Some project users also made it clear that they would not have welcomed efforts to convert them to Christianity. The Church's stance on evangelism will need further reflection if churches are to increase their engagement in partnerships and their work with local people.

### **iii The changing focus of the church (section 22.3)**

As the focus of the Church as an institution continues to change with the development of community projects, questions arise about the relationship between faith and community activity. This changing focus places new demands on clergy and potentially puts additional pressures on worshippers to engage in meeting community need. This may potentially deter those who simply wish to enjoy reflective worship.

### **iv Inter-parish, ecumenical and inter-faith co-operation (section 22.4)**

The Study provided few examples of inter-parish, ecumenical or inter-faith co-operation beyond the relatively informal or individual levels. There may be a need to give further thought to such collaboration, especially in the light of the relatively small size of many worshipping congregations.

### **v Volunteer recruitment, support and management (section 22.5)**

The Study provided many examples of committed volunteers running a wide range of activities, but it also highlighted the difficulty of recruiting volunteers in some parishes and the fact that some existing volunteers appeared over-stretched. It may be necessary to pay more attention to supporting church volunteers and to involving other local people who want to make a contribution. If this approach were to be taken, care would be needed to ensure that existing shared norms of behaviour did not exclude new people, nor become weakened by the involvement of non-church volunteers.

### **vi The trend towards formalisation (section 22.6)**

In some parishes there had been pressure on clergy and church volunteers caused by the need to be accountable to a range of external bodies. It was noted that this trend towards formalisation poses considerable challenges for clergy and lay management committees. They will need to consider carefully the implications of contracting with governmental agencies, since research elsewhere has shown that volunteers can be deterred by over-formalisation. In some circumstances consolidation of existing activities may be more appropriate than growth.

### **vii Capacity issues (section 22.7)**

Strategies such as engagement in partnerships and employment of paid staff can increase a church's capacity to provide services, but also bring increased management requirements and formalisation. The complexity of the management task is often substantial, bringing additional responsibilities for clergy and often necessitating further training. This needs to be part of a broader discussion about the capacity of the Church of England to sustain further community projects.

## **viii Models of organisation (section 22.8)**

The Study findings highlight the existence of different models of project organisation. Two possibilities - the 'Responsive Church' model and the 'Contracted Project' model - are discussed. The challenges and limitations of each are described; further assessment of the relative merits of these and other possible models will need to be part of any strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work. It is suggested that, while the Contracted Project model offers the opportunity for increased service provision, the associated formalisation brings many new challenges and potentially erodes the distinctive features which make church-organised projects attractive. Discussion about future developments will need to bear in mind the wider policy context and the potential tensions caused by increased involvement in the provision of social welfare services.

## Introduction to the Report

This is the Report of a Study carried out by the Centre for Voluntary Action Research at Aston Business School for the Church of England Diocese of Birmingham between June and September 2004. The aim of the Study was:

*To develop and promote an understanding of the distinctive features and value of the contribution (for example, tackling disadvantage, supporting flourishing neighbourhoods and contributing to 'social capital') made by local parishes in the Diocese of Birmingham to civil renewal.*

The Study had six target outcomes:

- i) A description of the different and various roles played by people in local parishes (e.g. clergy, lay people from the church, people from church-related organisations) in their local communities*
- ii) A profile of the different contributions (e.g. church-delivered, church-sponsored, church-hosted, diocesan organised) made by local parishes to their local communities (including purpose, theological rationale and value)*
- iii) An understanding of the impact made by local parishes to local communities, in particular the building of social capital (e.g. through community participation in parish-related activities)*
- iv) Understanding of the barriers to local parishes engaging effectively with their local communities and possible ways to overcome them*
- v) A higher profile (both within the Diocese itself and with external bodies, e.g. statutory bodies) for the contribution of local parishes to local communities*
- vi) Evidence to support a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities.*

In Part One we describe our approach to the Study. In Part Two we outline the broader context in which the Study took place, in particular the national and local context for the work of local Church of England parishes. In Part Three we set out the Study findings and summarise how they relate to the first four target outcomes. Finally, in Part Four, we discuss some of the key issues that need to be taken into account in order to achieve a higher profile for the contribution of local parishes to local communities and to support a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities (target outcomes v. and vi.).

## **PART ONE: OUR APPROACH TO THE STUDY**

### **1. Aim and Methodology**

#### **1.1 Aim of the Study**

The Study had one principal aim:

*To develop and promote an understanding of the distinctive features and value of the contribution (for example, tackling disadvantage, supporting flourishing neighbourhoods and contributing to 'social capital') made by local parishes in the Diocese of Birmingham to civil renewal.*

#### **1.2 Selection of fieldwork participants**

At an early stage it was agreed with the Diocese of Birmingham Community Regeneration Department (CRD) that the Study would focus on Church of England parishes (although this would not exclude Local Ecumenical Partnerships). As a way into studying parishes, twelve churches were selected in close collaboration with the CRD for detailed study. The twelve were chosen so that amongst them they would provide a mixture in terms of:

- Size of church congregation
- Style of worship
- Type of neighbourhood (e.g. inner city and outer estate)
- Racial / ethnic / faith mix of local population
- Relationship of church to social welfare activities (e.g. church-organised, church-hosted, church-sponsored; worshippers' involvement with other community organisations).

#### **1.3 Data collection**

We collected our data by means of:

- 26 interviews with parish priests and lay people who took a leading role in church-organised or sponsored activities, such as community project managers
- 9 focus groups with members of church congregations who were active participants in church-organised / sponsored activities or in community activities organised under the auspices of outside agencies
- 3 individual interviews with members of church congregations active as above
- 11 focus groups with users of church-organised activities.

We also gathered factual information about each parish, by means of written material provided by the diocese and by individual churches, and through

structured questioning of parish priests and key lay people. A brief profile of the parishes / projects can be found in anonymised form in Appendix One.

In order to meet the target outcomes of the Study, and to take account of the context in which the Study took place (see Part Two) we asked interviewees and focus group participants a range of carefully drafted questions about their church's involvement with its local community, the reasons behind it, the benefits and achievements and also the barriers to worshippers' participation. We discussed with users of the various activities why they had decided to get involved, their views about the church's involvement with the community and their feelings both about benefits and barriers to participation. The interview and focus group questions are set out in Appendix Two.

#### 1.4 Terminology

At the beginning of each interview with parish priests and other lead people we asked about their use of terminology, in particular the ways in which they described:

- People who attend regular worship who are active participants in church organised activities
- Members of the local population in general (people who live in the area who generally do not attend regular worship)
- Members of the local population who take part in activities organised or sponsored by the church.

It was clear from these discussions that a variety of terms were in use, and that there was no common pattern. For example, some described members of the local population in general as 'parishioners', some as 'local people', while others used 'the community' as their preferred description. Likewise some referred to people taking part in church-organised activities simply as 'service users', while others used terms such as 'the fringe' or specific names related to the activity in question, such as 'Mums and Tots'. Some people were also uncomfortable with the idea of attaching labels to particular groups of people, commenting for example that *'this is not something we've given a lot of thought to; I don't really want to label different groups'*. It was also clear that people frequently take several different roles within parishes, and that one person may, for example, at different times be an organiser of one activity and a participant / user in another. Nevertheless for the purposes of this Study we tried to seek views from people occupying a range of different roles, while recognising that these roles might at times overlap.

For the purposes of this Report, we use the following terms when reporting views expressed by *particular* individuals or groups:

- Parish priests and others (ordained and lay) with a lead role in church-organised activities will be referred to as **church leaders**
- Members of church congregations *in general* will be referred to as **worshippers**



- Members of church congregations who are active in church organised / sponsored activities, or in activities organised by other agencies, will be referred to as **church volunteers**
- People who take part in church-organised activities will be referred to as **project users**.

## 1.5 Analysis of data and presentation of findings

We have attempted to reflect the range of views and perspectives presented under each of the themes discussed. Given that this is a *qualitative* rather than a *quantitative* study, we do not attempt to state the proportion or percentage of Study participants holding a particular point of view. We were not asked to compile a detailed demographic profile of parishes' worshippers, volunteers or project users, nor to seek the views of people (whether Christian, worshippers from other faiths or those of no faith) who had chosen not to be involved in projects as users or volunteers. And given that the Study was not intended to be an evaluation, we do not assess the advantages and disadvantages of any particular parish's way of relating to its local community, nor the relative merits of church-organised projects in comparison with other forms of (secular) welfare provision.

The data has been analysed thematically using a system of open coding of the interview and focus group transcripts. These codes were then analysed in relation to each other and have resulted in the eight key emerging findings which are set out in Part Three of this Report.

We are presenting the findings anonymously; we simply refer to findings as emanating from 'church leaders', 'church volunteers' or 'project users'. Where it is not necessary to make such distinctions we use the more general term '*Study participants*'. Unattributed quotations and case study examples are presented throughout the following sections of the Report in italics.

The photographs included have been provided by the Study parishes as illustrations of the activities in which project users and church volunteers are involved.

## PART TWO: THE BROADER CONTEXT

### 2. Introduction

The Study takes place in a context in which a number of inter-related strands of central government policy are particularly relevant:

- Civil renewal
- Community and social cohesion
- The regeneration of local, especially urban, neighbourhoods.

Running through all of these policy concerns are the concepts of '*active citizenship*' and '*social capital*', which are seen as integral to the achievement of the government's policy objectives in the above areas.

Other significant themes are:

- Central government interest in faith communities and their role in social welfare and in regeneration
- The historic role of the Christian church (and especially the Church of England) in social welfare and community activity
- Current regeneration and community development initiatives in Birmingham.

Drawing on a range of written and Web-based material from government, academic, practitioner, diocesan and Birmingham city council sources, we set out here the significance of these broader contextual issues for the Study and the way in which the different policy strands relate to each other.

### 3. Civil renewal

Civil renewal is 'at the heart of the Home Office's vision of life in our 21<sup>st</sup> century communities' (Home Office, 2004a, home page). Civil renewal is defined in government circles as 'a way to empower people in their communities to provide the answers to our contemporary social problems' (Home Office, 2003, p.1). The then Home Secretary considered that a key reason for pursuing civil renewal is that local communities are better than outside agencies at dealing with their own problems, because they have the networks, knowledge and a sense of what will work locally (Blunkett, 2003). Civil renewal is seen as being both a political philosophy and a practical way of improving people's quality of life. It is described as having three essential ingredients (Home Office, 2004a):

- Active citizens who contribute to the common good
- Strengthened communities in which people work together to find solutions to problems
- Partnership between local people and public bodies in improving the planning and delivery of local services

#### **4. Community cohesion**

The aim of achieving greater '*community cohesion*' has also gained prominence in recent government policy statements on the subject of civil renewal, for example 'Communities are more able to organise themselves to tackle their common problems if they are not divided by mutual suspicion or misunderstanding of diverse cultures' (Blunkett, 2003, p.21). The term appears to have come into use following the disturbances in some northern cities in 2001. The report of the Independent Review Team notes that: 'Community cohesion requires that there is a shared sense of belonging based on common goals and core social values, respect for difference (ethnic, cultural and religious), and acceptance of the reciprocal rights and obligations of community members working for the common good' (Community Cohesion Unit, 2002, section 3.2).

Proponents of the concepts of civil renewal and community cohesion envisage the development of vibrant communities and an approach to regeneration in which local people are empowered to address commonly agreed problems with the support of statutory agencies. The voluntary and community sector (including faith communities) is seen as having an essential role; in the Foreword to the Government's Cross Cutting Review the VCS (voluntary and community sector) was viewed as having the ability to 'reform the operation of public services and build a bridge between the needs of individuals living in those communities and the capacity of the state to improve their lives' (HM Treasury, 2002, p.1).

Central government concern with civil renewal, and with the building of more cohesive communities, envisages a partnership between local communities and statutory and voluntary sector bodies. The concept of 'social capital' - 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups' (NCVO, 2003, p.8) - is seen as a resource that can be used in community development. Social capital is considered both as a way of facilitating community involvement and development (a central ingredient of many government initiatives such as regeneration partnerships) and of reviving local democracy and citizenship.

Individuals as 'active citizens' have a key role: 'we need to give citizens the information and motivation to encourage them to seek out opportunities to build, regenerate and renew the community on which they are dependent and which is dependent on their contribution' (Blunkett, 2003, p.11). Central government commitment to the development of active citizenship is exemplified through funding for various programmes to encourage volunteering, through the development of the 'Active Learning for Active Citizens' project and, most recently, through the inception of the Active Citizenship Centre (Blunkett, 2003).

#### **5. Regeneration of local neighbourhoods**

The concept of neighbourhood renewal, of regenerating poor (especially urban) neighbourhoods, and addressing problems of social exclusion, has

been a central theme of New Labour since soon after its election to government in 1997. A recent Home Office document describes social exclusion as 'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown' (Home Office, 2004b, p.3). The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) sets out a new approach to renewing poor neighbourhoods, through a co-ordinated approach to employment, education and skills, health, housing and crime reduction. As with the other policy strands discussed above, 'partnerships' are seen as the key bodies to take forward this agenda. In bringing together different parts of the public sector as well as the private, voluntary and community sectors, Local Strategic Partnerships provide a framework for co-ordinating local regeneration and other initiatives.

Other programmes such as New Deal for Communities, Health Action Zones, Education Action Zones and Sure Start contribute in different ways to aspects of the regeneration agenda. Individuals in their role as active citizens are seen as having an important part to play in improving the life of local communities, for example through involvement with the education system and citizenship education, community safety, sports and arts activities and many forms of volunteering (Blunkett, 2003).

## **6. Central government and faith communities**

It has been a feature of the current government that faith groups are increasingly seen as potential instruments of government policy implementation; the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal clearly states the important role of faith communities in reaching the most marginalised communities (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). The first phase of the New Deal for Communities programme involved Christian churches in neighbourhood renewal, working through a partnership of Church Action on Poverty, the Churches Community Work Alliance and the Church Urban Fund (Lukka and Locke, 2000).

The establishment of the Faith Communities Unit within the Home Office to take a lead role in government's engagement with faith communities demonstrates government's desire to recognise and utilise the experience, skills and diversity of faith communities and its acknowledgement of the importance of religious affiliation for many people (Faith Communities Unit, 2004). At a Regional level, the development of Faith Forums provides increased opportunities for faith groups to play a greater part in the democratic process, as at a District / borough level does the opening up of places on Local Strategic Partnerships to 'faith representatives'.

Faith communities have increasingly been seen by government actors as potential partners in regeneration initiatives. The Local Government Association's good practice guide for local authorities, for example, comments that 'As sources of values and commitment, and with substantial

constituencies, they have a valuable contribution to make, alongside other organisations and individuals, in building a sense of community and renewing civil society' (LGA, 2002, p.3). The recent launch of the Faith Based Regeneration Network's *Tools for Regeneration* by a Government Minister, and the support of faith based regeneration projects through the Special Grants Programme administered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, further exemplifies the government's desire to work with faith communities (FbRN, 2004).

Faith communities can also act as a source of volunteers and of community facilities such as buildings. They have a long-term presence in many areas, and members' value-base can provide extra motivation (Faith in Partnership, n.d.). Church of England authors note that 'the government is offering an open door to faith communities, hoping for a positive and creative response relating to faith based community development' (Finneron et al., n.d., p.13).

At the same time, however, membership of the Christian Church appears to be falling in all countries (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002) and some churches may be struggling to maintain a local presence. This may have implications for the levels of social capital present in some communities, since skills learned through participation in congregational activities are transferable and active participants may go on to engage additionally in other forms of collective community activity (Harris, 1998).

## **7. The historic role of the Christian church in social welfare and community activity**

Government interest in faith-based organisations and their potential role in regeneration may be relatively new, but religious institutions have a long tradition of providing education, social care and health care (Harris, 1998). The development of public policy was influenced significantly by Christian social thought in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Christian churches (and other faith groups) have made significant contributions to society in areas such as community development and social inclusion (Faith Communities Unit, 2004). Much volunteering in the UK has traditionally taken place within a Christian faith-based structure (Lukka and Locke, 2000).

Christian churches have always seen it as part of their mission and ministry to reach out beyond their own congregations to the surrounding community, and this sense of mission continues to guide the involvement in regeneration of the Church of England and other parts of the Christian Church. The Church's welfare role often extends beyond meeting the needs of its own members; many inner-city churches in particular have embarked on community projects funded by the Church Urban Fund set up in 1988 following the Church of England *Faith in the City* report (Harris, 1998). The *Faith in the City* Report, the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas published in 1985, emphasised the problems of poverty, racism, policing and housing in many urban areas. The vision of the Church Urban

Fund is quoted as being 'to bring about lasting positive change in the lives of people most on the margins of society – through investing resources, influencing change makers, and impacting the causes of poverty' (quoted in Rattley, 2003, p.1).

Twenty years after *Faith in the City*, concern to address these problems is still very evident within the Church of England. One document notes that 'The challenge facing the Church of England is whether it is able to lay foundations for its presence and witness in the twenty-first century that enable it to address deep rooted situations, as well as engage directly and consistently with change as it happens in our society' (Urban Bishops' Panel, 2002, p.5-6).

The literature discussing the role of several different faith communities in regeneration and in social welfare activities offers many case study examples of activities set up by faith groups, individually or in partnership (e.g. Finneron et al., n.d; Farnell et al., 2003). Authors suggest that such activities can help to build community capacity, can reach into some of the most excluded communities and can offer sustainability (Finneron et al., n.d.). In the particular case of the Church of England 'a continuing local presence (reflected in the parochial structure) is often linked theologically to an understanding of the church as one symbol of the closeness of God to the community and its material concerns' (Farnell et al., 2003, p.15). Research into the work of Christian and other faith communities in London boroughs showed not only a large number of community projects in operation, but also a substantial investment in other networks such as schools and projects working with homeless people (LCG / GLE, 2002).

It should also be noted that, despite the interest of central government in the role of faith communities in regeneration, barriers to collaboration and some differences of perception still exist, both at individual and organisational levels. In many Christian churches (especially in inner city areas) a majority of volunteers are older people, with church-going amongst younger people concentrated more in suburban areas or in churches whose membership travels from outside the immediate locality (Farnell et al., 2003). This raises questions about the long-term sustainability of activities. For some congregations, whose churches occupy buildings that are expensive to maintain, much effort may have to be devoted simply to maintaining the fabric of the building. In such situations, the demands on church volunteers may often be heavy, and official regeneration initiatives may make further demands on them that are unrealistic given their existing commitments (CVAR, 2002). Responses from churches to the government's *Building Civil Renewal* document indicated that the language both of community development and of government reports may be unfamiliar to some churches (CCWA, 2004).

There appears to be little research into the barriers to involvement in church-initiated activities that may exist on the part of local residents, although some authors note that there may be suspicions in the wider community about activities taking place in church buildings, and a 'fear of being preached to' (Finneron and Dinham, n.d. p.57). Church buildings may in some areas be the only facilities open for wider community use (LCG / GLE, 2002), and offer a valuable physical resource to meet a range of community needs, but people

may not always feel comfortable with buildings that serve both a religious and secular purpose.

Christian churches, because of their longevity, may have more resources than some other faith communities (LGA, 2002), but, in addition to the problems discussed above, may still experience problems with involvement in regeneration activities because of issues around communication (for example use of jargon in official documents), capacity, funding and policy issues. Church volunteers (and members of other faith groups) may lack the time to understand and complete complex application forms or attend the consultation exercises and decision-making processes associated with many regeneration programmes. There may also be problems when seeking funds for projects, with some local authority funders unwilling to fund ventures deemed to be 'religious' in nature (Farnell et al., 2003). Some funders insist on faith groups establishing separate legal entities in order to be eligible for funding for service delivery or project activity (LGA, 2002).

So while faith communities in general may have much to contribute to regeneration activities, and central government may see many advantages to their involvement, barriers still exist. Furthermore, 'faith communities often bring to the table a strong independence that demands active *engagement* rather than passive enlistment' (Farnell et al., 2003, p.9). This may be at odds with a strategy that wishes to capitalise on their perceived resources without actively involving them in planning and collaboration: 'faith communities are not inert resources to be harnessed by official programmes to an external agenda' (Farnell et al., 2003, p.2).

## 8. The Diocese of Birmingham and its aspirations

Documents produced within the Church of England Diocese of Birmingham itself, and earlier research studying the work of the Church Urban Fund, shows a significant history of community activity on the part of parishes in the diocese, especially in urban areas (Farnell et al., 1994). A further, and more strategic, development of this role is put forward in the Community Regeneration Department's discussion document *Towards a community Regeneration Strategy for the Diocese of Birmingham*, which suggests a strategy that would 'enable the Church to be a pro-active and effective partner in building cohesive communities and flourishing neighbourhoods' (Community Regeneration dept, 2002, p.2). This document (p.2) makes clear the principles underlying the Church's involvement in community regeneration:

- *'Our churches are communities of and for the area and the people who live there*
- *Our faith is concerned with the welfare of people, community, sustainability, and justice*
- *Our faith engages us in developing and sustaining hope and vision that things can be different (even against the odds); this is also a calling to analyse, understand and critique the structures, policies and programmes we encounter*

- *Our struggle for God's reign (on earth as it is in heaven) compels us to the advocacy and empowerment of those who are excluded and whose voice is rarely heard, to accompany them and form alliances with them and others who work for the same purposes*
- *Partnerships are a vital sign of a common humanity, and involve a mutual commitment of vision, authority and interest*
- *Regeneration is a spiritual matter'.*

In the above and other documents the Community Regeneration Department describes regeneration activity already taking place in the Birmingham Diocese, and the need for further work. They note that 64 parishes have a deprivation index qualifying them for funding through the Church Urban Fund, and that there are 'pockets of deprivation' in many more parishes. Forty projects are currently funded through CUF grants, usually to employ a community or youth worker. At least 20 more parishes have other funding, meaning that a total of 60+ parishes in the diocese are actively engaged in substantial community activity, usually using church buildings as a basis for the delivery of services. Some of these projects have a city-wide remit, for example those working with refugees and asylum seekers. And if Birmingham is typical of the wider West Midlands region, it is likely that much further work will be taking place at the level of ecumenical Christian church ventures, cross-faith initiatives and Local Strategic Partnerships (CVAR, 2002).

## **9. Social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal in Birmingham**

Local partnerships and strategies concerned with the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods add a further important dimension to the context of this study. The role of faith communities in regeneration strategy and practice is emphasised in local strategy documents, but experience in Birmingham and elsewhere suggests that the complexity of regeneration partnership structures and approval processes can prevent many smaller voluntary and community organisations from playing an active role.

With the establishment of the City Strategic Partnership in 2002, the development of a comprehensive framework for neighbourhood renewal in Birmingham began to take a new turn. Faith-based and community organisations were identified as having a major part to play in the implementation of the Community Strategy for Birmingham, aimed at improving the quality of life in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of the country (City Strategic Partnership, 2002). The establishment of eleven District Management Teams co-ordinating service delivery at a local level and eleven new District Strategic Partnerships implementing the city wide strategy locally (Birmingham City Council, 2004) has, however, complicated the situation and created uncertainty and additional work (but also opportunities) for some local actors who want to make a contribution towards the socio-economic renewal of their community.

Like many other cities in the UK, Birmingham is constantly searching for more effective models of governance and service delivery. The volunteers and clergy of parishes in the Diocese of Birmingham, as well as other community



groups and voluntary organisations, can, however, easily become caught up in processes that are primarily aimed at institutional change in public agencies. The most recent example of such a challenge is the establishment of Birmingham as a 'Civic Pioneer' authority – 'a local authority committed to the ethos of community engagement, regarding participatory democracy not as a threat to or substitute for, but a vital complement to representative democracy' (Tam, 2004, p.1).

The sheer number, complexity and scale of the initiatives promoted by public agencies in Birmingham makes it very difficult for any organisation to decide in which particular initiative to participate and what resources to invest. There is a danger that the lack of time, expertise or mandate often experienced by voluntary and community organisations may result in a further, possibly unintended, distancing of grass roots organisations from the very strategies designed to engage with them.

## **10. Summary**

We have outlined the way in which the inter-related concepts of civil renewal, community cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration form a back-drop to this Study. We have also highlighted the growing interest of central government in the role of faith communities in general in contributing to civil renewal and in playing a part in regeneration initiatives. We have placed this development within the broader perspective of the commitment of the Christian church and, within that, the Church of England Diocese of Birmingham, to social welfare and to community activity. We have also noted the pro-active role of Birmingham City Council in this respect.

We shall discuss these issues further in Part Four, in the light of the Study findings which are presented in the following Part Three of this report.

## PART THREE: STUDY FINDINGS - INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

### 11. Introduction

In Part Three we set out the findings from our interviews and focus groups with Study participants. In these discussions we used a carefully constructed set of questions aimed at teasing out different perspectives and views on issues relating to the aims and context of the Study. These perspectives are presented here under eight headings:

- Understanding of the word ‘community’
- Perceived reasons for the church’s involvement with its local population
- Reasons for individuals becoming involved in church-organised activities
- Challenges and ways of overcoming them
- Perceived benefits of the church’s involvement with the local community
- Main achievements
- Future plans
- Factors contributing to successful project development.

As indicated in Part One, we report the Study findings in anonymous form, and we refer to interviewees and focus group participants as follows.

- Parish priests and others (ordained and lay) with a lead role in church-organised activities are referred to as **church leaders**
- Members of church congregations *in general* are referred to as **worshippers**
- Members of church congregations who are active in church organised / sponsored activities, or in activities organised by other agencies, are referred to as **church volunteers**
- People who take part in church-organised activities are referred to as **project users**
- Where it is not necessary to make such distinctions, we use the term **Study participants**.

### 12. Understanding of the word ‘community’

*‘People in the environment in which they live and the relationships between them.’*

*‘There are lots of people in the community who don’t come to the Church or the Centre – they are still members of the community.’*

## 12.1 The views of church leaders

We asked all Study participants about their understanding of the word 'community' in relation to the church with which they were associated. Church leaders in particular emphasised the importance of the church (i.e. its clergy and worshippers) as a distinct community, for example: *'the community is mainly people who attend the congregation on a Sunday'*, but most saw the church clergy and worshippers, whom some referred to as a *'family'*, as one grouping within a much broader set of people and connections. For this group, 'community' was often a complex concept, made up of multiple and inter-locking groupings; *'there are different tiers of community extending out from the church'*; and *'community is the people who live in the parish and within that there are circles of interest, one of which is the church community'*.

Church leaders put relatively little emphasis on strict parish boundaries, although a few people noted that physical features such as major roads are quite important in Birmingham, and do have an effect in segregating geographical areas. They generally put more stress on the idea of 'community' as being concerned with people and relationships rather than, or as well as, geographical proximity; for example *'it is about a way of living and commitment'*; and *'people in the environment in which they live and the relationships between them'*.

## 12.2 The views of church volunteers

Church volunteers again noted the complexity of the idea of 'community'. While participants in one focus group felt that: *'for many of the congregation the community is just the congregation'*, this view was uncommon. Most church volunteers felt that regular worshippers formed an important grouping, for example – *'the Church community is very important because we are a community and care about and are interested in each other, but it is not easy for other people to break into it'*. The general trend was to see the church and its worshippers as part of a complex mix of people and interests with a broad focus on a particular geographical area, for example: *'it's a mix of people – agencies, the congregation, centre users or anyone who's been touched by the Centre – that's what community is – everyone coming together'*; and *'there are lots of people in the community who don't come to the Church or the Centre – they are still members of the community'*.

Some church volunteers noted that people who lived outside their particular parish who attended services or other activities there were still seen as part of the community.

## 12.3 The views of project users

Project users generally took a more detached view of the idea of 'community' and the church. Most saw the church whose activities they participated in as forming a community, but usually viewed it as *'a community within a community'*, part of a complex network of people and relationships, usually with links to a particular geographical area.

### 13. Perceived reasons for the church's involvement with its local population

We asked church leaders what they considered to be the over-arching reasons for their church's involvement with its local population, in particular the organisation of social welfare activities and engagement with other community activities.

Four main, inter-linked, concepts were discussed:

- Mission
- The importance of demonstrating and sharing God's love
- Service
- Meeting needs.

Secondary, but nevertheless important, reasons were concerned with:

- Use of church buildings
- The nature of the area in which the church is located.

#### 13.1 Mission

*'Our faith tells us to be out there.'*

Several church leaders stressed the importance of the idea of mission in their work, of the church looking outward beyond itself and its own worshippers. As one person noted: *'people have gone past the idea of mission abroad; they see need on their own doorstep'*. Some people noted the emphasis in the teachings of the Bible to *'go out into the world and preach the gospel'* or quoted particular Biblical passages which stress the duty of Christians to do practical things to meet people's physical needs as well as their spiritual ones. The notion that *'our faith tells us to be out there'* was described as a significant driving force behind many churches' community activity.

Several church leaders stressed that working with, and serving, the local community is a natural part of being a Christian and that concern for people's practical and physical needs cannot be separated from a desire to meet their spiritual needs: *'We had a sense of mission for the estate – spiritually, physically and emotionally'*. This holistic approach was evident in comments such as *'some people see what we are doing as the Church's community work, but for us it is our work, there is no divide between the sacred and the secular'*, and *'it's what we're made for; it is our vocation to work with others inclusively'*.

Many church leaders, alongside their concern with mission, were at pains to point out that their work was not about evangelising or proselytising: *'it's my duty as a Christian to serve the needs of the community, but not necessarily about mission in terms of proselytising'*.

### 13.2 The importance of demonstrating and sharing God's love

*'Spread the ethos that God loves everyone, whether Christian or not.'*

Several church leaders stressed how the impetus to *'express God's love in our community'* was a further important reason behind their involvement with activities to benefit the local community. One group of worshippers, who had developed a new congregation on an outlying estate, had a strong sense of wanting to *'spread the ethos that God loves everyone, whether Christian or not'*. One church leader described the importance of demonstrating that faith is not just about worship, but about showing and sharing God's love.

The above view, which tended to be expressed primarily by church leaders from the more evangelical churches, was also seen as providing a way for people to question the reasons behind the approach and *'move forward on their personal journey towards God'* (although converting people to Christianity was not expressed as an explicit purpose).

### 13.3 Service

*'The church is there to serve the whole community.'*

Several church leaders stressed the importance of the idea of service, to the local community in particular, as a third strand behind their activities. The Christian idea of Christ as servant was implied in comments such as *'My basic philosophy is that the church is there to serve the whole community; this comes from my theology – bringing the people in from the hedgerows and byways to the feast'* and *'building relationships is a natural spiritual thing to do and it has helped to serve the local community'*. The concept of 'service' was also linked by some with the idea of 'duty'; one church leader referred to the view of some more affluent worshippers that involvement as, for example, a school governor or magistrate, was *'part of their duty of service'*, while in another parish it was considered that *'the Church sees it as its duty to sit on the Ward Advisory Board in order to represent the community and speak up for them'*.

### 13.4 Meeting needs

*'The reasons for getting involved are about meeting those needs people have at whatever level.'*

In many parishes, the community activities and social welfare projects organised or sponsored by the church were amongst very few such facilities in the area. In both inner city areas and outlying estates church leaders were very aware of local needs and of high levels of disadvantage and problems

such as unemployment, limited places for people to meet, poor health and so on. Concern with meeting individuals' needs was seen both as a driving force in itself and as inextricably linked with the ideas of service, mission and the importance of demonstrating God's love for all people.

Some churches had carried out a needs assessment or community profiling exercise and aimed to work on several different identified areas of need, for example *'the major issues identified were about employment; facilities for young people; a place for older people to meet; child care and social exclusion generally. This led on to the development of the building and projects to meet those needs'*. In another example *'we found that health is a debilitating factor and therefore we've brought the PCT health facility onto the estate'*. Others had adopted a slightly less formal approach to needs assessment, but one still apparently based on available resources and on awareness of issues concerning local people: *'with young people there was a local issue with gangs and this gained national prominence recently. This gave an impetus to the youth work'*. Either way, the idea that *'the reasons for getting involved are about meeting those needs people have at whatever level'* was felt by church leaders to be a strong driving force behind many churches' community involvement.

The idea of the importance of meeting needs extended in some cases to offering free or subsidised use of church buildings to other organisations, for example *'we'll make facilities available free if groups have no funding. We see no harm, nor are we concerned about the use of a little electricity. It's here for the community to take and use for their need'*. Church leaders made occasional references to the fact that this apparent generosity posed a risk of exploitation, but most seemed to manage the risk through an informal process of filtering requests for use of the church's resources.

*The church runs a Centre on an estate that has a large number of families, many of them in emergency housing. Unemployment is 17%, and the school has a high turnover rate. The congregation had a 'sense of mission for the estate' and wanted to provide more resources for people living there. They decided to develop a Centre focused on the needs of families and children. Staff and volunteers run coffee mornings, playgroups, counselling sessions and various youth activities. Other organisations also run activities, which include youth groups, Sure Start and an employment surgery. There is also a furniture store.*

### 13.5 Use of church buildings

*'We can't justify having a building like this and not using it – we couldn't justify having a church open once a week and the congregation would agree.'*

Amongst the other reasons behind churches' involvement with their local communities was the desire, suggested above, to make good use of church premises. It was noted that church buildings are often expensive to maintain, and may represent the only resource of their kind in some areas. In one parish, the need to make a decision about the future of a church building that was in poor condition, and used only by a small congregation, had been an important factor behind the decision to redevelop it into a resource that could be used by the whole local community.



The need to justify ownership of a large and costly building was significant in at least two other parishes; in one it was noted that *'we can't justify having a building like this and not using it – we couldn't justify having a church open once a week and the congregation would agree'*, while in another the existence of suitable premises was seen as a catalyst for developing a wide variety of activities: *'the other thing is that we have premises and that allows us to do what we do. This has been the reason for putting money into the project'*.

*The church needed to make a decision about the future of its buildings, which were in poor condition, with inadequate heating. Clergy and worshippers felt it did not make sense to spend a lot of money on premises used by so few people when the local community did not have many resources available. They wanted to serve their community and express their faith in a practical way. They decided to redevelop the building to provide both worship space and facilities for the community. They now run a nursery, employment advice service, youth project, groups for mothers and children and a café. They also rent office space to other organisations and hire out rooms for conferences and other events.*

### 13.6 The nature of the area

*'The future of hope for the city.'*

A few churches were operating in areas that were very mixed in terms of race, ethnicity and faith. In one parish a church leader felt it was important for the church to have a continuing presence in a mainly Muslim area, not only spiritually but in terms of providing a resource that could be used by the whole community. In this way, it was hoped that dialogue would develop between people of different faiths – described as *'the future of hope for the city'*.

In another parish one of the church leaders commented on the need that had been apparent since the 1960s for the Church of England to work more effectively in multi-racial areas. In his view, one of the responses to that challenge was for the church to become more involved with their local community, both through church-organised projects and through activities initiated by other agencies.

## 14. Reasons for individuals becoming involved in church-organised activities

We asked church leaders why they felt regular worshippers had wanted to get involved in community activities, both projects organised or sponsored by the church and those initiated by other organisations. We asked church volunteers themselves why they had decided to get involved; we also asked users of church-organised activities about their reasons for participation.

### 14.1 The views of church leaders

Church leaders' views in general fell into three main categories, concerned with:

- The close link between faith and action
- Desire to be of service / Christian duty
- Being asked and encouraged.

#### 14.1.1 The close link between faith and action

*'Faith without action is dead.'*

One church leader commented on what he felt to be the holistic nature of Christian belief – *'what we do in serving the community and worshipping is all part of the same thing'*, while another took up the same theme when she commented that *'most worshippers who get involved with community activities almost come with a church badge on – they and their church life are*



*one and the same*'. This idea of the close link between faith and its practical expression was apparent in the comment that *'faith without action is dead'*.

Several church leaders, especially those from more evangelical churches, stressed that this holistic approach encompassed the need for church volunteers to express their faith in practical ways, for example, *'developing the Centre provides an opportunity to demonstrate God's love and share faith'*; and *'people get involved because their faith is a practical faith, which needs outward expression'*.

#### 14.1.2 Desire to be of service / Christian duty

*'They see a need and want to fulfil it as part of their Christian calling.'*

The Christian concept of service was one of the driving forces behind many churches' decisions to initiate projects with and for their local community; it appears also to have motivated individuals to volunteer. Church leaders variously commented that regular worshippers sometimes became involved with local organisations because *'they feel they ought to, that it's a good thing to do'*; and *'people get involved, give their time because they want to; they see it as Christian duty and want to further their service'*.

Closely connected with the concept of service was the idea of the importance of meeting needs, and recognition that the church, whether through its human or physical resources, could help in meeting those needs. For example *'they see a project and see it needs to be done and think maybe I am the person to answer it'*, and *'they see a need and want to fulfil it as part of their Christian calling'*.

It should be noted, however, that some church leaders expressed a degree of sorrow about a perceived lack of sense of service on the part of some of their worshippers. One person commented that *'there's not as much engagement as there needs to be; people are not coming forward as a matter of duty'*.

#### 14.1.3 Being asked and encouraged

*'People volunteer because they've been asked to.'*

Several church leaders noted how clergy and lay leaders had played a role in asking or encouraging individual worshippers, or the congregation in general, to get involved in church-organised projects or in the wider community. In one parish a (lay) church leader noted how the clergy there *'remind people that all have a gift to offer; they have drawn the best out of people'*; while in a second *'I [vicar] have always emphasised the community side of the work here – this may be why some of the worshippers get involved'*. And in a third parish *'people volunteer because they've been asked to; most wouldn't go so deep into considering community benefit. Some people are happy that they are*

*busy with something, and that they've been asked'. There was consistent evidence of clergy being very skilled at discerning the needs and skills of those who eventually became volunteers.*

*Sometimes people in the church wanted to get involved in one kind of volunteering when their skills and talents might have been better suited to a different activity. Lay church leaders felt that the parish priest played an important role in encouraging worshippers to get involved in the most appropriate activities. They noted that a sensitive but strong priest plays a vital role in 'taking someone to one side and saying "this would really take off if you did it and gave up that instead"'.*

## 14.2 The views of church volunteers

In describing their own reasons for involvement, church volunteers generally echoed the above views, focusing in particular on:

- expressing their faith in a practical way
- meeting need
- the nature of the project
- being asked or encouraged.

### 14.2.1 A practical expression of faith

*'Jesus didn't exist only between 10 and 12 on a Sunday.'*

For many church volunteers, involvement in projects that would benefit the local community provided a real practical opportunity for expression of their faith. In one church people noted that *'Jesus didn't exist only between 10 and 12 on a Sunday'*. For them, the development of a major community resource was a chance to work with people who shared a similar understanding of faith. Comments made elsewhere show the very close link in the minds of many between faith and practical work in the community: for example *'for me it is an extension of my faith; when I came here I slowly got involved in the project'; 'if you are a Christian it is about helping others'*.

*Members of the church congregation discussed the importance of the church having a practical role in the parish. They felt it was important to be involved with the whole community, and to break down barriers between the worshipping congregation and other local people. They have now set up three free-standing social and community work projects. One of the projects runs an Employment Resource Centre, women's groups and various groups for people aged 50+. Another project provides conference, meeting and activity space, while the third project is set up as a limited company providing health and social care services.*

#### 14.2.2 Meeting need

*'I see the hands-on effect, how it benefits people and how it makes a difference.'*

The idea of the importance of meeting local need came through in many discussions with church volunteers, as a practical expression of faith and as a motivating factor in its own right. Several church volunteers had been involved in establishing projects because they could clearly see the need for resources such as a Credit Union, a group for older people or pre-school provision. The idea of meeting need had both galvanised their initial involvement and spurred them on to continue: *'I see the hands-on effect, how it benefits people and how it makes a difference'*.

#### 14.2.3 The nature of the project

*'This was the first time I had experienced the community work as an essential part of the church.'*

In some instances church volunteers had been attracted by the nature of a particular project; for example one person referred to his keenness to be involved in a collaborative project partly because it represented *'a done with rather than a done to model'* of community development. Others had been keen to be involved in a project that aimed to improve the lives of families on their estate, or that provided pre-school activities in a particular way. Some were attracted by the opportunity to be involved in developing a new initiative in an area previously lacking in community facilities; for example *'this was the first time I had experienced the community work as an essential part of the church; I was excited by this and also seeing the building of the church'*.

#### 14.2.4 Being asked or encouraged

*'A central idea of the vicar's has been of service to the community.'*

In many parishes church volunteers spoke of the role that others, usually clergy, had played in encouraging them to get involved in volunteering. In some cases people had become involved at a difficult stage in their lives, for example after a bereavement, when conversation with the vicar had led to the decision to get involved as a church volunteer. The leadership role of clergy was frequently mentioned: *'a central idea of [the vicar's] has been of service to the community'*; and *'[the vicar] has very persuasive ways – he just asks you in such a way that you say yes and you think it was your own idea'*; and *'I've been involved from the start; the vicar at that time had a vision of helping people outside of the church – in the community'*. In some parishes clergy took a leading role in initiating projects, while in others the nature of the

activities established was driven more by lay people. In most parishes, however, the role of clergy in leading and / or supporting church volunteers' involvement appeared to be crucial.

The fact of being asked, or encouraged, was clearly an important motivating factor for many church volunteers, often within a context where clergy led by example and facilitated individual engagement.

#### 14.3 The views of project users

*'The vicar asked if I would like to come along to the lunch club'.*

We asked project users about their reasons for getting involved with a church-organised project. In general there was one main reason for this: the opportunity to have their needs met, whether these were for help in dealing with particular issues such as housing, family difficulties or child care, or more general problems of isolation and lack of social contacts. For example:

- Participants in a 'Mums and Tots' group wanted to get out and meet other women with children; some also saw this as good preparation for their children starting school or as a way in which their children's behavioural problems might be addressed
- Women attending a Women's group wanted to meet other women living locally and facing similar problems
- Older people attending a lunch club welcomed the opportunity of hot meals and the chance to socialise.



While a few had found out about the group / project they were involved with by means of written publicity, most had been informed by professional workers such as health visitors or teachers at their children's school, or by friends or family, and felt that the organisation in question could meet their needs. Like some church volunteers, some project users had also become involved through personal contact with clergy: *'I didn't come originally; my husband died and I was lost for a while – I had looked after him. Then [vicar] asked if I would like to come along to the lunch club'.*

## 15. Challenges and ways of overcoming them

We asked church leaders about their experience of obstacles to the involvement of regular worshippers in community activities, and church volunteers themselves about their views of the challenges associated with setting up and running activities for the benefit of the local community. Both groups also offered perspectives on the ways in which these obstacles had been, or might have been, addressed. Since the two groups raised broadly similar issues, their views are presented together.

We also asked project users about their experiences of involvement in activities associated with a church, and in particular about whether the church connection had affected their initial decision to become involved; their views will be included under the appropriate headings.

Five main challenges emerge from analysis of the data:

- Involving volunteers
- Management issues
- Working with other organisations
- Local people's views of the Church as an institution
- Working in a multi-faith area.

### 15.1 Involving volunteers

*'I can get people to make the tea, but getting people to take on a leadership role is a problem.'*

Many Study participants, both church leaders and church volunteers, described difficulties involving worshippers as volunteers in projects, whether initiated by the church itself or by external agencies. In several parishes some existing (and often very long-standing) volunteers also appeared to be over-stretched in terms of the amount of time they were spending on their voluntary activities. The difficulty of recruiting volunteers was particularly acute where they were required to take on leadership roles – *'I can get people to make the tea, but getting people to take on a leadership role is a problem'*. This problem was pronounced in those churches with small congregations, but by no means confined to them.

Some of the reasons cited for people not wishing to volunteer came under the broad heading of what one church leader called *lifestyle pressures* – time, work, health problems, family commitments and so on. Some church leaders also referred to a lack of skills or confidence amongst people in the area, for example, *‘most of the white or African Caribbean people with skills who used to live here have left the area’*, and *‘there are a lot of big words at governing body meetings’*. In some areas there was also a perception amongst local people that the Church or the local authority should be paying people rather than involving volunteers. In a small number of parishes it was also suggested that differences of opinion between volunteers and paid staff over the direction projects should take, or the extent to which projects should actively promote a Christian ethos, had led to volunteers discontinuing their involvement.

Several Study participants also expressed a sense of regret that some worshippers did not share their own understanding of need. Some church volunteers felt that a few fellow worshippers did not understand why, for example, people get into financial difficulties: *‘they can’t understand why people are unable to make their money cover all their needs’*. Some Study participants also expressed a view that other worshippers did not always see it as part of their commitment to the church to get involved in community projects: *‘there’s not as much engagement as there needs to be; people are not coming forward as a matter of duty; there is a separation between the Sunday congregation and other activities’*; or *‘Church is something they do on Sundays’*.

Some churches had addressed the problem of lack of volunteers by employing paid staff to run activities, but this could also be problematic because the presence of paid staff could exacerbate the sense of lack of skills or confidence felt by volunteers. As discussed earlier (sections 14.1.3 and 14.2.4), clergy also played a crucial role in encouraging volunteering, and, in some instances, in subtly directing volunteers to areas of activity where their talents might be used to best effect. Some attempts had been made to address the question of lack of skills through initiatives such as training and a skills audit. So far as developing awareness of need was concerned, Study participants felt that education and the role of clergy in leading and setting an example were crucial.

*Some worshippers initially found it difficult to understand why people could not deal with their own problems, such as debt, and why they needed help from other people. Clergy played a big role in helping people understand why needs exist, and had been good at leading discussion on these issues. Leadership from the diocese had also been helpful. As a result, there was a greater awareness of need and willingness to get involved in local projects.*

## 15.2 Management issues

*'New developments are always held up because money is not available.'*

Church volunteers, in particular those directly responsible for the organisation of projects, were concerned about a range of management issues. These included securing funding (*'new developments are always held up because money is not available'*), complying with accountability and monitoring requirements, and aspects of decision-making. In one parish church volunteers commented that it can be difficult to maintain a balance between church ownership of the projects and their stated principle of community consultation and engagement. In another, the sheer scale of a big project presented a small congregation with serious management challenges.

While some management issues identified, such as the above, are similar to those that beset secular voluntary agencies, others appear distinctive to church-run projects. In one parish, for example, church volunteers described the difficulty reconciling the *'business decisions and Jesus decisions'*, especially in relation to personnel issues.

It was generally felt that management problems just had to be addressed by being persistent and not giving up. However, in one project, a Credit Union, complying with external requirements had proved too much for the volunteer management committee and the organisation was in the process of winding up. Training had been provided in some parishes to help church volunteers cope with financial and monitoring requirements of projects. In other projects the presence of paid staff and / or a strong management committee was recognised as vital for sustainability. Strong clergy leadership, and their ability to make links with external sources of help, was also crucial in some parishes.

Study participants appeared to place relatively little emphasis on their religious faith as a source of support; comments such as *'you need to keep your eyes on the vision, keep your eyes on what God's done'* were relatively uncommon.

*Worshippers found it difficult preparing funding applications and complying with all the legislative and monitoring expectations of the various church projects in the absence of a vicar. Meeting the requirements of the Children Act and dealing with police checks for volunteers involved a substantial amount of responsibility. The commitment of those involved had helped maintain activities. Access to external training had helped them understand monitoring processes and enlarging the pool of active volunteers had provided additional support for the lay church leaders.*

### 15.3 Working with other organisations

*'Working with other groups can be challenging.'*

Some churches had experienced problems with other agencies working in the same geographical area; *'working with other groups can be challenging'*. This difficulty was usually directly attributed by Study participants to anxiety that the church might attempt *'church takeover for church purposes'*. This seems partly to relate to what one church leader described as the church's *'record of being imperialistic over the years'* and partly to concerns about the church encroaching on what other agencies perceive as their territory – *'people are very territorial'*. In most instances where these problems had existed they appear to have been resolved over time, through persistence on the church's part: *'people realise we are here for the long haul'*, being clear about the church's remit, keeping promises, networking and meeting needs. The role of clergy as leaders had also helped. In some situations secular organisations working with both the church and with other agencies had helped provide a bridge and had broken down barriers. In some parishes it appeared that fears about evangelism had been allayed if social welfare activities and projects were held in premises separate from those used for worship.

Such difficulties were, however, not universal. In some situations there was little awareness amongst other local agencies, or even church-sponsored project staff themselves, of the link with the church, and / or it was not perceived as relevant. In other cases the link was clear, but problems had not arisen, because, for example, key people were closely involved with local people and organisations and trusted by them; *'I am local – I am in pubs and clubs, locally networked; the church angle is not shoved in people's faces. If people are asked they are told but it is not pushed'*. Many agencies were happy to have church representation on their boards and committees, and saw the church as a welcome resource.

Some churches were indeed very much involved in networks of local organisations, forums and other structures. In one parish, for example, it was felt that the close relationships between the church and many local organisations, and the involvement of church leaders in various networks, played a major part in their ability to work with a huge and diverse number of local people; *'[named leader] is linked into most professionals in the area – this has a good effect on the local community'*.

### 15.4 Local people's views of the Church as an institution

*'They think they will be told their life is a mess because they aren't Christians.'*

As discussed above, some voluntary and statutory agencies expressed initial concerns about the role of the church in local communities; this view was



thought to be shared in some areas by local people themselves – *‘they think they will be told their life is a mess because they aren’t Christians’*.

In practice it is difficult to tell to what extent the attitudes of local (non-Christian) people actually prevented them making use of activities run or sponsored by the church, or by church volunteers. Discussions with project users suggest that concern about evangelism, for example, may not always be a substantial barrier, or at least not sufficiently major for people to forgo the prospect of receiving services they need.

Some project users had previously been unaware of the connection between the church and the facility / group they were involved with. For some, awareness of the connection would have made no difference to their decision to get involved, while others were less sure, having had previous negative experiences of the church and organised religion. Concern about evangelism was the main anxiety expressed – *‘I was concerned it would be full of Bible bashers before I came’*, but some people also perceived the church as a somewhat judgemental or controlling institution, for example *‘it is stigmatising and unapproachable and you can’t input into it’* and *‘it is a one way street’*. A few people felt comfortable to take part in a church-sponsored activity only because it took place in a separate space from the premises normally used for worship. Others felt that the church connection really made no difference; as discussed above (section 14.3) the main issue was the fact that the church was providing a local service that met their needs. While some Christians had been positively influenced to join a church-organised activity because of the church connection, most non-Christians did not appear to have been negatively influenced. (It should, however, be noted that those who were deterred from joining would never have had the opportunity to express their views through participation in this Study).

In general, people who had joined a church-organised activity with some degree of reservation about the church connection had positive experiences of their involvement; *‘it has softened my view towards the church; I don’t feel so anti now. It isn’t too bad up here’*; and *‘they handle things differently because of the way they are - they treat you as a human being’*. Project users frequently expressed relief that no attempts had been made to try to convert them to Christianity.

As with local organisations, it was felt that networking, building up trust and keeping promises were important factors in breaking down barriers. Some church volunteers suggested that the fact that they are seen as ordinary people like other local residents is useful – *‘we can act as a bridge between the church and other residents’*.

#### 15.5 Working in a multi-faith area

*‘We don’t break promises; we have seized every opportunity possible to work with members of the community.’*

The issue of relationships with local people acquires particular significance where the church is operating in a multi-faith area, in particular neighbourhoods where the identifiable Christian population is in a minority. Some church leaders referred to the fact that this might have presented difficulties in terms of relating to, and providing services for, the whole of the local community. In practice this does not appear to have been the case; while many local residents of other faiths (or no faith) will have chosen not to be involved with church-organised activities, many did so. We met Muslim women attending pre-school groups with their children, and heard of Muslim (in particular) users of church-organised or church-sponsored advice services, youth provision and nurseries. In one project a substantial number of the 35 employees were Muslim. Local Asian groups hired space in church buildings, and in one church centre Muslims attending conferences used the chapel to pray at lunchtime.



Church leaders felt that open attitudes and trust on the part of both project users and church organisations were crucial. One church leader explained that *'we don't break promises; we have seized every opportunity possible to work with members of the community'*. It was also suggested that a shared understanding of the importance of faith drew people of different religions together – *'the Muslim community respects what is going on, and parents are happy for their young female family members to work in the nursery where they might not be happy with them working for a secular organisation'*.

## 16. Perceived benefits of the church's involvement with the local community

We asked all Study participants to consider the benefits of the church's involvement with the wider community. The comments of our three different groups of Study participants can be considered together under five headings:

- Improved self-esteem for church volunteers and project users
- Services and activities provided
- Community resources
- Improved image of the church
- Development of relationships.

### 16.1 Improved self-esteem for church volunteers and project users

*'It has given me the confidence to talk to strangers.'*

Both church volunteers and project users spoke of the ways in which they felt involvement in church-organised activities had improved their self-esteem and increased their skills or confidence. Volunteers gave examples of ways in which their own situations had improved through volunteering: *'it has given me the confidence to talk to strangers'*; and *'it has boosted my morale to be accepted as who I am'*. Project users also felt they had been able to develop new skills and confidence through involvement in group activities, for example: *'there is a change in me somewhere; I just want to get on with making life better for my home and my kids'*. Women whose children attended pre-school activities noted how their children had grown in confidence and gained new skills such as the ability to share toys with other children. Study participants referred to users of activities, especially young people, as feeling safe and valued in church organisations.

### 16.2 Services and activities provided

*'The biggest benefit of all is that people in desperate circumstances get help.'*

For some Study participants, the provision of services and activities in communities with few other facilities was the most important benefit: *'the biggest benefit of all is that people in desperate circumstances get help'*. Several people, particularly older people and parents with young children, stressed the importance of those services being *local*: *'the best thing is that [organisation] is open to this community'*. For project users, the church-organised activity frequently offered a safe refuge (*'sanity'*, *'a bit of peace for me'*), help with specific problems such as debt, a place for children to play and the chance to take part in group activities. People who sometimes felt unwelcome elsewhere were accepted in church organisations, for example one mother of pre-school children commented that *'there's only one other*

*place we could go, but they are a bit snotty there so we like it here – they make the parents welcome and we have met some new people’.*

For some people the opportunity to make use of church-organised services such as a nursery meant they were able to take up employment, sometimes for the first time. This in turn improved people's chances to enhance the quality of their lives. Some Study participants also noted that the services and activities not only had value in themselves in terms of helping project users; they also provided jobs for local people, sometimes in areas of high unemployment.



*Older people who attended the lunch club commented on how isolated they had been before they joined. Some of them hardly went out, and had become increasingly nervous about leaving their homes. Attending the lunch club had enabled them to make friends, gain support for problems and generally feel less lonely. They also attended some of the other events organised by the church, and felt that they were made very welcome. Some had been able to contribute by doing things like baking cakes, and felt that their help was appreciated. They were very positive about the way in which the project workers had encouraged them to get involved.*

### 16.3 Community resources

*‘It’s a facilitator to allow things to happen that may not happen otherwise.’*

Several Study participants commented on the way in which church-organised and church-sponsored activities, and the personnel involved, acted as a resource for the community that went beyond the provision of services to individuals. Church provision could complement statutory and other voluntary sector provision; for example in one area where people were frequently rehoused the local authority provided housing, but the church project provided

the furniture, bedding and so on that people often lacked. It was also noted that church projects could complement the efforts of individual worshippers and take some pressure off them – *‘a job gets done, otherwise they would be approached individually’*.

In one church, where involvement with the local community mainly took the form of membership of governing bodies of other agencies, church leaders felt that their involvement was taken seriously by other local organisations, and was seen as a demonstration of commitment and solidarity with others. A leader from another church also noted that *‘we bring expertise and experience into the groups we are running’*.

In some instances church-organised projects provided a springboard for further community activities, usually campaigning on particular issues affecting project users: *‘it’s a facilitator to allow things to happen that may not happen otherwise’*. Work with particular groups of project users had in some instances enabled the church to go further than the provision of services and act as advocate for asylum seekers, people with mental health problems or others experiencing disadvantage or prejudice. On one estate the work of the church project had facilitated a move to clear some dilapidated housing and replace it with sheltered accommodation for older people.

The church’s physical resources were also seen as a valuable community asset, available in some cases both for long-term rental at subsidised cost and for regular or one-off hire: *‘voluntary groups in the area benefit from having a meeting place that is not too far afield’*; and *‘other Christian organisations benefit from being able to run some activities from our base’*; and *‘the low fees are helpful for these clubs; it helps build community networks... pubs charge about seven times what we charge for a space’*.

*The church’s community project is located in the joint school / community centre / church premises. There are few other community facilities in the area, which was originally very rural, but now includes a new estate on the outskirts of Birmingham. The church runs a lunch club for older people and the Junior Club for young people. The premises are also used by a variety of other local groups. These include a playgroup, parent and toddler group, Pentecostal Church, Credit Union, community newspaper and Professional Workers Forum. These are independent, but closely linked with the other groups and with Project staff and volunteers through joint work or networks.*

#### 16.4 Improved image of the church

*‘People are becoming more positive about being here; the Church is seen as being good news.’*

A number of Study participants commented that the church as an institution had benefited from its community involvement, in terms of an improved image

with local people: *'the church gets good publicity from the fact that it is running a successful group'*. Contact between individual worshippers and other local people, together with good quality services and an inclusive approach, had improved the image of the church: *'people think that X goes to church so it must be all right'*; and *'people will drop their kids off because they trust that they'll learn something and have a good time'*; and *'people are becoming more positive about being here; the Church is seen as being good news'*.

In many areas it was recognised that the church had brought some improvement to the quality of people's lives and gained respect as a result. Church volunteers from one inner-city area commented that, while many urban churches experience vandalism, they have not; a fact they attributed to being known and respected in the community for their work. Churches in multi-racial / multi-faith areas were often considered to have developed good links with the local Muslim population through the community services developed: *'everyone coming together has been very positive'*; and *'we know they will never come to our church but we share common concerns around pollution, litter, vandalism and so on'*.

## 16.5 Development of relationships

Study participants had much to say about the development of relationships as a result of the church's involvement in the community, in particular:

- Relationships amongst worshippers
- Relationships between worshippers and other local people
- Relationships amongst local people themselves
- Relationships amongst local organisations.

### 16.5.1 Relationships amongst worshippers

*'The community projects have provided a way for people to work together.'*

In several parishes Study participants described how working together to establish community activities had also had the effect of drawing worshippers closer together and providing a focus for interaction amongst worshippers and also between worshippers and project users. In one church, for example, volunteers described how their joint enterprise had *'broken down barriers within the congregation; people are more open in talking to each other'*, and in another *'the community projects have provided a way for people to work together'*. There and elsewhere it was felt that work in the community provided worshippers with a focus that helped prevent divisions occurring: *'yes, the work also helps bring all the different factions of the church together'*.

### 16.5.2 Relationships between worshippers and other local people

*'An affirmation of bridging social capital, a bridge between different groups of people.'*

Church-organised activities, many Study participants suggested, had provided valuable opportunities for worshippers and other local people to meet, leading to greater understanding of community needs on the part of worshippers. Church centres and projects had in some cases acted as a focus, bringing worshippers and other community members closer together: *'there's a well-maintained link between church and community through the centre; we even take enquiries like "can I meet the vicar?"'*

In parishes where projects had been set up as independent structures, clergy and worshippers who acted as management committee members often played a bridging role between the church and the wider community, maintaining a 'church ethos' and reconciling the spiritual and secular worlds.

In several parishes Study participants noted that worshippers, could, and did, use the services and activities organised for community benefit. Several people commented on the beneficial effects of this, in terms of building links between different groups, as, for example: *'there is a blurring as to beneficiaries here – these activities can be taken up by the congregation, by 'beneficiaries' – in some cases people are in both categories – and also by people who are volunteers in other activities'.*

In one parish a church leader described worshippers as *'an affirmation of bridging social capital, a bridge between different groups of people'*. That church, a focus for much local activity and a meeting place for many organisations, was seen as offering a unique opportunity for local people to meet and work together. One church volunteer from that congregation considered that *'I've got sixty friends here'* as a result of running a social group for many years, while others involved in a project to develop the church buildings for community use felt that, in a short space of time *'there is quite a strong sense of community support amongst the people involved in the project'*.

### 16.5.3 Relationships amongst local people themselves

*'If we don't come here we wouldn't see anyone.'*

Relationships that had developed through participation in church-organised activities often appeared to be one of the most important benefits of some of the projects. In some groups project users referred to the activity they were involved in as one of their few social engagements, eagerly anticipated both for the activity itself and the chance to spend time with other people. Isolation was seen as a major problem in many parts of Birmingham; a user of a

church-run lunch club said *'if we don't come here we wouldn't see anyone'*. Many Study participants felt the church was well equipped to address such problems: *'The Centre has become a useful meeting place for the elderly; it takes care of their social needs and tackles problems of isolation and loneliness'*. Several project users spoke of how they had made friends through a church-organised group, which they had often joined at a difficult time in their lives such as after bereavement or re-housing in a new area. Comments made by project users of various groups included: *'it is like a family supporting each other'*; and *'there is a sense of belonging for people who attend the group'*; and *'I have done far more since joining [worker's] group'*.



In some areas people living in close proximity met through the church-organised activity and for the first time knew someone living in the same building or block. This had, for some project users, given them a more positive feeling about living in an area where they had sometimes felt isolated or fearful. On one estate church volunteers and project users both felt that relations in the area had improved, and divisions between different parts of the estate largely disappeared, improvements which both groups attributed to the influence of the church-organised project operating there.

In some parishes church volunteers and project users commented on the fact that attending a church-organised activity gave them an opportunity that they would have lacked otherwise to get to know people from a different racial or faith background. For example, some Pakistani women whose children would soon attend school with mainly Asian pupils were glad that their children had an opportunity before school to mix with children from a wider range of racial backgrounds.



Although they found it hard to be specific, a number of project users felt that living conditions in their area had improved as a by-product of church-organised activities. For example, young people attending youth provision were not hanging about, potentially causing trouble and intimidating older residents.

*Project staff felt that a sense of community had developed on the estate since the project had been established. Some people living in the tower blocks who had previously not known any of their neighbours had been able to meet other residents. The project's joint work with other local organisations had also helped, and there was the possibility of developing a neighbourhood forum. Church volunteers who lived on the estate felt that the divisions that had previously existed between different parts of the estate were beginning to disappear. Project users also felt that they had made friends with other users, and were less isolated than when they first moved to the area.*

#### 16.5.4 Relationships amongst local organisations

*'We have respect from other organisations because they see the good work we do.'*

Collaborative working, amongst voluntary and statutory agencies, featured in several parishes. Working together through the medium of the church had in some instances helped other organisations to improve both their links with each other and with local people. In one area the church was a key player in several collaborative working arrangements: *'we have respect from other organisations because they see the good work we do and invite us to put in collaborative bids'*. In one parish good communications amongst different agencies had developed through their mutual engagement with church projects and were seen as having a positive effect on the local community. In another area a church leader noted how joint work had facilitated *'interaction and communication between difficult community groups'*.

In cases where churches rented out rooms to other organisations, the use of shared space provided a further opportunity to network with others doing similar work.

## 17. Main achievements

We asked church leaders and church volunteers what they felt had been the church's main achievements in developing projects and activities for the benefit of the local community. As discussed earlier (section 15) the development of projects had often presented church leaders and volunteers with significant challenges, but Study participants also highlighted what they felt to be major achievements, in particular:

- Development and maintenance of sustainable projects
- Meeting needs and providing services
- A more outward looking church
- Development of relationships.

### 17.1 Development and maintenance of sustainable projects

*'The Centre itself is seen as an achievement.'*

Many Study participants suggested that the development of sustainable projects, some of which had been in existence for several years at the time of the Study, was in itself a significant achievement; for example *'the Centre itself is seen as an achievement; it is very visible, local and a cheap resource; there's lots going on here, from lace-making to work with young people'*. While most projects employed several paid staff, it had often been the responsibility of worshippers and clergy to secure initial funding, deal with premises issues, recruit staff and so on. In some parishes these matters had been dealt with by a small group of worshippers from a tiny congregation, often with limited experience of dealing with such matters. In a few instances management of projects had been maintained by lay people with little or no support available from clergy because of an inter-regnum.

The fact that several projects were now employers of large numbers of staff, often local people, was noted as an achievement for several reasons – not only had jobs been created, but more activities could be organised, and church volunteers involved in managing projects gained new skills through acting as employers of staff: *'the congregation has learned how to run a project. They have also learned a lot about legal issues, health and safety, employment law, planning permission etc. Knowledge that would have been available only within the diocesan infrastructure is now available locally'*. In some parishes, projects had also brought substantial levels of inward investment into the locality via the church.

### 17.2 Meeting needs and providing services

*'We provide much needed pre-school facilities for the community and if we hadn't done it 55 children wouldn't be getting it.'*

The development of sustainable projects meant that, across the twelve parishes, a huge range of community services and activities were organised. Study participants gave numerous examples of ways in which church-organised projects made a major difference to people's lives, for example: *'people have received practical help and resources such as furniture that they would not have had otherwise'*; and *'we provide much needed pre-school facilities for the community and if we hadn't done it 55 children wouldn't be getting it'*; and *'the work with young families; building relationships among community members; meeting specific needs of single parents, the youth and care for the elderly'*.

It appears that the church in many areas is meeting needs that are not being met through other voluntary or statutory provision. In some areas church leaders referred to limited availability of other services – certainly at the very local level – and to the fact that they were a significant local service provider; for example: *'the church is seen as a first order provider of care in the community – for example the lunch club has contracts with social services; the youth club has received grants for running workshops and engaging youth locally'*.

Study participants also referred to various ways in which an initiative designed to meet a particular need had acted as a springboard for other changes, in the particular venture itself, in individuals or in the development of new activities or campaigns. Again, in some parishes projects had grown from small beginnings into quite substantial ventures, for example *'...first they had a crèche for their children, then this became a playgroup for those attending the language classes. The Parent and Toddler Group grew out of this...'*



Study participants in some parishes also noted how some people had originally come to the project as users but, once their needs had been met, had made the transition to getting involved as a volunteer or taking up a paid staff role. In one parish a Study participant described how young people who had been involved with the project for several years were now training as 'young leaders' and making a difference for other young people. Elsewhere

Study participants gave examples of campaigns that had developed out of a church-organised activity as the venture had highlighted other community needs. In one locality a campaign had developed to set up a parish council (unusual in an urban area); this campaign had been successful and the new body was able to distribute small amounts of money to local groups.

*Some of the young people who attended the youth group have now become 'young leaders' and are working with other young people. The youth work is recognised as making a positive difference to young people's lives. The youth group has been asked to lead the Deanery Synod and two young people have been asked to join the Bishop's Youth Council. They have also been asked to take the lead in encouraging other churches to participate in the celebration of the Diocese's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.*

### 17.3 A more outward looking church

*'It is important to move on from traditional ways of being church.'*

Several Study participants referred with pleasure to the fact that they felt their church had become '*more outward looking*' and generally more accessible since it had become more involved with the local community. Many Study participants felt that their church, in its organisation of worship as well as in its social welfare activities, had adopted a more open and welcoming approach and had earned respect for its work with local people. In most parishes this had occurred through project organisers and church volunteers proactively encouraging the participation of local people as project users. In a few parishes it happened in a more reactive way as members of the community responded to activities set up in church buildings by other agencies or by worshippers acting semi-independently of the church.

Several people felt that that the church as an institution is changing, partly through the development of community projects, and is trying to relate to worshippers and non-worshippers in new ways: '*it is important to move on from traditional ways of being church and our congregation definitely manages that*'; and '*the church is now accessible to people on the estate six days a week*'.

The involvement in some parishes of clergy, church volunteers or paid project staff in regeneration partnerships and other activities designed to improve local neighbourhoods was also seen as a sign of the church's outward looking stance. Engagement in such initiatives was seen as an achievement in its own right, but also as part of a positive attempt to relate to local people in new ways.

While many Study participants felt that the church as a body has in many areas made significant steps towards becoming more accessible and outward

looking, they also noted that it has had limited success in bringing in more people as regular worshippers.

#### 17.4 Development of relationships

Many Study participants felt that the relationships that have developed through involvement with church-organised projects and other community activities have been one of the most important achievements. Throughout the Study participants referred to opportunities they and others had had to meet and work with people they would not otherwise have met. As discussed above (section 16.5), friendships and linkages of various kinds have developed amongst worshippers, between worshippers and local people, amongst local people themselves and between different local organisations.

These relationships acted both to provide individuals with support and social contacts, and also to further the development of community projects. In one parish a church leader felt that *'the main achievement has been building trust between individuals'*; another church leader felt that *'the development of relationships that bridge boundaries'* had been important – involvement in this instance with New Deal for Communities enabled him to make links between different groups, to their mutual benefit. Partnership working had not always been easy in all parishes, but very often the contacts made had enabled ideas to be shared and needs to be addressed in ways that would not have been possible through a single organisation.

*Lay church leaders in one parish felt that the building of strong relationships had been the biggest achievement, amongst worshippers, and also with the wider community. The profile of the area had been raised and a wider range of organisations got involved in making services more accessible for local people. The local college set up courses that people were requesting, and the Primary Care Trust provided a local health facility and worked on improving people's health. These initiatives developed through their contact with the church and its projects, which helped them gain an understanding of people's needs.*

#### 18. Future plans

*'We're trying to listen to what people are saying.'*

We asked church leaders about future plans for their church's involvement with the community. Most hoped that their church would be able to sustain existing activities (subject to need) and continue operating at least at the current level, but not necessarily develop any new initiatives – *'it is about maintenance; we are doing a great deal already'*. Others hoped to expand into new areas, for example: *'help refugees and asylum seekers integrate with the local community'*; and *'future plans focus on health issues – there are*

*many problems on the estate related to poor diet, smoking and coronary heart disease'; and 'we also want to expand youth and elderly services, as well as pre-school activities for parents and toddlers'.*

Several church leaders stressed the importance of activities being 'needs led', for example: *'we're trying to listen to what people are saying; we're moving from regeneration to neighbourhood co-ordination and possibly into neighbourhood management when devolution takes place'*. However, despite the emphasis on activities being developed specifically in response to local need, there was little mention of ways in which parishes planned to set priorities in the allocation of time and resources or deal with conflicting ideas about which needs amongst a range of possibilities should be addressed first.

*The church Centre organises projects that include a group for people aged 50+, a parent and toddler group, IT group, scout group, martial arts group and a healthy eating café. Future plans include providing more resources for the large number of local young people, helping refugees and asylum seekers settle into the area, and working more closely with the Youth Service, Barnardo's, Sure Start and schools.*

As well as expressing aspirations to expand and provide additional services, several church leaders referred to issues of capacity and the way in which these might affect their ability to develop. Mention was made in particular of the constraints caused by physical space, the small size of the congregation and financial restrictions; for example, *'getting the building sorted out is the key to any future development – we can't do any more in the current building'*; and *'there is no spare capacity; two families moved away recently and the new ones who have joined are quite fragile and vulnerable'*; and *'to do more we would need more resources'*.

Several (lay) church leaders also noted the crucial role of clergy in overseeing the work of church activities and felt that pressure on them also acted as a constraining factor: *'the congregation figures are very low and the question is "where should resources be targeted?" With decreasing numbers of ministers it means [vicar] needs to pick up more of the work'*. In a couple of parishes the appointment of a new vicar was seen as having a strong bearing on the direction of future plans.

*The church hoped to expand its current activities to enable it to do more work with children, but was constrained by the space available in its current premises. Developing new initiatives required the building of new premises in the church grounds which would take about two years to develop. This would require significant fundraising and time commitment from key people.*

In two parishes there was some discussion about current projects being maintained and expanded under the auspices of an independently managed organisation rather than directly by the church. In both instances this appears

to have been the result of differing views amongst church leaders, or between church leaders and project workers, about the appropriateness of the church running social welfare activities. A further factor affecting the development of church-organised projects was raised by a church leader from an inner-city, mainly Muslim, area, who felt that *'there needs to be a discussion about the responsibility of the church in areas like this. If the church abandons areas like this, there will be Muslims who do not know Christians and suspicion can grow amongst both groups'*. That discussion, he felt, needed to take place at a strategic level, not only in Birmingham but nationally.

## 19. Factors contributing to successful project development

Finally, we asked church leaders only to reflect on the various factors that they felt contribute to successful project development. Six main themes emerged:

- Resources
- A vision for the future
- Long-term commitment on the part of key people
- Leadership
- Shared values
- The ability to work in partnership.

### 19.1 Resources

*'Money – without that nothing would happen.'*

Church leaders referred to the vital importance of resources to their work, both resources of committed people and the physical resources of buildings, funding and management services.

Many church leaders described the essential resource afforded by church buildings, some of which could be used flexibly to fit a wide range of purposes. The availability of external funding was also considered vital, whether from the Church Urban Fund, statutory bodies or Trusts, for example *'money – without that nothing would happen'*; and *'the [Trust] has been a real backbone in terms of the funding they have provided'*. Finally the infrastructure support provided by the parish church and the diocesan structure was recognised as essential: *'there is sufficient management structure to be accountable and seen as trustworthy by local people'*; and *'the diocese offered support including services such as payroll'*.

*The church building has been modified so that access to the hall and community rooms can be gained without going through the main worship area. Activities run directly by the church take place in the hall and community rooms and include a lunch club, crèche, craft group for people with disabilities and parent and toddler groups. Outside organisations using the premises include a playgroup, Sure Start and a disabled learners group. There are also commercial lets for parties, a dance group and a slimming club. Church leaders thought it might be possible to use the space even more creatively by making small areas accessible to other groups.*

## 19.2 A vision for the future

*'The over-arching vision and sense of calling driving the work is very important.'*

Several church leaders spoke of the importance of having a vision for the future development of church projects, what one person described as *'having an eye on the long game'*. Having a clear long-term aim was felt to be essential to enable projects to develop and to help deal with difficult situations: *'the over-arching vision and sense of calling driving the work is very important – without that the Centre would not have volunteers or developed to the point it is at now'*.

Although Study participants spoke mainly in secular terms, it was also evident in many discussions that church leaders and volunteers saw the work as part of a broader sense of mission or calling, and that they felt this was behind the projects' success: *'knowing we didn't do it on our own – there is a higher power behind it'*.

## 19.3 Long-term commitment on the part of key people

*'A hugely committed set of people.'*

Commitment to the venture – on the part of clergy, lay leaders, church volunteers, project staff and so on, was acknowledged as crucial: *'a hugely committed set of people, especially the treasurer,'* and *'the commitment of the people in the congregation and the management committee'*. Several church leaders suggested in various ways that *'a Christian commitment gives a different viewpoint on why and how you relate to other people'*. In many parishes examples were given of clergy, other paid staff and church volunteers who had been involved in parishes and in church projects for many years, bringing stability and continuity that were felt to be very important.



## 19.4 Leadership

*'Stability in leadership and staffing is crucial.'*

Leadership - and especially the facilitating and enabling role played by clergy in stressing the importance of community projects, in facilitating the development of links between people and organisations, and in encouraging individuals to volunteer, was recognised as a further critical success factor. Several clergy appeared to have been in the same post for a number of years. Long-standing and committed lay leaders also played an important leadership role: *'stability in leadership and staffing is crucial'*.

While clergy themselves often downplayed their own centrality, others were keen to emphasise their importance. There were numerous references to the example set by clergy, their role in encouraging people to volunteer, their role in providing education and in forming links between different groups of people: *'playing the traditional role of the parish priest, working for everyone in the community'*. The presence of *'project leaders who were light years ahead'* or *'[named leaders] who have been here for years and have provided great stability at a strategic level'* was felt to be hugely important in their parishes.

*The church has a small number of people who have provided leadership and been committed to the development of the church projects over a period of several years. The trust that has been established between them, combined with the range of skills possessed, shared passion and vision for the future has been crucial to the development of the projects. The leadership provided by committed clergy and lay people has provided stability at a strategic level that has enabled the church to bring its plans to fruition. Church volunteers felt that the vicar's role in encouraging worshippers to get involved in projects had been very important, and had helped them gain confidence to develop the venture.*

## 19.5 Shared values

*'People can sign up to the same values and still be critical of each other in ways that move things on.'*

Shared values amongst those involved were also felt to be an important contributor to projects' success – *'people can sign up to the same values and still be critical of each other in ways that move things on'*. The ability to relate on an equal basis to people, whatever their circumstances, was felt to be an integral part of this – *'it's all about being empowering and offering people choices and not being patronising'*; and *'we want to be there and with them – it's about being where they are and not where we are'*.

## 19.6 The ability to work in partnership

*'Partnership and working together really makes a difference.'*

Although most churches took lead responsibility for organisation of projects, there were nevertheless many examples of partnerships with other organisations in relation to particular areas of work, and church leaders felt that these made a major contribution to the services they were able to offer, for example: *'we could not do half what we do, or do it so effectively, without people with expertise in particular fields, e.g. debt advice, Sure Start. Partnership and working together really makes a difference, and increases the possibilities for signposting people to other sources of help'*. Partnerships were felt to increase the range of services available, and could in some instances also help act as a bridge between the church and local people.

## 20. Summary of key findings

In this Part Three we have presented the findings from the fieldwork carried out in twelve parishes in the Diocese of Birmingham. We have discussed in particular: Study participants' understanding of the word 'community'; the perceived reasons for the church's involvement with its local population; reasons for individuals becoming involved in church-organised activities; challenges experienced in organising and running activities and ways of overcoming them; the benefits of the church's involvement with the local community; the main achievements; churches' future plans for community involvement and the factors contributing to successful project development.

The findings therefore offer an important contribution to the Study's target outcomes *i* to *iv*:

- i) A description of the different and various roles played by people in local parishes (e.g. clergy, lay people from the church, people from church-related organisations) in their local communities*
- ii) A profile of the different contributions (e.g. church-delivered, church-sponsored, church-hosted, diocesan organised) made by local parishes to their local communities (including purpose, theological rationale and value)*
- iii) An understanding of the impact made by local parishes to local communities, in particular the building of social capital (e.g. through community participation in parish-related activities)*
- iv) Understanding of the barriers to local parishes engaging effectively with their local communities and possible ways to overcome them*

In summary, the fieldwork findings described above relate to the target outcomes in the following ways.

## 20.1 **Roles played in local parishes**

The twelve parishes we studied were organising an impressive array of social welfare activities and / or contributing to the development of activities organised by other agencies through the involvement of clergy and lay people as trustees and volunteers. In some cases activities were organised mainly by lay / unpaid people; in others, projects operated in an organisational sense along the same lines as a secular voluntary organisation, with a number of paid staff performing key roles, usually, but not always, assisted by church volunteers and sometimes by other volunteers from the local area. In some parishes, church volunteers (usually relatively few in number) were supporting the activities of local schools, other statutory bodies and voluntary organisations.

A further key role provided by church volunteers was that of facilitating links, amongst worshippers and between worshippers and other local people. The parishes' social welfare activities were both an end in themselves and also a means to facilitate relationships amongst community members.

The role of clergy in encouraging worshippers to volunteer was also very important. In many parishes they played a key educative role by stressing the importance of churches' community projects and their relationship with worship and mission.

## 20.2 **Contributions made by parishes to local communities**

It is clear from discussion of churches' reasons for involvement with their local communities, and the factors motivating individual worshippers, that these add a different dimension to secular ideas about the importance of meeting need. While the desire to meet local community need plays an important part, the inter-linked ideas about mission, being of service and demonstrating the love of God distinguish church-based organisations from secular bodies operating in the same field. The findings also suggest that in many churches worship and practical work in the community are not seen as separate manifestations of faith, but as an integrated whole. This suggests an 'added value' contribution to local communities that offers a more personalised and flexible approach to the care of individuals than can be provided by secular agencies or organisations tied by a contract to providing a tightly specified service.

The facilitating role played by clergy in encouraging participation in projects also adds special value. Their privileged access to individuals within the Church and the parish provides them with opportunities not necessarily available to secular agencies to match skills and needs of worshippers with opportunities for volunteering and participation in projects.

The findings do not appear to suggest that the contributions of the different types of organisational arrangement (e.g. church-delivered as opposed to church-sponsored or hosted) are intrinsically different. In some parishes more than one organisational model was in operation, but the findings about benefits, challenges and overall contribution to the life of the community appear broadly similar.

### 20.3 Impact on local communities

It is notoriously difficult to assess the impact of social welfare activities. The term 'impact' is widely used but rarely defined (Wainwright, 2002). While the Study does not offer specific hard evidence about links between particular church activities and the lives of communities, the evidence provided does show a range of ways in which the activities organised in the twelve parishes make a *difference* in their local areas. As discussed above, the services and activities meet individuals' needs that are not met by other agencies; they also offer vital community resources in areas with few other facilities. In turn, participation in these activities has been shown as contributing to the development of links and relationships; participation has also helped individuals (both church volunteers and project users) improve their self-esteem, learn new skills and develop confidence.

In some parishes Study participants also described 'spin-off' effects, such as the development of community campaigns or improved relationships and feelings of security and safety in communities where these had been lacking.

### 20.4 Barriers to parishes engaging with local communities

The Study has also highlighted individual and organisational barriers that limit the ability of parishes to engage with their local communities. Study participants spoke of 'lifestyle pressures' that restricted the ability of worshippers to become involved as volunteers (as in secular agencies), as well as obstacles posed by limited skills, confidence or understanding of need. The findings highlight that worshippers still need to be asked or encouraged to volunteer, even within a context where ministry and mission exert strong imperatives.

Several church leaders also referred to capacity issues arising from the small size of a church's congregation, the need to redevelop buildings or the need to secure more funding. The challenges of organisation and management, and of complying with the demands of accountability and monitoring posed by external bodies, were substantial, especially for small congregations.

The findings, and in particular the discussions with project users, also suggest that the church as an institution still has an 'image problem' in many areas – perhaps more with people of no faith than with worshippers from other faiths. Although many project users had overcome their fears about the church as an institution, including its perceived role in evangelism, or found their worries to be groundless in practice, we do not know how many people decided not to use the services of a church-based organisation because of concerns on these issues. The findings suggest that more work may be needed to help potential project users overcome this barrier.

<b>PART FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS</b>
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## **21. Introduction**

In Part Three we presented the Study findings and suggested ways in which they contribute to the first four target Study outcomes. We now move on to discuss how the findings contribute to the final two target outcomes:

- i. *A higher profile (both within the Diocese itself and with external bodies, e.g. statutory bodies) for the contribution of local parishes to local communities*
- ii. *Evidence to support a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities.*

### **21.1 A higher profile for the contribution of local parishes to local communities**

The findings highlight a number of issues which merit particular attention when describing the contribution made by Church of England parishes to their local communities:

- Social capital and community cohesion
- Social inclusion
- Responsiveness to local needs
- Motivated volunteer workforce
- Leadership by the clergy
- Physical capacity
- Availability of funding.

Analysis of the data suggest that these constitute critical dimensions which enable us to further our understanding of the nature of the contributions made by Study participants.

#### **21.1.1 Social capital and community cohesion**

The findings show that church-organised projects and activities run by other agencies are an important factor in developing links – amongst worshippers themselves, between worshippers and the wider community, amongst community members and amongst local agencies. The Study shows that the development of these informal links and relationships is highly valued by members of local communities, and that the activities taking place in the twelve Study parishes are contributing significantly to the development of many supportive friendships and caring small communities. Many examples were given of friendships that had developed, and mutual support that had been provided, as a result of contacts initiated through the medium of the church and its social welfare activities. Examples were also given of people having the opportunity to meet and develop relationships with others in their area whom they might not otherwise have met, for example people living on parts of an estate with no other community facilities, or people attending a

group where mothers and children of different races and faith backgrounds had the opportunity to mix.

This suggests that local churches are, often in a very quiet and unobtrusive way, playing an important role in the development of social capital and more cohesive communities. Much of the literature on social capital (e.g. Putnam, 2000) distinguishes between *bonding* social capital (for example amongst people from the same faith backgrounds or people with similar interests) and *bridging* social capital (for example across different ethnic groups). The Study findings suggest that the work going on in parishes contributes more to the former than to the latter. There is, however, considerable evidence of the development of bridging social capital amongst, for example, families from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds attending activities such as Mothers and Toddlers groups. The data suggest that bridging social capital is more likely to develop amongst participants in family-oriented activities such as groups for parents of young children than amongst those involved in activities such as lunch clubs, where project users tend to be more homogenous. It appears, however, that the development of bridging social capital is mainly occurring at the local and individual level rather than at the strategic level, for example between leaders of different faiths.

The development of bonding social capital in this way suggests that there is some potential for local communities in our twelve parishes to organise themselves further to address common problems. Study participants provided a few examples of initiatives that had developed as a result of local people moving on from working together on one issue to campaign on an additional commonly felt concern (see section 16.3 above). There was evidence also at the very local level of some barriers being broken down, for example across different parts of an estate, or between young and older residents, and of some people feeling safer and more engaged with others in their area as a result of their participation in church projects.

At present the relatively few examples of the development of bridging social capital suggests that more work is needed (by churches and others) to facilitate links between different 'identity groups' within local communities. But the data suggest that local churches can in some circumstances (for example through making available suitable human and material resources) play a part in developing more cohesive communities. The very broad and inclusive definitions of 'community' provided by many Study participants also suggest a willingness amongst many community members to encompass diversity in the pursuit of shared goals.

#### 21.1.2 Social inclusion

The projects we studied worked with pre-school children, young people, older people, family groups, people with learning disabilities and many others in some of the most disadvantaged inner city areas and outer estates in Birmingham. While they were rarely working with individuals whose difficulties demanded highly specialist expertise (for example drug users or people with serious mental health problems) they were often providing services and facilitating social contacts for people who were not in touch with other agencies. In many areas there were few other community resources; in

several places we heard of the importance of services being *local* and personalised to meet individual needs, and of people who had felt excluded by other organisations feeling welcomed and accepted in church-organised projects. Although the ability to receive services and participate in organised activities does not in itself constitute social inclusion, the Study findings do suggest that the links developed through such involvement did contribute to project users' feelings of involvement and inclusion in their communities.

This suggests that churches are making important contributions to reaching marginalised or stigmatised community members.

#### 21.1.3 Responsiveness to local needs

Some parishes had developed their community activities following some form of community survey or needs assessment. In others the approach had been more 'ad hoc' and based on a perception of a gap in services rather than a clear evidence base. In parishes where services were provided mainly by volunteers rather than paid staff the decision about what services to provide may also have been based simply on an assessment of what could be done without too much further investment of human or financial resources, or on an awareness of what fitted with potential volunteers' availability and interests.

In any case, there was in all parishes an expressed concern to meet local need and respond as far as possible to the concerns of community members. In many parishes this was seen as inextricably bound up with a sense of mission and service and a desire to demonstrate and share the love of God. The ability to be relatively flexible with resources (both of buildings and people) appears to have made this easier for churches than it might be for statutory agencies or voluntary organisations operating on a more formal contract basis.

In an increasingly formalised and contract-led welfare culture, this ability to be flexible and responsive is noteworthy, and is one of the distinctive features of the projects studied.

#### 21.1.4 Motivated volunteer workforce

Discussions with individual church volunteers suggest that worshippers' motivations for volunteering are often different from those of 'secular' volunteers, focusing on the desire to show God's love in a practical way and be of service as an integral part of one's faith. These factors exert a strong influence on worshippers, although many still need to be asked or encouraged to get involved in volunteering.

While church volunteers are also often still subject to the same 'lifestyle pressures' as others, the strong desire to be of service, and to find a practical way of expressing one's faith, does offer a new dimension to the secular concept of volunteering and a distinct contribution to meeting local need.

#### 21.1.5 Leadership by the clergy

The data show the vital role played by clergy as leaders. They 'set the tone' through preaching and teaching in formal and informal ways about the importance of the church reaching out to its local community. They also provide an example through their own involvement with other agencies. Most importantly, they are crucial to both recruiting and motivating volunteers. They encourage people to get involved and often know well how to match volunteers to projects and activities. Moreover they are often the people who can address problems in relationships between individuals, and who can form links with other agencies and with diocesan structures.

This crucial leadership role was sometimes under-played by clergy themselves, but it was stressed by church volunteers and by lay church leaders. It seems important that it is given the acknowledgement it deserves and the part that clergy play in encouraging volunteering and making links between different groups is duly recognised.

#### 21.1.6 Physical capacity

Several of our Study parishes possessed, or had further developed, buildings that could be used as the base for projects to benefit the wider local community as well as their own worshippers. Indeed several felt that it was incumbent upon them to use these resources for community benefit rather than leave large buildings empty for most of the week.

Our Study parishes thus offered a valuable resource to their local communities, as a setting for church-organised activities, a base in which other organisations could arrange events, a space for other organisations to rent, a venue for meetings and a facility that could also be hired by individuals. In many areas the variety of activities taking place in church buildings could simply not have happened without this resource, since the absence of other community facilities meant there was no alternative space.

#### 21.1.7 Availability of funding

None of our Study parishes appeared to be well-endowed financially, but many had secured funding from sources such as the Church Urban Fund, charitable trusts and statutory bodies to enable them to carry out a range of activities. Some supplemented this by renting out space to other agencies and individuals, usually at a subsidised rate. The ability to secure external funding, and to make careful use of the resources available, was seen as an essential attribute that enhanced the contribution parishes were able to make to their local communities. The challenge of securing external funding is, however, likely to grow in complexity if churches decide to increase their role in contracting with statutory bodies for provision of services. The need to operate in an environment where both collaboration and competition are encouraged will demand a sophisticated understanding of the demands of statutory funders and of the potential risks of co-option and loss of independence (Gronbjerg, 1993; Russell, Scott and Wilding, 1996).



## **22. Evidence to support a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities**

The twelve Study parishes, then, offer many positive examples of the Church working effectively and relatively quietly in many local communities to address unmet needs, build relationships and provide resources. In taking this work forward, we suggest that a number of other issues raised by the Study findings need further consideration, both at a parish and Diocesan level:

- The use of church buildings
- The question of evangelism
- The changing focus of the church
- Inter-parish, ecumenical and inter-faith co-operation
- Volunteer recruitment, support and management
- The trend towards formalisation
- Capacity issues
- Models of organisation.

### **22.1 The use of church buildings**

Some of our Study parishes had been motivated to develop social welfare and other community activities in part because they felt it was important to make good use of large (and often expensive to maintain) buildings. In section 13.5 we noted that this desire had in several instances acted as a catalyst for development of a variety of services and groups, and for use by other organisations. In several parishes, buildings owned by the church were the only physical resource available to the community. One church was about to embark on a major project to adapt two of its buildings to make them more accessible for community use. Others had been able to make flexible use of partitions to make it possible to use their buildings both for worship and for secular purposes. We note, however, that some churches are restricted in the ways in which they can use their buildings because, for example, of their Listed Building status.

We noted also (section 15.4) that some people felt comfortable to participate in church-organised activities only because they took place in spaces separate from those used at other times for worship.

The data suggest, then, that more thought might be given to ways in which church buildings can be used to provide a community resource, bearing in mind both the need for sensitivity to their primary use for worship and also the concerns of some non-Christians about dual use of space.

### **22.2 The question of evangelism**

Some Study participants told us that evangelism was not a motivating factor behind the development of community projects; indeed many were very explicit about this. Although we found no evidence of project users being deterred from using church-organised projects because of concerns about evangelism, there was some evidence of other voluntary and statutory agencies having reservations about working with Christians or Christian

projects. Also some project users were adamant that they would have been unhappy should anyone have tried to convert them to Christianity. (This appeared to be more of an issue for those of no faith than for members of other faiths.) And a few project users would not have liked activities in which they were involved to have taken place in premises also used for worship.

There was some evidence that the nature of the user group and of the activity in question, along with the project's relationship with the church, had a bearing on potential users' decisions about involvement. For example, most older people did not seem to have had many dilemmas about attending a lunch club where grace was not said, in a building separate from that used for worship. In contrast, young people who felt a degree of peer pressure were less certain about attending a youth club associated with the church.

For most project users, the church label does not appear to have been a barrier provided it was not used as a vehicle for proselytising. The matter of the Church's stance on evangelism will, however, need to be discussed and addressed in some way if individual churches are to increase their engagement in partnerships and work with a wider range of local people. The whole question of the link between community projects and faith is complex, and requires considerably more discussion, at a parish and Diocesan level.

### **22.3 The changing focus of the church**

Many Study participants noted that the focus of the Church as an institution is changing, and that churches are trying to develop new ways of engaging with local people (i.e. those who are not regular worshippers) that are not about evangelism. One of the most significant of these is the development of community projects which provide services not only to worshippers but to many other local people.

As suggested above, this changing focus raises a number of questions about the relationships between faith and community activity. It places new demands on clergy in terms of the range of skills required of them in addition to ministry and pastoral care of their congregation. It also potentially puts additional pressures on worshippers; as well as the expectations of peers that they will, for example, join a prayer group, arrange flowers, undertake church cleaning and help with Sunday School, there may be a whole set of new understandings about what being a member of a worshipping congregation entails – to do with volunteering and meeting community need. While this may be attractive to some people, it may act as a deterrent to others who simply want to enjoy reflective worship.

This changing focus, and the expectations and demands it creates, may need more discussion at a Diocesan as well as a parish level if the development of parish work with local communities is to grow further.

### **22.4 Inter-parish, ecumenical and inter-faith co-operation**

The Study provided few examples of inter-parish, ecumenical or inter-faith co-operation (with the exception of parishes already designated as Local Ecumenical Partnerships). While there were some instances of all of these

forms of co-operation at the relatively informal and individual levels, they did not appear to extend to the strategic level. For example, in several parishes there was evidence of good relationships between Muslim and Christian project users and other local people of different faiths, but no examples of joint work at the strategic level.

Given the relatively small size of some Church of England congregations – and worshipping communities in other parts of the Christian church – consideration of joint work across denominational boundaries might also be beneficial to all parties.

## 22.5 Volunteer recruitment, support and management

The Study offered many examples of committed volunteers providing services such as running lunch clubs, playgroups and so on, regularly over long periods of time. While some projects employed substantial numbers of paid staff, others were heavily dependent on volunteers. The commitment and tenacity of many church volunteers was seen by Study participants as a strength and a defining feature of several of the projects studied. Yet Study participants also referred to the difficulty recruiting church volunteers in some parishes. It was noted that some congregations are very small, and that 'lifestyle pressures' affect church worshippers in the same way as they do other members of the population. And as in secular agencies, people need to be encouraged or asked to volunteer (Davis Smith, 1998). They often do not themselves recognise the talents they have to offer.

Some projects appeared successful in involving other local people (i.e. not regular worshippers) who shared their values and wanted to support a project they saw as making a valuable contribution to the local community. It may be that more consideration will need to be given in the future to recruiting non-church volunteers. If this approach is adopted, care will be needed to ensure that the shared values and norms of behaviour that do so much to bond existing groups of volunteers are neither destroyed by the entry of additional volunteers nor act inadvertently to exclude potential volunteers. Consideration might also be given in a recruitment strategy to the question of diversity, to ensuring that church (and non-church) volunteers are as far as possible reflective of the local community and not drawn exclusively from any one segment of society such as women or older people.

In the future more attention may also be needed to supporting church volunteers, in particular against the effects of burn-out and peer pressure to become, and remain, involved. While continuity was seen in many parishes as a positive feature, it is important that it is not achieved at the expense of individuals' health and general well-being. If congregations dwindle at the same time as projects develop, pressure on existing volunteers to contribute more could increase. As the Study shows, church volunteers are often strongly motivated by their faith and desire to be of service, but they are not immune to competing pressures such as time and family commitments which affect other volunteers.

## 22.6 The trend towards formalisation

In several parishes we heard examples of the pressures caused by the need for projects to be accountable, not just to the church and its own management structures, but to external regulatory bodies. In isolated instances this was leading to the closure of individual initiatives, such as a Credit Union. Expectations of monitoring and accountability, and formalisation of roles, are likely to increase if churches take a greater role in contracting with statutory agencies. This has been shown by research with secular agencies to deter people from becoming involved in volunteering, and in particular from taking on leadership roles (Scott and Russell, 2000; Harris, 2001). Our twelve Study parishes generally appeared to benefit from the ability to be flexible, to set their own agenda, and to avoid the constraints of tight role definitions in projects.

If the role of parishes in organising social welfare activities is to develop further, careful consideration will need to be given to the management and accountability demands posed by contracting with governmental agencies. The challenges of such formalisation for clergy and lay management committees may go well beyond what many individuals wish, or feel equipped, to deal with. It may be that in some circumstances consolidation of current activities is a more appropriate option than growth.

## 22.7 Capacity issues

We discussed above the challenge of recruiting volunteers; the question of formalisation through contracting has added a further dimension to this issue. In several cases it was suggested that activities could not be expanded until questions of capacity - human, financial and physical - had been addressed. While the capacity of the church to provide services can be increased through participation in partnerships of various kinds, these too require organisational resources if they are to be sustainable. In some parishes expansion of church-organised projects can probably only be achieved through employment of paid staff. While this would provide the opportunity to offer more services, the implications in terms of management requirements and formalisation, as discussed above, would need serious consideration. The complexity of the task of managing such projects is substantial, for example in terms of recruiting and supervising paid staff and volunteers, dealing with financial matters, health and safety requirements and so on. Clergy and others responsible for overseeing the work may require further training in issues such as volunteer management, influencing the funding environment and assessing the needs for services.

Furthermore if the Church of England as a body, and the total number of Christian worshippers, is diminishing in size in some inner city areas, as some Study participants suggested, that too needs to be considered as part of the discussion about the capacity of the church, locally and across the Diocese, to sustain further community projects.

## 22.8 Models of organisation

Finally the data show that where churches are directly organising projects and activities to benefit their local communities, there are a number of possible approaches to organisation.

One model - which could be described as The Responsive Church model - is the relatively informal approach, with substantial volunteer involvement, interchangeable roles amongst church volunteers and project users, and a low degree of dependency on, and accountability to, external bodies. This model has advantages in that the church can retain its independence from external agencies and can plan and develop services flexibly and responsively according to perceived need without necessarily requiring the agreement of other organisations. There is perhaps greater potential in The Responsive Church model for project users to play a role in helping with the running of an activity, and to gain new skills as a result. Church volunteers too may be able to operate with greater flexibility than in projects where roles and responsibilities are more formalised.

On the other hand, the difficulty in recruiting volunteers experienced in several of our Study parishes may make activities difficult to sustain. It may limit the number and range of services that can be provided and the ability to meet the most pressing needs. In some parishes a lack of specialist skills may restrict the church's ability to address the more difficult problems presented by project users, for example long-standing mental health problems or drug use.

An alternative model of organisation - which could be described as The Contracted Project model - is more formalised, including greater differentiation of roles and increased involvement of paid staff (generally with volunteers in a supporting rather than leadership role). In this model the church is usually in receipt of some statutory funding, often on a contract basis. Volunteers' roles are more formalised, with job descriptions, structured support and supervision and recruitment and selection processes more reminiscent of paid jobs.

The Contracted Project model potentially offers the opportunity for increased provision of services, meeting a wider range of needs in a structured way. This enhanced service provision role in turn may make it possible for the church to have a bigger influence on statutory agencies and local policy makers.

The Contracted Project model can, however, present new challenges and move the church away from relative informality and independence of organisation, mission and management towards public service provision and preoccupation with the demands of external agencies. Increased employment of paid staff requires clergy and lay leaders to acquire additional skills and responsibilities to respond to the complex management challenges associated with staff employment, accountability to external bodies and complying with the requirements of funders. Adopting this model of organisation may also prompt questions on the part of external agencies about the links between faith, evangelism and the development of community

projects. There may be a risk of eroding the distinctive features (such as the desire to demonstrate and share God's love, and to be of service) which provide the 'added value' discussed in section 20.2, and which make church projects attractive in the first place. The data confirm the importance of these attributes, and the need to retain them.

Some research further suggests that The Contracted Project model, can, as discussed in section 22.6 above, act as a deterrent to volunteer involvement where people wish to act in a more informal manner (Russell and Scott, 1997). And in some situations, volunteers may feel that their ability to act flexibly is restricted by the presence of paid staff.

An assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of The Responsive Church and Contracted Project models will need to be a part of any discussions about a strategic approach to the development and sustainability of parish work with local communities. While we have presented only two extreme models, other possibilities, or variant forms of these two models, exist, which could be developed along a spectrum between informality and formality where churches may choose to locate their activities. One possibility might be for church projects to act more as social enterprises, generating revenue through, for example, the hiring out of rooms for conference facilities, and using the resources gained to help them retain their independence and cross-subsidise other activities. It would be useful for there to be more discussion, at parish and Diocesan levels, about the relative merits of the various approaches, the extent to which increased formalisation is either *desired* or *desirable*, and the ways in which the distinctive features of church-organised projects can be retained.

Any such discussion will need to bear in mind the wider policy context, in particular the 'civil renewal' agenda (discussed in section 3 above) and the concern of central government to see faith communities in general as instruments of social policy (discussed in section 6). Other research has shown that involvement in such work takes considerable resources of time and energy, and potentially draws partners (i.e. those working together on a project) away from their core activities such as providing locally based services (Rochester, 2001). A distinctive feature of many of our Study parishes was their ability to provide informal care on a local basis to people who had few other sources of support. If churches do take a decision to develop into more formalised, and larger, providers of social welfare services, and / or to diversify further into other activities in line with government policy, they need to be aware of the possible tensions. They will also need to consider the extent to which they wish to be involved in *shaping* public policy in relation to social welfare, civil renewal or regeneration as opposed to policy *taking*. The former would involve trying actively to influence the relevant agencies and policies, while the latter implies a more passive role through, for example, scanning and interpreting the environment or responding to consultation exercises.

## 22.9 Conclusion

In this final section we have highlighted a number of issues emerging from analysis of the data which require further consideration in order to support decisions about a strategic approach to the development of parish work with local communities. In particular:

- we have suggested the need for attention to issues of organisational capacity, especially the involvement of church and possibly other local volunteers
- we have highlighted issues related to the links between faith and community activity, both in relation to project users' concerns about evangelism and the changing, and broadening, focus of the church towards more work with its local population
- we have also suggested that more thought might be given to possible collaborations, where appropriate, across parish, denominational and faith boundaries
- finally, we have built on the Study findings to draw attention to two different models for the development of parish community work in the future.

All of these issues would benefit from further consideration by church leaders and worshippers in individual parishes. They also clearly merit discussion and decision at the Diocesan level, to assist parishes in deciding the future direction of their work and to support its long-term sustainability.



## **APPENDIX ONE – PROFILES OF PARISHES**

The following profiles of the twelve Study parishes are presented in anonymous form to preserve the confidentiality of Study participants. The material has been drawn from two main sources:

- Factual information (verbal and written) provided by church leaders
- Statistical information (including 2001 census figures) provided by the Diocesan Community Regeneration Department.



## **Parish 1**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish as a whole is a residentially mixed outer city neighbourhood several miles from Birmingham city centre and includes a very disadvantaged estate on which the project studied is based.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was about 9400; the estate in question has 1200 properties, many with 3-4 occupants.
- The estate's population is mainly white (as is 87% of the parish as a whole), but with a few Black families, some Chinese people and a few Kosovans.
- 50% of the estate's population is transitory; with a lot of emergency housing. The school has a very high turnover rate.
- Unemployment on the estate is around 17%.
- There are few community facilities apart from the project studied and a local authority-run community centre.

### **The Church and its worshippers**

- The church has two worshipping congregations, one at the main church outside the estate and one which meets in a school on the estate.
- Average Sunday morning attendance at the estate church is about 40, mainly white and mostly families.
- The estate congregation is lay-led; worship is informal, evangelical and family oriented. The lay leadership team works under the overall auspices of the main church and the joint Parochial Church Council.

### **The Church's engagement with its local population**

- The church runs a Centre on the estate focusing on the needs of families. A variety of activities (mainly family oriented) take place there; these include coffee mornings, counselling sessions, playgroups. The Centre runs a furniture store. There is a house group for the children of congregation members; all other activities are open. People can also be sign-posted to other organisations where Centre staff do not have the expertise to deal with the problem, e.g. debt advice.
- Other organisations (both Christian and secular) also run activities at the Centre, including youth groups, Sure Start and an employment surgery. Occasional adult education classes are run in conjunction with the local school and Barnardos.
- A total of about 120 people take part in the Centre's activities in an average week.
- The Centre employs a Centre Manager, Project Worker and Community Worker, and has some part-time assistance from a Youth Worker and an Administrator. The Centre involves a small number of volunteers, mainly but not entirely members of the congregation from the estate church.
- Some worshippers are involved with the local Residents' Association, one of the few organisations based on the estate.

## **Parish 2**

### **The parish and its population**

- The area is a mixture of suburban and Urban Priority Area; the estate on which the project is based represents an enclave of inner city deprivation in an otherwise modestly comfortable suburb.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was 6450, of whom 6% were aged under 5 and 17% over 60.
- In 2001 81% of the population described themselves as white; 10% as Asian / Asian British and 5% as Black / Black British.
- The population is changing as more Asian families and refugees from countries such as Iraq, Albania and countries of the former Yugoslavia move into the parish.
- The area has few community facilities apart from the project studied (some previously existing projects have closed).

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The parish has been a Local Ecumenical Partnership (Anglican and Methodist) since 2000, with one worshipping congregation.
- The average Sunday morning congregation is about 65, and comprises mainly people over retirement age. Worshippers include five Black families; the remainder are white.
- Worship is a combination of Anglican Eucharist and Methodist preaching. There is a full-time Anglican vicar and part-time Methodist minister.

### **The Church's engagement with its local population**

- The church has set up three social and community work projects, now operating as free-standing projects with their own management committees. One of the projects runs a variety of activities including an Employment Resource Centre, women's groups and a variety of groups for people aged 50+. Staff are also involved in community development and a major local regeneration initiative. Another project is a social enterprise with the aim of providing conference, meeting and activity space for commercial, non-commercial and charitable use, including some groups organised by the other church-initiated projects. The third project is a limited company providing health and social care services.
- The projects employ 15 paid workers; there is little volunteer involvement.
- A bereavement counselling group and Punjabi group meet on the church premises. The latter works with children to teach them about their origins, language and culture. Uniformed organisations also use the church buildings and attend some Sunday services.
- Clergy and a small number of worshippers are involved in the management committees of the various projects. Two worshippers act as school governors.

## **Parish 3**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish is an Urban Priority Area, with high levels of deprivation, crime, drugs and poor housing. Many residents experience isolation and / or depression. There are many single occupancy households.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was 8000, of whom about 7% were aged under 5 (and 30% under 20) and 20% were over retirement age.
- The BME population of the parish is about 40%. About 30% of the total population are Asian in origin (and a mix of Muslim and Sikh in terms of faith).
- There are few community facilities and activities apart from some clubs and sports facilities, and very little social engagement.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The number of Sunday morning worshippers varies between 70 and 110 adults and between 15 and 40 children.
- About half the congregation is aged under 60; the remainder are over retirement age. There are also many full-time carers.
- The congregation includes 12 African Caribbean worshippers; the remainder are white.
- The style of worship is described as moderate / liberal catholic.

### **The Church's engagement with its local population**

- The church has set up a Centre, with an independent management committee chaired by the vicar, to organise a range of community projects. These include a club for people aged 50+, parent and toddler group, IT project, scout group, martial arts group, healthy eating café.
- Some activities are run in partnership with other agencies, e.g. youth provision in partnership with Barnardos and activities for under 5s with Sure Start.
- The Centre hires out space to other organisations and individuals for parties and social events.
- Participation in the Centre sponsored activities is mainly by the local white community, while the Asian community regularly hires space for social events.
- The Centre employs seven staff, mainly on a part-time basis, and involves 16 volunteers, about half of whom worship at the church.
- The vicar and a small number of worshippers are active as local councillors and school governors.

## **Parish 4**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish is a very deprived area, with associated problems of crime, violence and unemployment.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was about 16,500, almost all white. Many are very long-standing (and second and third generation) residents of the estate.
- A small number of refugees and asylum seekers live in the parish.
- 8% of the population is aged under 5; 15% are over retirement age.
- The parish includes a variety of leisure and sports facilities; it is particularly rich in facilities for young people. There is also an advice centre.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The parish has been designated a Local Ecumenical Partnership and joint ministry of Anglicans and Methodists for many years.
- The average Sunday morning congregation is between 40 and 50, with more middle-aged and older people than younger worshippers.
- About one third of worshippers are African Caribbean.
- The style of worship varies between Anglican and Methodist, depending on which minister is leading the service.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- The church owns a building used as a family centre. This is managed by a committee chaired by the Methodist minister and includes some worshippers from the church.
- The Family Centre houses several statutory and voluntary agencies and a community nursery.
- Several other groups initiated or run by members of the congregation meet in the church. These include a Stay and Play group for children, youth clubs / groups, football teams, Friendship Group and Credit Union. These activities are all organised by worshippers.
- A variety of other organisations meet on the church premises, including the Asylum Seekers Support Group, a brass band and a dancing school. The church also lets rooms in the church to some commercial organisations.
- The Methodist minister spends a major part of his time on community work, and is a member of the management committees of several organisations and the board of a regeneration partnership.
- Both clergy are school governors; one church volunteer is also involved in other local organisations.
- The church regards the execution of its Offices as a critical means of establishing and maintaining relationships with the community, and has employed a part-time Pastoral Assistant to help with this.

## **Parish 5**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish is an inner city area, but very mixed in that it includes some quite wealthy suburbs and also some very poor areas.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was about 14000; of these 6% were aged under 5 and 18% over 60.
- The parish has a BME population of around 60% (about 6000 people of Asian origin and 1800 African Caribbean). There is a large Sikh population (about 3300), but also significant numbers of Hindus and Muslims.
- The parish is relatively well supplied with community facilities; in addition to those owned by the church there is a leisure centre, library and sports facilities.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The average Sunday morning congregation is 100 worshippers, covering a very wide age range.
- About 60 worshippers are white and 40 are Black, with two Asian families. The numbers include some African asylum seekers.
- There is about one third turnover in the congregation every few years.
- Most worshippers are employed, in a wide range of occupations, many very well-paid and some in low-paid jobs.
- The style of worship is Anglo-Catholic and progressive.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- The church sees itself as an enabler of activities rather than a direct organiser or sponsor. The exception is the youth club that is supported by several Anglican churches. It is planned to develop this, offering a drop-in facility and some joint work with schools.
- The church provides free or reduced cost space in its hall for a range of organisations providing services to the community. The hall is adjacent to, but separate from, the church, and includes meeting space, offices, kitchen etc. Groups using the hall include a mental health group, parent and toddler group, youth club and coffee groups. In an average week these groups involve nearly 100 people, and are supported by about 15 volunteers.
- Other organisations using the church hall include Black led churches, several karate groups, Tai Chi group, local college, training organisation, after school club, keep fit group and Age Concern. These organisations' activities together involve about 550 people in an average week.
- The church employs two youth workers and three cleaning, caretaking and administrative staff. Organisations using the hall employ their own staff.
- The vicar is involved in several local organisations, including a school, Credit Union and a group working with asylum seekers. A small number of worshippers are involved with other local organisations.

## **Parish 6**

### **The parish and its population**

- The area is deprived, with high housing density and much multiple occupation. The 2000 Community Profile, undertaken by the church, identified a number of problems relating to community safety; leisure and cultural facilities, employment and residential stability.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was about 7300; 9% were under 5 and 14% over retirement age.
- About 4100 of the parish's population in 2001 described themselves as Asian / Asian British (of whom about 75% were Muslim).
- The area contains few community facilities; those in existence include a fitness centre, swimming pool, sewing and English classes.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The average Sunday morning congregation comprises 90 worshippers.
- The age range of the congregation is quite broad; about one third are children and the majority of adults are young or middle-aged.
- About 50 of the congregation are white; 10 are Asian and 20 African Caribbean.
- The style of worship is evangelical / charismatic and unrobed. There are many non-Anglican worshippers.
- There was no vicar in post at the time of the Study.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- The church has established an independent project with its own management committee. It provides a variety of activities mainly geared to the needs of families. These include a nursery, playgroup, parent and toddler group, youth club, holiday play scheme, after school club and Saturday group.
- A Family Support Team works with individual families, offering both home visits and sessions at the project's base, for example parenting courses and play workshops.
- The project employs 10 full-time and 5 part-time staff, supported by 33 volunteers. The activities are well used (for example the parent and toddler group is used by 50 adults and 70 children in an average week).
- Some other organisations use space in the church buildings regularly (for example the Neighbourhood Forum), while others rent space on an occasional basis.
- There is limited clergy and lay involvement in other local organisations.

## **Parish 7**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish includes an area that was originally very rural and also a new estate built in the 1970s on the outskirts of Birmingham.
- The parish today is quite deprived, with significant poverty and high numbers of single parents.
- The total population of the parish in 2001 was about 9,000, of whom 6% were aged under 5 and 17% over 60.
- The population is predominantly white (92%). A small number of asylum seekers are resident on a temporary basis.
- There are a few community facilities, all built in the last 20 years. These include a library, gym, two tenants' halls, day centre and public library.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- There are two churches in the parish, a traditional Anglican church in a rural setting (but drawing some worshippers from nearby urban areas) and a combined school / community church Centre in the estate setting. The latter is a Local Ecumenical Partnership.
- There are two different congregations, but with some interchange between them. The Anglican vicar ministers to both congregations, assisted by the Centre community worker who is also an ordained Methodist minister.
- The traditional Anglican church has about 120 worshippers on a Sunday, spread over three services. The average age is about 40; worshippers tend to be in employment and higher earners. All but two are white.
- The community centre church has a much smaller and older congregation (13 or 14 worshippers of retirement age, all except one of whom is white).
- There are no major differences in worship style between the two churches. Both are ecumenical and 'middle of the road' in style.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- The church's Community Project is located in the joint school / community centre / church venue. Its management committee includes clergy, project users and volunteers and some external people.
- The Anglican vicar and Community Worker are closely involved in most local networks and campaigns; inter-agency co-operation is a major feature of the Project's work and is considered as essential to meeting the needs of the community.
- Activities run directly by the Project include a lunch club for older people and the Junior Project.
- The Project employs several part-time and sessional staff to run these activities, supported by 20-30 volunteers.
- A variety of other local groups use the Centre; these include a playgroup and parent and toddler group, Pentecostal Church, Credit Union, community newspaper and Professional Workers Forum. While independent, they are very closely linked with the other groups and with Project staff and volunteers through joint work or networks.

## **Parish 8**

### **The parish and its population**

- The area is mainly residential, and is described as 'suburban deprived', with substantial poverty and high numbers of single parents. Part of the parish is quite rural.
- The population of the parish was 6400 in 2001; of this total 6% were aged under 5 and 23% over retirement age.
- The population is mainly white; in 2001 7% described themselves as Asian or Asian British and 4% as Black or Black British.
- The area has few community facilities apart from the resources provided by the church – two schools and an inactive community centre on the edge of the parish.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The church has an average Sunday morning congregation of 36.
- The vast majority of worshippers are white; very few are aged under 50 and about 75% are over retirement age.
- Just over half of worshippers live outside the parish.
- The style of worship is described as modern, eclectic and moderately catholic.
- There was no vicar in post at the time of the Study.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- The church organises various activities which take place in the church Centre. These include two parent and toddler groups (one in conjunction with Sure Start), a lunch club for older people and lunch deliveries. Some of this work is run on a contract basis with the local authority.
- The church has been modified so that access to the hall and community rooms (all within the one building) can be gained without going through the sacred space containing the main worship area. The lunch club, crèche, craft group for people with learning disabilities and other activities all take place in these modern rooms.
- These activities are run with the support of nine paid staff (8 part-time) and about 20 volunteers.
- Other groups using the church Centre include a playgroup, community events, Sure Start pre-school activities and a disabled learners group. There are also commercial lets for parties, dance group and slimming club.
- The church work is managed by the Parochial Church Council, but there is also a legally separate 'Projects' committee which runs the community projects and applies for funding.
- Broader links with other local organisations have been hampered in the recent past by the lack of a vicar.



## **Parish 9**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish contains a mixture of three types of housing: tower block flats, regular council housing and private houses.
- The population of the parish in 2001 was 7000; this includes a large number of young families (7% of the population was aged under 5), but also 24% over retirement age.
- The population is predominantly (88%) white.
- There is a high level of unemployment in the parish; in 2002 25% of all households included one person who was unemployed.
- There is a good range of community facilities and activities, based on the local community hall, a neighbourhood school and three churches.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- Church attendance varies between 50 and 70 worshippers.
- The age spread of worshippers is quite broad, with quite a high number of younger people.
- About 80% of the congregation are white and 20% are African Caribbean.
- 20% of worshippers are in paid employment.
- The style of worship is high Anglican, but also loosely evangelical, informal, accessible and at times charismatic.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- A range of activities are organised directly by the church or in partnership with other organisations, mainly focusing on young people and older residents. They include a youth club, parent and toddler group, luncheon club and some sports and IT activities.
- The activities take place in a centre physically separate from, but owned by, the Church.
- The activities are overseen by a regeneration team with delegated authority to run them, although the vicar takes a keen interest.
- The church also runs a number of courses on issues such as child care and IT skills.
- A resource and information shop will be opening in the near future.
- These activities are run with the support of 15 staff, including 8 youth workers and two social care workers.
- About 30 volunteers are involved in these activities, many of whom are non-worshippers.
- Some other local organisations meet on the church premises, including a group of people with disabilities and sports groups.
- The church also has extensive involvement in the regeneration of the surrounding area. It employs three regeneration officers; some church volunteers are also involved in the programme of regeneration, mainly through participation in a local community housing association.

## **Parish 10**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish includes both a small relatively affluent area and some outer estates. There is a mixture of well-established residents and others who are more temporary, including some in emergency social housing.
- Three estates are in a New Deal for Communities area; one is in an SRB area; housing regeneration is taking place on two estates.
- The total population of the parish in 2001 was about 28,000, of whom 20,000 live on outer estates.
- In 2001 7% of the population was aged under 5 and 21% over 60.
- The BME population of the parish is about 11% (mainly African Caribbean or mixed race).
- Unemployment is slightly above the Birmingham average, rising to 18% on some estates.
- The parish includes a large number of schools, plus some community centres and halls.

### **The Church and its worshippers**

- The parish includes a main parish church and district churches on three estates, organised through a team ministry structure.
- Average Sunday morning attendance at the parish church is 175; the district churches have much smaller congregations.
- The congregation of the parish church includes a high number of people over retirement age; those under 60 are mainly in paid work; 5% are Black.
- The style of worship at the parish church is 'middle of the road, but embracing great diversity' in terms of style and use of music.

### **The Church's engagement with its local population**

- The church runs a large number of groups (uniformed organisations, youth group, group for older people) mainly for members of its own congregation, though non-worshippers also attend. The initiation of social welfare projects to benefit the wider population is planned following re-development of buildings owned by the church.
- About 50 volunteers are involved in running the existing activities.
- The church is a major focus for the local population, and many organisations (including a playgroup, historical society, fellowship groups, drama group) meet on its premises. The church is committed to providing meeting space and facilitating networks for others.
- Clergy and worshippers are very involved with a range of local statutory and voluntary organisations, acting for example as school governors, magistrates, member of New Deal for Communities board, and as volunteers in a range of social, political, amenity and community action groups.
- There is also substantial involvement both from worshippers and other local people in a project to restore buildings owned by the church and make them more suited to community use.

## **Parish 11**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish is an inner city area, which includes a mixture of Victorian terraced housing and a 1930s council estate.
- The population is a mix of long-standing (especially on the council estate) and transitory residents.
- Unemployment is 2-3 times the national average.
- The population in 2001 was about 8300, of whom 10% were aged under 5 and 16% over 60.
- About half of the population described themselves as Asian / Asian British in 2001 (most of whom are Pakistani Muslim).
- The parish has very few community facilities apart from schools, a small mosque, some small churches and some 'declining' associations such as a Working Men's Club.

### **The Church and its worshippers**

- The average Sunday morning congregation is about 30, from a mix of age groups, mainly white European, but with a small number of Black and Asian families.
- Few members of the congregation are in paid employment.
- The church's style of worship is evangelical and informal.

### **The Church's engagement with its local population**

- This church runs a variety of activities that benefit the local community, including a café, employment advice service, 54 place nursery (supported by a local hospital), youth project, training courses and groups for mothers and children. Training in ICT and life skills is offered to people under the age of 30.
- These activities take place both in the main church centre, which can be used flexibly by means of moveable partitions, and in adjacent buildings.
- The church employs 35 paid staff to run these projects, and involves a small number of volunteers in addition. Some worshippers, as well as people from other local agencies, are involved in the project management committees.
- The church also lets rooms to other organisations, hires out rooms for conferences and other events and organises the catering.
- The projects are all well used by local people (for example an average of 50-60 people each day use the café; the employment service has 600 registered clients; the youth project is in touch with about 100 young people). Users and staff very much reflect the ethnicity of the area.
- The vicar and a small number of worshippers are involved with other local organisations, e.g. as a school governor, but the lack of local organisations limits opportunities for involvement.

## **Parish 12**

### **The parish and its population**

- The parish is an outer city urban area, consisting mainly of council housing, though private ownership has risen recently. The area has high levels of unemployment and deprivation.
- The population of the parish was about 7500 in 2001, 92% of whom were white.
- There are high numbers of young people (7% under 5; 29% under 20) and single parents, but also 24% over retirement age.
- The only community facilities are those provided by the church and the college.

### **The church and its worshippers**

- The average Sunday morning congregation is 20, with 50 people attending on special occasions.
- The congregation is predominantly white, and covers a broad age range. 60% are unemployed.
- The style of worship is informal and evangelical.

### **The church's engagement with its local population**

- The activities organised by the church are geared mainly to families and young people. They include a parent and toddler group, young leaders group, youth group, children's group and support group for children with autism. There is a weekly lunch for older people and some additional activities for participants such as theatre trips. The church also runs holiday play schemes and a community banking system.
- Activities take place within the church building, but in space separate from the areas used for worship.
- The church employs a community and youth officer and involves 13 volunteers in its community projects.
- The church also rents office space to a Credit Union and hires space regularly to a women's group, bereavement support group, a dance group and a local college.
- One worshipper is involved with the local neighbourhood renewal project; the vicar is involved with the bereavement support group and is a school governor.

## APPENDIX TWO

### A - Interview questions for church leaders

1. Do you have a shorthand label or title for the following groups of people:
  - People who attend regular worship who are active participants in church organised activities?
  - Members of the local population in general (people who live in the area who generally do not attend regular worship)?
  - Members of the local population who take part in activities organised or sponsored by the church?
2. What is your understanding of the word 'community' in relation to this church?
3. What would you describe as being the over-arching reasons for the church becoming involved with its local population beyond the organisation of worship?
4. Why do you think regular worshippers have wanted to get involved in community activities?
5. Have there been any barriers to regular worshippers getting involved?
6. How have / how might have these barriers been overcome?
7. What have been the benefits of the church's involvement with the community?
8. What do you feel have been the main achievements?
9. What are the future plans for the church's involvement with the community?
10. What would you say are the critical success factors in making the project(s) work?

### B - Focus group questions for church volunteers

1. What made you decide to get involved in the activity / activities you take part in?
2. What have been the benefits of the activities?
  - For you personally
  - For other members of the congregation
  - For specific members of the community (e.g. users of the particular service / activity)
  - For the broader community
3. Have there been any particular challenges involved in setting up and running these activities?

4. How have you addressed these challenges?
5. What would you say have been the church's main achievements in getting involved in activities with / for the wider community?
6. What is your understanding of the word 'community' in relation to this church?

**C – Focus group questions for project users**

1. Can you tell me what made you decide to get involved in the activity you take part in?
2. Did the fact that the activity was run by a church affect your decision about getting involved?
3. Have your views of this changed or remained the same since you got involved?
4. What have been the benefits for you of being involved?
5. Do you think anyone apart from the users / participants has benefited?  
If so, in what ways have they benefited?
6. What do you understand by the word 'community' in relation to this church?

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