



faith in the community

the contribution of
faith-based organisations
to rural voluntary action

by Jemma Grieve, Véronique Jochum, Belinda Pratten and Claire Steel



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Rural Communities
Tackling rural disadvantage

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This report forms part of NCVO's programme of research and policy development, focussing specifically on the needs of voluntary and community organisations working in rural areas. We aim to increase awareness and understanding of the scope and impact of rural voluntary activity and develop and promote policy to support the work of the voluntary sector in rural areas. NCVO's rural work is funded by the Commission for Rural Communities.

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1. Introduction

part

1

In recent years the role of faith communities and faith-based organisations in public life has become a strong theme within government policy, particularly in relation to civil renewal and engagement; community cohesion; and the delivery of some public services. In each of these areas their role overlaps with that of voluntary and community organisations more generally, yet there has been relatively little exploration of the relationship between generic and faith-based organisations, for example in terms of the activities they provide or the challenges they face.

This report examines the role of faith-based organisations in voluntary action, and their contribution to community life, in rural areas. It draws on the experience of those working in this field to identify the type of services and activities faith-based organisations provide and the resources they are able to mobilise in support of these activities. A particular focus is the changes and challenges they face and how they are responding to these.

The report is written from a voluntary sector perspective, reflecting NCVO's interest in supporting voluntary action in general as well as the specific concerns of its rural programme. Over the last six years, NCVO's rural programme has helped to develop a better understanding of the role and scope of voluntary and community organisations in rural areas, their contribution to community life, their needs and concerns. This current study builds on this work. Therefore as well as exploring the particular contribution of faith-based organisations, it also considers the relationship between faith-based voluntary action and the wider voluntary and community sector in rural communities. For example it asks whether faith-based organisations have a distinctive contribution to make and therefore require specialist support, or whether they share common interests and face similar challenges to secular organisations, suggesting greater scope for mutual learning and support.

The context for this work is therefore partly a rural one: what are the needs of rural communities and how are voluntary and community organisations responding to these needs? It is also concerned with current policy developments and the increasing emphasis on voluntary sector involvement, and the involvement of faith-based organisations in particular, in key policy areas. But it is also partly both: how relevant is this policy agenda to rural communities and what is the role of the church and of faith-based organisations within them?

During the summer and autumn of 2006, NCVO undertook a series of focus groups with faith-based organisations and specialist (faith-based) and generic infrastructure bodies working in rural areas to explore these questions. We also commissioned fifteen case exemplars to examine the activities and achievements of the organisations involved in some detail. This report draws on the experiences of focus group participants and the case studies to develop a picture of the contribution that these organisations make to rural communities. The report is divided in to two parts:

Part one sets out the background to the project and the research findings and identifies key themes and issues for the future.

Part two describes the fifteen case exemplars.

Terminology

This report uses the term 'faith-based organisations' to refer to religious institutions and congregations as well as organisations that are to some extent grounded in a faith tradition, but do not necessarily involve any activities that are explicitly religious.

The research focuses on faith-based organisations that are Christian, because of the demographics of rural communities, and within that group, it often refers to churches and church-led groups or activities, because of their significant presence within rural areas.

2. Setting the scene

2.1 The rural context

According to the most recent *State of the Countryside* report from the Commission for Rural Communities, there are a number of factors that impact on the quality of people's lives in rural areas and their access to a wide range of services. It is clear that more people are choosing to live in the countryside: rural populations are growing at a much faster rate than in urban areas, as urban to rural migration continues. For example in 2003-4 there was a net migration of 105,000 people into rural areas. There is also evidence to show that average incomes are higher in rural communities. However, alongside this relative affluence and the continuing popularity of rural life, there is a different picture of deprivation and isolation, both geographical and social. For example figures from the Commission for Rural Communities show that in these areas there is also:

- a lack of affordable housing, with house prices 10-15 times the level of local household incomes;
- an increase in income poverty, with households in less densely populated rural areas having lower incomes than those living in small settlements;
- a decline in the availability of services locally, including access to banks, post offices and petrol stations;
- an ageing population, with far fewer people aged 15-34 years living in rural areas; and
- labour shortages, limiting the growth of local businesses¹.

Yet rural deprivation is often hidden, in part because there is not the same concentration as exists in urban areas, but also because the indices of deprivation used by Government do not necessarily apply in rural areas. This is often compounded by the geographical isolation that is a feature of rural life, meaning that people must travel much greater distances in order to access services and to create and sustain social networks, including visits to friends and family. A lack of public transport infrastructure can make this particularly difficult, leaving those without access to private transport marginalised and isolated. At the same time scattered populations can make local needs harder to identify.

In this context, voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) make a vital contribution to rural communities: for example there are proportionately more charities in rural areas than in urban². VCOs undertake a range of activities, both formal and informal that play a key role in promoting associational life, building social capital and filling in the gaps left by the withdrawal of other sectors and services³. For example, the decline in the delivery of some basic services in rural areas has led to the sector taking on a range of roles more traditionally associated with the public and private sectors. There is also evidence that in some areas the sector has an economic as well as a social impact, partly as a consequence of organisations taking on a greater role in service delivery.

The rural VCS is characterised by a high number of smaller organisations, with very low incomes and highly reliant on the support of a small number of volunteers⁴. Previous research by NCVO has found those who do volunteer are frequently active in more than one group or project: overlapping membership and multiple involvement appear to be major features of rural community action⁵. Moreover, a significant

¹ Commission for Rural Communities, 2006, *State of the Countryside* The Stationery Office

² Wilding et al 2006 *The UK Voluntary Sector Almanac* NCVO

³ H Yates and V Jochum, 2003, *It's who you know that counts* NCVO

⁴ Yates, 2002, *Supporting Voluntary Action* NCVO

⁵ H Yates and V Jochum, 2003, *It's who you know that counts* NCVO

number of these volunteers are aged over 50 years and many are past retirement age, raising concerns about the long-term viability of voluntary action in rural areas.

2.2 The policy context

Throughout the last decade there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of the voluntary and community sector within public policy, and particularly on the sector's contribution to key government objectives, for example in relation to promoting active citizenship and civil renewal as well as improving the quality of life and quality of services in local areas. An aim has been to increase the sector's role in these policy areas because of the distinctive value that voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) can bring. A recent Government report suggested that this distinctiveness arises from: their institutional position, independent of government and the market; their motivation, driven by their mission and values for the public benefit, not personal financial gain; and their relationship with their users and/or members⁶. This policy agenda has created new opportunities for many VCOs, working in partnership with or under contract to the public sector, to further their own objectives where these coincide with those of government.

Within this agenda there has been a focus on the role of faith communities and faith-based organisations, particularly in relation to policies that promote local regeneration and civil renewal; community cohesion and integration; and the management and delivery of public services. For example, the Faith Communities Consultative Council (formerly the Inner Cities Religious Council) has been established to give faith communities a stronger voice in the development of government policy in relation to local regeneration programmes. Government has also issued guidance highlighting the 'potentially significant' contribution of faith communities to neighbourhood renewal.

The role of faith leaders and faith communities has also been central to the Government's community cohesion agenda, a focus of which has been the need to enhance inter-faith co-operation and combat extremism by promoting integration, particularly of people from Muslim communities. This is a theme of the Local Government White Paper, *Stronger, Prosperous Communities*, for example, and is the focus of the work of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, established in 2006 to make recommendations as to how to bring people of different faiths together.

The third area where there has been an emphasis on increasing the involvement of faith-based organisations is in relation to the delivery of public services, for example in the management of schools. In a speech given in 2005, the Prime Minister explicitly said that he would like to see the faith sector play a bigger role in service delivery, because of its track record of 'making a positive difference' in the past⁷. However, this focus on faith has not been without criticism. For example, there are real concerns that single faith schools will increase segregation, reducing the opportunities for young people of different faiths and backgrounds to come together as a matter of course. The implementation of the Equalities Act 2006, and particularly the regulations outlawing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, has provoked particular controversy and highlighted the potentially significant dissonance between secular values and religious beliefs.⁸

⁶ HM Treasury, dti and Home Office, 2005, *Exploring the Role of the Third Sector in public service reform* The Stationery Office

⁷ T Blair, 2005 Speech to Faithworks

⁸ These issues are examined in our forthcoming report *Faith and Voluntary Action: An overview of current evidence and debates*.

Why faith?

There appears to be a strong commitment from the Government to enabling faith-based organisations to contribute to the development of these policy areas. In part this may be linked to a belief in the role of faith as a motivation for voluntary action, as well as to the role of faith institutions within local communities, and particularly within black and minority ethnic communities. Research by Lowndes and Chapman has identified three distinct rationales for faith group involvement in civil renewal, focusing on:

- the role of faith groups in promoting community values and identities; linked to a concern with ‘remoralising the public sphere’ and with faith as a motivation for volunteering (normative rationale);
- the organisational capacity of faith-based organisations and their ability to mobilise resources, including people (staff, volunteers, members); physical assets, such as church buildings; and financial resources, including donations from church members (resource rationale); and
- the representative and leadership role of faith groups inside communities and within broader networks and partnerships (governance rationale).⁹

They also raised the possibility of a fourth rationale: integration, particularly the need to bring together different faith communities, which has come increasingly to the fore since the publication of their findings, as a consequence of the continued threat of Al Qaeda-related terrorism.

In practice these rationales are ‘not always explicit or consistent’ in policy statements, and may vary between policy contexts (and are not necessarily shared by faith groups themselves), as Lowndes and Chapman recognise. However, their work does provide a useful model of key drivers of the current agenda and a starting point from which to consider the contribution of faith communities and faith-based organisations.

2.3 Faith in rural communities

Our concern here is the relevance of this policy agenda to the particular needs and concerns of people living in rural areas. Given the decline in basic services in these areas, for example, faith-based organisations may be well-placed to fill this gap.

Whilst regeneration is not exclusively an urban issue, the challenges associated with the inner cities have tended to predominate. In part this is related to the hidden nature of deprivation in rural areas, discussed above: the 1998 Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, for example, was targeted at the 88 most deprived neighbourhoods in England, only five of which were in rural areas. Therefore it is likely that a different approach is needed to address rural deprivation.

Inter-faith co-operation and the integration of people from minority faith communities also does not appear to have the same resonance in rural areas as in some inner cities: research by the Commission for Rural Communities found that people of faith living in rural areas are predominantly Christian, with between 40% and 47% defining themselves as affiliated to (though not necessarily in regular contact with) the Anglican Church. The number of residents who identified themselves as having a faith other than Christian was generally too small to be

⁹ Lowndes and Chapman, 2005, *Faith, hope and clarity: developing a model of faith group involvement in civil renewal* De Montfort University

recorded¹⁰. This is not to say that there are not people of other faiths in rural communities, but that they are fewer and more dispersed, suggesting that again a different approach to meeting the needs of minority communities may be needed.

The role of the Church

The Church itself has for some time recognised the particular role it has within rural communities, with 60% of churches based in rural areas. This can be seen, for example, in its 1990 report, *Faith in the Countryside*¹¹. Published five years after its seminal study of urban deprivation, *Faith in the City*¹², this report showed that rural communities were (and still are) undergoing a sustained period of change as a consequence of demographic, social and economic pressures and highlighted the need for churches, alongside institutions from all sectors, to respond and adapt to these changes. Indeed it can be said to have been very prescient, with many of the trends identified then, now being experienced by those living in rural areas.

Ten years on, the report *Celebrating the Rural Church* identified developments within the church that have taken place since 1990. These include:

- the appointment of a network of rural officers and agricultural officers;
- a reduction in the number of full time clergy;
- campaigns to make fuller use of Church buildings for the community;
- specific rural ministry training; and
- the appointment of a national rural officer¹³.

This suggests that although the number of ministers of religion in rural areas has declined, the Church has been taking active steps to adapt its ministry to the particular needs of people living in rural areas where appropriate.

More recently a number of reports have examined the role of the church and of faith action within rural communities. For example, in 2003 the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber highlighted the central role of the church in these communities, both physically and socially, and the role of faith as a motivation for social action and volunteering, benefiting people beyond their faith group¹⁴. A more comprehensive picture has come from the DEFRA-sponsored study by Farnell and colleagues, which sought to identify the contribution of rural faith communities to building social capital¹⁵. This found that people of faith and faith institutions in rural areas make a substantial contribution to the life of their community. For example by supporting and sustaining social networks and activities that impact on local people, not just those who attend worship, as well as on village life as a whole.

These studies have led to a greater understanding of the role of faith communities and organisations in rural areas. They have also recognised that this role overlaps with, and links into voluntary and community action more generally. For example, Farnell and colleagues highlighted the need for all stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector (VCS), to give greater recognition to the contribution of faith communities. And they called on faith communities to work in closer partnership with the VCS than they may have done in the past¹⁶. However, relatively little attention has been given to this relationship between faith groups and the wider voluntary and community sector and what they can learn from each other.

¹⁰ Commission for Rural Communities, 2006, *State of the Countryside* The Stationary Office

¹¹ Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas, 1990, *Faith in the Countryside* ACORA Publishing

¹² Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985, *Faith in the City*, Church House Publishing

¹³ House of Bishops Rural Panel, 2000, *Celebrating the Rural Church*, ACORA Publishing

¹⁴ The Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, 2003, *Sowing the Seed: church and the rural renaissance in Yorkshire and the Humber*

¹⁵ Farnell et al, 2006, *Faith in Communities: contributions of social capital to community vibrancy* p.6 Coventry University, the Arthur Rank Centre and the Church of England

¹⁶ *ibid*

3. Faith in action

This chapter examines the contribution of faith-based organisations in rural areas, drawing on the findings of research conducted for this project.

3.1 Methodology

The research involved a three stage approach, including: a review of the existing literature and scoping interviews with several experts who had already carried out research in this field; four focus groups; and fifteen case exemplars. The four focus groups were conducted with different stakeholders:

- focus group 1 involved faith-based infrastructure organisations;
- focus group 2, local faith leaders and people working in local faith-based organisations;
- focus group 3, volunteers and activists who were people of faith; and
- focus group 4, non-faith-based organisations who had some experience of working with faith-based organisations.

Each group was asked to consider what contribution faith-based organisations make and what challenges they face.

The fifteen case exemplars have been written by people who are actively involved with, or responsible for a faith-based organisation or initiative. Each person was asked to present their activity and reflect on their achievements, and what had made these possible; the major challenges they have encountered; and their vision of the future. For ease of reference each case exemplar has been assigned a number which is used to identify it in the findings and subsequent discussion; this may be abbreviated as, for example, (CE1).

Case exemplar no.1: St Peter's Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet and eat supper • Reading group 	Case exemplar no.2: Kirton-in-Lindsey Mission Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Ecumenical Partnership • Drop-in community centre 	Case exemplar no.3: Save Our Parsonages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign against the sale of parsonages 	TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF CASE EXEMPLARS
Case exemplar no.4: Sheriff Hutton Junior School <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church activities for children and families 	Case exemplar no.5: Holy Trinity Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecocongregation • Campaign against airport expansion • Walking bus scheme 	Case exemplar no.6: Caring for God's Acre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churchyard management • Public events 	

TABLE 1 continued	Case exemplar no.7: The Eathorpe Roast	Case exemplar no.8: St James Church	Case exemplar no.9: Chichester Diocesan Association for Family Support
SUMMARY OF CASE EXEMPLARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunday lunch • Presentations and debates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening church building to wider community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support services
	Case exemplar no.10: Farm Crisis Network South East Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support services for the farming community 	Case exemplar no.11: Church Action Within Society Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work aimed at migrant workers • Campaigning to improve access to services 	Case exemplar no.12: Luddendenfoot United Reformed Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community campaign with other organisations to maintain civic centre open
	Case exemplar no.13: St Giles' Parochial Church Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers' market 	Case exemplar no.14: Sunday 4.6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Christian community 	Case exemplar no.15: Yesu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee bar • Help shop: advice, support groups etc.

3.2 Discussion of findings

The role of the Church

In common with previous studies,¹⁷ findings from this research highlight the central role that the church can play within rural communities. This is partly because of its role in marking important occasions, both religious (such as Christmas and Easter) and non-religious (such as the Millennium), as well as rites of passage for birth, marriage and death. But it is also about its physical presence, a place where people can come together: research participants identified church buildings as an important resource, providing communities with community spaces where people can meet and share experiences.

It has often been said that in rural areas the church belongs to the people, whereas in urban areas people talk about belonging to the church. The focus groups and case exemplars largely confirm this. Different interpretations were given to explain this 'special' link between church building and community. Tradition, family memories and community celebrations were all mentioned. This link is reinforced when churches are used by the wider community for activities and services not directly related to their religious mission. In some places the church acts, in effect, as a hub for a range of social, recreational and cultural activities.

¹⁷ See for example Farnell et al, 2006 *Faith in Rural Communities*

In many rural communities, there will be at least one church and it is not unusual for the church building to be the only communal facility available. As such it is very much seen as a focal point for the community, and the architecture of the building which often dominates the skyline reinforces this impression. Although church attendance has fallen quite dramatically in the last few decades, there is a community feeling of ownership towards the church building in rural areas that goes beyond church membership and religious practice. For example, one focus group participant said that a sponsored Bible reading event to raise funds to renovate the local church building involved both churchgoers and non-churchgoers.

Activities

In terms of the contribution that local churches and faith-based organisations make to rural life, key areas of activity involve:

Worship and faith teaching

The primary role of the church is to provide a place of worship for congregation members. Some churches and faith leaders will focus solely on this function, offering services for their members and other activities linked directly to faith (e.g. Sunday school teaching). CE4 and CE14 are good examples of this: in both cases the activities aim to help individuals and their families grow in their faith.

Service provision

Faith-based organisations may also provide services to the local community. Some activities and services will seek to promote social participation: St Peter's Church (CE1), for example, organises a 'meet and eat supper' for older single women for this purpose. Other organisations are primarily concerned with meeting welfare needs: for example, the Farm Crisis Network South East Project (CE10) provides similar services to the Samaritans, but specifically for the farming community; the organisation Yesu (CE15) also provides a range of services for the local community, including advice and courses. Often the boundaries between the two types of activity – conviviality and welfare – are blurred: luncheon clubs and mother and toddler groups, for example, may meet both needs.

Fundraising

Faith-based organisations are often involved in fundraising activities. Some of these activities will be directed at providing funds for the church, or church-related needs, such as renovation and upkeep of buildings or the management of churchyards. But others will seek to fund the work of charities and non-faith-based initiatives: such as the farmers' market (CE13), which gives its profits to farming charities operating in the UK and the developing world.

Advocacy and campaigning

Some faith-based organisations advocate on behalf of others and are involved in campaigning. They can voice concerns around issues that are faith-related as the work of 'Save Our Parsonages' (CE 3) shows. They can also focus on wider local and global issues as shown by the environmental campaigning activities of Holy Trinity Church (CE5), and by the migrant project of 'Church Action within Society' (CE11).

Infrastructure support

A number of faith-based organisations are there to support other faith-based organisations, providing them with information, advice and training.

Faith in the community

It can therefore be seen that faith communities and faith-based organisations make a range of contributions to rural life, from those that are concerned with faith and the life of the church to those that are more outward focused and aimed at the wider community, locally and globally. Some of the organisations in this study operate in a church setting, but others do not; some activities are targeted only at people of faith, and others are open to the wider community. And for some organisations the faith dimension of their activities is explicit: in CE7, for example, the speakers invited to talk on a topical issue are always connected to a faith-based organisation and the objective of the talk is to encourage debate and highlight the Christian message. In other cases the link seemed far less direct, with organisations or projects shaped by faith, but not undertaking explicitly faith-related activities. For these organisations or projects, faith is a key motivator, with activities seen as an expression of faith by those who organise them:

“It’s sort of leading by example really, just saying we’re not just about coming to church and worshipping in church, it’s about doing things with your neighbour, with your friends and setting an example I think.” *(focus group no.3)*

Many of the organisations in this study contribute to building social capital, bringing people together as individuals and as members of the community, for example events organised by the local church that are clearly convivial in nature and create a sense of connectedness. Others contribute to social welfare, providing services in response to local needs, and/or social change, offering spaces for debate and campaigning, for example. They also contribute to our cultural and historical heritage with activities focused on church buildings and other physical church assets.

			TABLE 2
			SUMMARY OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS WITH EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITY
Human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing skills, including personal and interpersonal skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering • Involvement in governance structures (Parochial Church Council or trustee board) 	
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening common identity and values (bonding) • Bringing people with different interests and views together (bridging) • Accessing decision-making processes (linking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrations and rituals • Activities aimed at the wider community or organised in collaboration with others • Participation in community governance structures 	
Social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing spaces for debate • Campaigning and advocacy • Influencing policy and decision-makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair-trade campaign • Ecocongregations scheme • Lobbying for improved service access for migrant workers 	
Social needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing services • Providing advice and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support services • Mental health support services 	
Cultural and historical heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing, maintaining and promoting church assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising events • Church trails 	

A finding of both the focus groups and the case exemplars is the diversity of activities undertaken by faith-based organisations in rural areas. When categorised by activity, rather than contribution, they can be grouped under the following ten headings:

- faith;
- heritage;
- the environment and sustainable development;
- tourism;
- the arts and culture;
- recreation and leisure;

- children and families;
- youth;
- older people; and
- social care.

A number of organisations, particularly local churches, undertook activities that fell under several of these headings. The research shows that faith-based organisations play a significant role in rural communities partly because of this diversity.

Beyond this, the examples given show that while some activities organised by faith-based organisations might focus on faith, others are more about supporting the wider community. In many cases both dimensions are present, as illustrated in the table below. Although the table simplifies reality, it provides a useful framework to think about and discuss the purpose and impact of faith-based activities.

TABLE 3		
THE FAITH AND COMMUNITY DIMENSIONS OF ACTIVITIES ORGANISED BY FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS	Faith content: high Purpose: mainly support faith and faith institutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church services • Sunday school 	Faith content: high Purpose: mainly support the wider community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoral care • Religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals • Memorial services
	Faith content: low Purpose: mainly support faith and faith institutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising events for church building • Social events for church members 	Faith content: low Purpose: mainly support the wider community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother and toddlers group • Luncheon club • Hosting other voluntary and community organisations • Fair trade campaigning • Family support services

People

Despite falling numbers, and a loss of status, the clergy is still seen as a major resource and as having a unique position within the community. Members of the clergy who participated in the research felt they were very much part of the community, had duties and responsibilities towards it, and were expected to be there for it, particularly in times of need or crisis, as shown during the foot-and-mouth outbreak. Evidence from the focus groups highlighted the extent to which individual ministers of religion shape the role of their church and the types of activities church members will get involved in. This suggests that they do play an important leadership role, both within their church and within the community, but it also makes it difficult to generalise about their role or the contribution of individual churches to rural life.

Lay members of a church also play a critical role in church initiatives and activities as volunteers. This includes activities related to the running of the church itself, for example arranging the flowers, teaching in Sunday school or being involved in its governance, perhaps as a churchwarden. It also includes activities that are church-led but secular in nature and aimed at the wider community. And many people of faith are involved in community initiatives that are not linked to a church or a faith-based organisation. Indeed, the faith dimension of volunteering is often invisible:

“I can think of lots of communities where you wouldn’t know whether the person was actually an active volunteer from a religious perspective or any other perspective, they just are involved and maybe after a while it emerges that they may be the church warden, or they may be on the parochial church council or they may be a lay reader or whatever.” *(focus group no.4)*

Determining whether volunteering, formal or informal, is motivated by people’s faith is difficult. The research shows that individuals are driven by a range of factors, faith being one. It is a key factor for some, but community is also important and the two can go hand-in-hand. This was reflected, for instance, in the fact that some people of faith were involved in non-faith activities and that, conversely, some people who were not of faith participated in activities organised by faith-based organisations:

“One chap who is absolutely, well he must be atheist rather than agnostic, I suspect and yet when I said to him the other day, because he comes every Saturday to the coffee morning and enjoys the occasional debate, I said “this gate needs sorting out Robbie”, “okay” he said “I’ll do it” and by the Tuesday it was done. It’s just that sort of community link isn’t it?” *(focus group no.2)*

Links with other organisations

Participants in this study suggested that another key resource for faith-based organisations is their connections to other organisations and institutions. These depend, to a large extent, on the type of activity faith-based organisations are involved in and the type of structure they have. Organisations are more likely to work collaboratively on activities that involve:

- campaigning to influence policy agendas and decision-making structures, for example the migrant project of the ‘Church Action Within Society’ group (CE11) has worked closely with local Citizens Advice Bureaux to achieve its aims;
- delivering services and providing activities to users with specific and multiple needs, for example the Chichester Diocesan Association for Family Support Work (CE9) works with schools, health visitors, social services amongst others; and/or
- looking at the changing use of church buildings, for example in CE8, the local church has worked with the parish council and other members of the community to extend the usage of their building and define the priority needs; the community development approach adopted in this example requires the involvement of different community stakeholders. This has also been the case of the Luddendenfoot United Reformed Church (CE12), which has worked with an outreach development worker from Active Faith Communities.

Often, however, the links with non-faith based organisations are more informal and rely heavily on the overlapping membership of individuals. In some cases these links are very limited. Collaboration is made possible if there are shared objectives and values: when faith-based and secular organisations work in collaboration it is often a common concern for the community that unites them:

“as a fairly rampant atheist, I don’t feel any inhibitions about working with clergy and with lay people within the diocese, within the Methodist, the Baptist or what ever, because I think we’re working for the same end which is concern about the community, concern about providing facilities and services for the people who live in that community” (focus group no.4)

More common are partnerships or joint initiatives between different churches and denominations. They may come together exclusively to worship or to celebrate special occasions, but they may also work collaboratively to serve the wider community. As mentioned in one of the focus groups, several churches had, for example, jointly established a charity to provide youth services, others were running a helpline in partnership.

A distinctive role?

When asked how they are distinctive from secular organisations, research participants who represented faith-based organisations identified a number of features. Firstly, there is the physical presence of church buildings which are very

much part of the rural landscape. Because it is linked to family memories, heritage and culture, this presence still has a strong symbolic value for many and there is no other local institution that can claim to have a similar position within rural communities. The sentimental and historical attachment, that ceremonies and rituals help to maintain, contributes to people's sense of place and belonging.

Secondly, faith-based organisations are felt to be distinctive because they address people's spiritual needs and take on board some of the more metaphysical questions that they may have. Participants viewed the approach of faith-based organisations to people and communities as being more holistic, responding to their spiritual needs as well as their other needs. They also viewed their commitment as being more long-term because of their concern for long-term well-being. It was this dimension that some participants talked about when referring to the transformative nature of their work:

“Whatever people come with, whatever people present, whatever people then later show, church is there to cater for all people but not just on a certain theme but all their needs and that's why you listen to them” (*focus group no.2*)

Thirdly, these participants identified faith, and the values and beliefs associated with it, as providing a distinctive motivation for the voluntary activities of both faith-based organisations and people of faith. Not only does faith determine the type of voluntary action people choose to get involved in, but it is also seen to be a source of energy and inspiration for involvement. Many of the case exemplars illustrate this last point very well, particularly CE1 and CE5. All these distinctive features contribute to a shared identity.

Demonstrating the distinctiveness, or what some refer to as the added value of an activity or initiative is far from straightforward and is challenging for both faith-based organisations and secular organisations. What is interesting here is to see that many of the distinctive features put forward by faith-based organisations mirror to a large extent those mentioned by voluntary and community organisations that are not faith-based. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Challenges

Focus group participants and the authors of the case exemplars were asked to reflect on the changes and challenges that their organisations face. Their responses highlight three main areas of concern: firstly, the pressure on existing resources as a consequence of ageing church buildings, fewer rural clergy, and falling congregation numbers; secondly, changes in the wider society, including changing social attitudes and expectations; and thirdly changes arising from the implementation of government policy.

Resources

Whilst church buildings are recognised to be important community assets, many are in a poor state of repair and require a significant amount of resources to

preserve and maintain them, as well as make necessary adaptations to meet current health and safety regulations:

“My church needs £600,000 spent on it and we have a derelict church hall that is actually uninhabitable, the holes in the roof are the size of dinner plates and it’s just awful.” (*focus group no.2*)

For this reason participants clearly had mixed feelings about these assets and were concerned that the time spent on maintenance-related activities, and on fundraising initiatives to pay for these repairs and alterations, divert much energy and resources from other activities, including those aimed at the wider community.

At the same time, reduced numbers of clergy means that those remaining are often over-stretched. They are increasingly responsible for several parishes and this weakens the privileged link they have traditionally had with local communities. Changing congregations are another key challenge. Participants mentioned the decline in numbers of church members, as well as the changing composition of congregations, which have an increasingly high proportion of older people, partly because rural areas are ageing faster than other areas¹⁸, and changing patterns of churchgoing (with members attending services less regularly).

Impact of social changes

Alongside these developments, changes in society and in social attitudes are also having an impact on the stability of rural communities and the role of the church within them. These include patterns of migration in and out of rural communities; the availability of local employment and housing; and greater mobility. For example, greater mobility means that people increasingly do not live and work in the same locality; their friends and family may be some distance away; and they have access to services and recreational activities that are not locally based. With this has come increased choice and expectation of choice, which cannot always be met at a local level. As a result participation in locally based activities, including activities organised by the local church, is less of a priority for some.

The sense of ownership and attachment towards the local church is still important, as highlighted above, but it is diminishing. This affects church membership, as some people will choose to attend services in a non-local church. It also affects the capacity of churches and church groups to offer community activities and puts increasing pressure on those church members and volunteers who are already active. The twin pressures of distance and time constraints also impact on the nature of people’s participation and their willingness or ability to make a regular commitment. For example, a participant in one of the focus groups reported that the new church organist, unlike her predecessor, was not available to play every Sunday because she often went to visit her grandchildren.

Formalisation

The need to recruit new volunteers from a diminishing pool of individuals was said to be more difficult because of pressure to adopt more formal ways of working. For example, although CRB checks and health and safety regulations are seen as

¹⁸ Newcastle University Centre for Rural Economy, Northern Rural Network Seminar – Press release, 4 April 2006

necessary protections, participants were concerned that current procedures are overly-bureaucratic and disproportionate. As such they are seen to have a negative effect on recruitment and to be detrimental to volunteering generally, especially in relation to activities for children and young people. There was a similar ambivalence towards the current emphasis on volunteer training, considered a mixed blessing by organisations and groups already struggling to find people with enough time to spare. The resource implications of further formalisation partly explain why some participants' were reluctant towards it:

“We do expect so much more now of our volunteers in churches, it's not just turning up on a Sunday and teaching Sunday school. Children's ministry and youth ministry now is a much bigger thing, quite rightly because customers are demanding more, because they demand more from their lives, so it's quite a daunting thing sometimes for our volunteers.” *(focus group no.1)*

This push towards professionalisation, and the acquisition of new skills this often implies, was also felt by faith-based organisations providing services on a larger scale and in all aspects of their work, not only in the way they managed volunteers. For example, the need to demonstrate effectiveness and cost-efficiency in delivery, prompted partly by the organisations themselves and partly in response to funders, has led to the introduction of mechanisms, such as monitoring and reporting systems, to improve accountability and transparency. However, one of the biggest challenges facing faith-based organisations has been finding a satisfactory way of demonstrating some of the softer outcomes that their services have.

Service delivery in rural areas was also an issue of concern, both in terms of the loss of services overall and the pressure on organisations to become more formal and professional in approach in order to fill the gaps. As noted above, the cost of delivering services to rural areas has meant that an increasing number of providers have chosen to withdraw. The needs of the community, and especially the needs of isolated and disadvantaged members of the community, are increasingly left to those who are still present, which includes faith-based organisations. It is a challenge for those remaining, who may have to take on new ways of working. If an organisation wishes to work beyond their immediate community to serve a larger area, there will be the additional challenge associated with the cost of travel, which will have significant implications on resources.

Impact of government policy

The demands on faith-based organisations arising from policy developments, such as their involvement in local governance and service provision, are perceived as being high. However, many of the research participants who represented small local churches and church-based groups did not engage with these agendas: only faith-based organisations of a certain size and faith-based infrastructure organisations talked at greater length about the challenges associated with these policies.

These organisations welcomed the fact that government is now recognising faith-based organisations as partners; but participants also identified a number of

limitations and potential tensions. The risk of co-option and mission drift were cited, for instance. They were often sceptical of the government's intentions and criticised its instrumentalist approach to the involvement of faith-based organisations, which they thought failed to take into account the faith dimension of their work. There was some concern that the government agenda is too urban-focused and, in fact, solely about community cohesion and integration. As such it was seen to be potentially divisive, because it seemed to marginalise people who had no religious beliefs and those who were not of a minority faith:

“When people were talking about faith engagement, they were actually talking about minority ethnic group engagement and they got terrified when all these grey haired old vicars like me turned up, because they didn't really want me.” *(focus group no.1)*

Despite these reservations, central government was thought to have a better understanding of faith-based organisations than local authorities, which were seen to be often reluctant to fund faith-based organisations because of their fear of proselytisation. This fear was echoed by some of the participants who were not representatives of a faith-based organisation. Participants confirmed that access to funding and non-financial support could be a problem, however some barriers were also, it was felt, cultural and self-imposed. Some faith-organisations, for instance, refused to access certain forms of funding on moral grounds (e.g. Lottery funding). Others assumed that they would not be eligible or would be rejected:

“They hadn't realised that they were eligible to actually apply for grants subscription. I think they thought that they would be naturally excluded, so there was a bit of a gap of understanding there” *(focus group no.4)*

			TABLE 4
			SUMMARY OF KEY DRIVERS
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall in clergy numbers • Declining congregations • Ageing buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constraints on resources • More time dedicated on fundraising 	
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater diversity • Greater mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New needs • Changing patterns of involvement and volunteering • Decreasing importance of local ties 	
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer local providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More pressure on those remaining • Need to bid for contracts 	
Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing formalisation and professionalisation • Increased regulation • More emphasis on monitoring and reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential burnout of existing volunteers • Difficulties in recruiting new ones • New skill set 	
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More involvement of faith-based organisations in service delivery and local governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential mission drift and co-option • More resources needed • New skill set (e.g. contract negotiation) 	

How faith-based organisations have responded

The research found that many organisations have responded to these challenges with much creativity and innovation. This can be seen in some of the projects that have developed, such as the farmers' market in CE13. They also appear to have created new opportunities for lay involvement in the church itself and for more collaborative working, both with other denominations and with secular organisations.

The decline in rural clergy and in congregation numbers has led to the closure of some churches and the selling off of church assets. Due to the loss in critical mass and the need for economies of scale, an increasing number of parishes have had to adapt to these circumstances by grouping together to form a benefice¹⁹. This was

¹⁹ A parish or group of parishes served by one vicar

certainly the case for several members of the clergy who attended the focus groups and who were responsible for several parishes. However this has led to new patterns of ministry, in which lay church members are playing a more active role and collaborating more closely with members of the clergy than in the past:

“The minister ended up with more churches than actually he could really manage, I think the result of that, and through the way in which he enabled it as well, was that the various congregations took more control, understood more about where they were going and were able to lead.” (focus group no.3)

This important cultural change is perhaps more noticeable amongst Anglican churches than for Methodist churches, where congregation members have traditionally had a more prominent role. It has certainly been one of the key features of what some have called ‘fresh expressions of faith’ which are seen as being more open, flexible and adapted to today’s society. CE14 illustrates this very well. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if people will have the time and the will to commit to this initiative.

Constraints on resources are said to have led to the development of more ecumenical working²⁰, which has involved both faith and non-faith activities. There has also been a move towards more collaboration with secular organisations. However, the administrative structure of church institutions was found to be complex and burdensome, acting at times as a barrier to the development of further joint working across denominations or with secular organisations that do not always have the same geographical boundaries.

One area where collaboration seems to be particularly strong is in the use of local church buildings. The use of church buildings beyond faith-based activities may be a response to financial needs, but their transformation into community buildings often implies collaboration with other stakeholders, as the vision of Kirton-in-Lindsey United Mission Church for its drop-in centre (CE2) illustrates. Collaborative working is expected to become increasingly a necessity and to develop further. It is encouraged by faith-based infrastructure bodies, although responses from local churches have varied and access to funding to adapt church buildings for community use remains a key issue as CE8 shows.

Infrastructure and capacity building

Amongst the different initiatives mentioned in the research there are some very positive messages about regeneration, empowering communities and people, and giving people the scope to develop activities and services best suited to their needs and the changing nature of their needs. Yet for many the underlying issue is access to sources of funding and capacity building: links between faith-based community groups in rural areas and funders and infrastructure organisations remains poor. This is due partly to a widespread culture of self-reliance, and partly to the physical isolation of many rural areas. Where faith-based organisations are in contact with infrastructure organisations, their first port of call is faith-based infrastructure

²⁰ Collaboration between different Christian denominations

bodies and far more rarely voluntary and community organisations. However, there are concerns that reduced resources will impact on the support provided by faith-based infrastructure bodies, especially in their provision of field workers:

“We’re like everyone else, we’re going to face cutbacks over the next few years and I suspect in lots of dioceses, perhaps the rural ones more than the urban ones, the advisor posts will get cut and so you know, churches will have to rely on those bigger infrastructure organisations in order to give that encouragement, but the truth is the best encouragement is for somebody to go and sit and have a cup of coffee with you isn’t it?” *(focus group no.1)*

This suggests that there may be value in developing closer relationships between faith-based and generic infrastructure bodies to promote shared learning and the dissemination of good practice, as well as to strengthen the capacity of both to meet the needs of their members and the communities they serve.

4. Key themes and issues for the future

This research shows that faith-based organisations continue to make a significant contribution to the life of rural communities. Participants from faith groups identified their faith as being an important and distinctive driver of voluntary action and as underpinning a sense of shared identity between people of faith. At the same time it is clear that faith-based organisations provide opportunities for active citizenship, enabling people to participate in the life of the church, of the local community and the world beyond. The church itself is also said to be a vital resource: a centre of and for the community, as well as a place of worship. And these findings also highlight the role of Ministers of religion as leaders within the community, in terms of influencing the type and range of activities faith communities become involved in.

In addition to these practical contributions to rural life, the church also has a symbolic value, its physical presence representing a sense of place and belonging both for people of faith and those with none. However, the research finds that this attachment appears to be diminishing: one might question whether this too is symbolic of the fact that ‘place’ no longer holds as central a place in people’s lives or their sense of community as it may once have. Yet it remains a central focus of local government policy, reflected in government commitments to devolve power down to the neighbourhood or parish level and in Sir Michael Lyons conception of ‘place shaping’: taking responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there²¹. As we have stated elsewhere, ‘place shaping is primarily about civil society and community, not about the formal structures of local government’²². This suggests that there is a need not only to devolve power to the local level, but also to recognise and support those organisations, such as the church, which play a key role in shaping people’s sense of place and contribute to their well-being.

As this research has shown, in many rural areas the church may be the only community asset available, and as such local people feel ownership of it, whether or not they are church members. It is a hub for local activities generally, not only those that are faith-based and in some areas local churches are working with other stakeholders to transform church buildings into community buildings. This is partly in response to financial concerns, the need to generate income for the upkeep and preservation of these buildings. But, as a recent report from the Archbishops’ Council²³ has suggested, rural church buildings can be a major resource, replacing services that have been lost to communities. For example they can be used for a wide range of services and activities, from after school clubs to farmers market as well as and alongside their role as sacred places of worship. Such possibilities were also discussed at a seminar at NCVO’s 2007 rural conference, *Standing Up, Taking Part: Participation and Rural Voluntary Action*.²⁴

This highlights the potential of local churches as community anchor organisations, where they choose to permit their buildings to be used in this way, working in collaboration with both faith-based and secular voluntary and community organisations as well as with local government. But the extent to which they can take on this role will depend on their ability to attract external funds. The Government is currently looking at ways of transferring assets from the public sector to community ownership and control. However, this research suggests that existing community assets, including church buildings where they have this role, need to be adequately supported, which includes access to financial support where necessary.

²¹ M Lyons, 2006, National prosperity, local choice and civic engagement: a new partnership between central and local government for the 21st century Lyons Inquiry into Local Government interim report

²² D Vyas, 2006 How voluntary and Community Organisations can help transform the local relationship NCVO

²³ Archbishops’ Council, 2005, Seeds in Holy Ground, a workbook for rural churches ACORA publishing; see also B Cairns, M Harris R Hutchison, 2005, Faithful Regeneration: The role and contribution of local parishes in local communities in the diocese of Birmingham Aston University, Home Office, Diocese of Birmingham

²⁴ A report of the conference can be found at: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/policy/rural/events/index.asp?id=4668>

From the examples given, it is clear that some local churches have been very innovative in developing the resources they have and in empowering people and communities, often in collaboration with other organisations. As such they provide models of good practice from which other voluntary and community organisations can learn. There is perhaps more scope for shared learning between faith-based and secular organisations than has occurred in the past.

Relationship with the wider VCS

Faith, and a concern with people's spiritual needs, obviously distinguishes faith-based organisations from their secular counterparts within the voluntary and community sector. Apart from this, however, there are striking similarities between the two in terms of their functions and areas of activity; distinctive characteristics and ways of working; and, crucially, in terms of the changes and challenges they face. There are particularly strong resonances with voluntary and community organisations working in rural areas and the specific issues that they face, highlighting the relevance of rurality to these debates.

The VCS consists of a wide range of independent organisations undertaking a diversity of activities for the public benefit, including campaigning, advocacy and service provision. Indeed, this diversity is recognised as being one of the sector's major strengths. Voluntary and community organisations provide support to individuals and facilitate collective action, thereby playing a vital role in strengthening communities and building social capital. And they will typically describe their distinctiveness in terms of their close relationship with their users and members; their commitment to a holistic and long-term approach to meeting people's needs; and their motivation, driven by their mission and values.

As noted above, previous research by NCVO²⁵ has found that voluntary and community organisations in rural areas are often small and heavily reliant on volunteers, with a similar age profile and patterns of volunteering to those described by participants in this study. Active involvement in a range of activities, including activities that are faith-based, is often concentrated amongst a relatively limited number of individuals and amongst these activists are people of faith. It is also the case that informal participation, groups and networks play a prominent role in rural communities, across the board. Issues of sustainability and the need to recruit new volunteers are concerns for these organisations as well.

Therefore it can be seen that many of the challenges raised by participants in this study are faced by the voluntary and community sector as a whole. For example, the need to value and support informal activities and to recognise the contribution they make to building social capital and community cohesion. As we have argued elsewhere²⁶, such activities are generated by people themselves, coming together for their own reasons, whether this is on the basis of their faith or values; their sense of community; a common interest such as sport or gardening; or simply to make friends and meet people. And it is this that makes informal voluntary action so valuable. There is a need to consider how best to create the conditions in which associational life can flourish without undermining this independence and spontaneity. Small grants can have a big impact at this level, providing a spur to creativity and innovation, but only if accountability mechanisms are proportionate

²⁵ Yates, H. and Jochum, V. (2005), *It's who you know that counts* NCVO

²⁶ V Jochum, B Pratten, K Wilding, 2005, *Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate* NCVO

and designed to preserve the vibrancy and informality of community action.

In terms of more formal voluntary action, government support has created many more opportunities for voluntary, community and faith-based organisations to take on a wider range of roles, for example in relation to service delivery and local governance. However, this has given rise to fears that it will lead to co-option and mission-drift from secular as well as faith-based organisations. There is a concern that the Government is taking an instrumentalist approach to the sector and is only interested in the extent to which it can directly contribute to government objectives. Although participants here were primarily concerned that little account is taken of the faith dimension to their work, this echoes a more general concern about the government's commitment to, or interest in the wider contribution that the sector makes to civil society.

However, any organisation must recognise that it is appropriate for government to focus on its own objectives and to fund organisations accordingly: that is what it is elected to do. Moreover, government has a responsibility to people of all faiths, as well as those with none. Therefore there is no reason for it to take account of a faith, or any other dimension unless this furthers its goals. But it is also appropriate for the government and the sector to work together where they have shared objectives. Not only does this achieve mutual benefits for both sides, it also contributes to better outcomes for citizens and communities. What is important is that where government works with the sector, it does so in ways that respect its distinctive role and independence and that the relationship is underpinned by the Compact.

Faith-based organisations, like others in the voluntary and community sector, need to take responsibility for their own objectives and mission and ensure that they focus on these, working in partnership with others where appropriate. Where they provide services under contract to government, they need to negotiate and agree the terms and conditions under which they do so, to preserve their integrity and independence²⁷.

However, it is clear that this whole agenda has created new challenges for organisations across the sector, which is responding in a number of ways. For example, NCVO and Futurebuilders England have set up a Public Service Delivery Network to develop the capacity of those in the VCS with responsibility for negotiating and managing public service contracts²⁸. There may be considerable benefits for faith-based and secular organisations to share their experiences, learning and infrastructure support in relation to issues of common concern. Yet this research suggests that there is relatively little interaction between faith-based organisations and generic infrastructure bodies: both need to consider how they can work together to build capacity across the board.

The Government's Change Up programme represents a significant investment in sector infrastructure to build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations. This includes the development of national centres of excellence, for example in relation to performance improvement and volunteering (both issues raised in this report), as well as strengthening support for organisations working at regional and local levels, including faith-based organisations and those working in rural areas. Additionally NCVO's rural programme has recently published a guide to 'rural proofing': explaining how voluntary and community organisations can effectively meet the needs of rural communities and, for infrastructure bodies,

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of these issues see: A Blackmore, 2004, Standing apart working together: A study of the myths and realities of voluntary and community sector independence NCVO

²⁸ Further information about the network is available at: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sfp/earning/contracting/index.asp?id=2390>

those of rural organisations²⁹. Faith-based organisations should consider how they can tap in and contribute to these resources in addition to their involvement with specialist faith-based infrastructure organisations. At the same time generalist infrastructure bodies should consider how they can reach out to faith-based organisations more effectively and work alongside specialist faith-based infrastructure bodies to promote better collaboration and shared learning on issues of common concern, such as the relationship with government.

Conclusion

This study suggests that faith and faith-based organisations have a vital role to play in rural life, as a driver for voluntary action, community participation and engagement, as well as meeting people's spiritual and physical needs. At the same time there are clear overlaps between key aspects of this role and that of the voluntary and community sector more widely. This can be seen in relation to the types of activities undertaken (such as fundraising, campaigning and service delivery) and in their response to changes to their operating environment. This suggests that closer collaboration between the two in future would bring real benefits to both and to the individuals and communities they serve.

²⁹ J Grieve, 2007, *Access All Areas: meeting the needs of rural communities*
NCVO/Commission for Rural Communities

Case exemplars

part

This section contains the full text of the 15 case exemplars. The case exemplars are referenced in the previous chapter and you may want to refer to them as you read it. However, it can also be read as a stand-alone section. The case exemplar projects reflect a wide range of organisations and activities which give a flavour of the variety found in the faith-based voluntary sector. They have been written by key people involved in the projects, including faith group leaders, community leaders and volunteers. Authors were asked to write about their achievements; the factors that made these possible; and the challenges they faced. We also asked them to outline how they saw their work changing in the future.

CASE EXEMPLARS		
1: St Peter's Church	<i>Running a church-led supper and reading group for the local community</i>	30
2: Kirton-in-Lindsey United Mission Church	<i>Setting up a local ecumenical partnership to create a community outreach centre</i>	32
3: Save Our Parsonages	<i>Campaigning to oppose the sale by the Church of England of its traditional rectories and vicarages</i>	34
4: Sheriff Hutton Junior Church	<i>Involving children and families in the church through services and other activities</i>	36
5: Holy Trinity Church	<i>Environmental campaigning as part of the Ecocongregation church scheme</i>	38
6: Caring for God's Acre	<i>Managing the parish churchyard for people and for wildlife</i>	39
7: The Eathorpe Roast	<i>Bringing together the local villages by serving Sunday lunch and holding talks</i>	41
8: St John the Baptist Church	<i>Opening up the church building to the wider community</i>	43
9: Family Support Work	<i>Supporting families, particularly lone parents, in rural areas of East and West Sussex</i>	45
10: Farm Crisis Network South East Project	<i>Providing pastoral and practical support to members of the farming community</i>	46
11: Church Action Within Society Group	<i>Working with churches to raise awareness of and support migrant agricultural workers</i>	48
12: Luddendenfoot United Reformed Church	<i>Community campaign to secure a community building and to encourage participation in community activities</i>	50
13: St Giles' Parochial Church Council	<i>Supporting local and international farmers through holding a Farmers' Market</i>	52
14: Sunday 4.6	<i>Developing a new Christian community for those of any Christian denomination and none</i>	53
15: Yesu	<i>Supporting the local community by providing a range of services and hosting a number of different agencies</i>	55

St. Peter's Church, Brafferton, North Yorkshire

Ann Bowes (non-stipendiary³⁰ Minister in Church of England)

Aims and objectives: bringing together the wider community

Activities: 'Meet and Eat' supper, and reading group

Location: rural farming community in North Yorkshire

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: young mums (and househusbands), the bereaved, single over 60's

Resources: books, local food, vicarage, volunteers

Partner organisations: no formal links but the suppers have cross-membership with the Monday Club for over 60s and parents of the toddler group, playgroup and village school

We aim to bring together villagers who do not necessarily attend church regularly, for conversation, community, and companionship. Several projects are evolving that will hopefully evidence to the village that God cares about their everyday life and issues. Here, I will focus on a 'Meet and Eat' supper and a reading group.

We hold the supper in the vicarage every two months or so, and it is largely (although not exclusively), welcomed and attended by single women over 60 who live alone. There is another similar event which runs less regularly, but equally valued, for young Mums, and the occasional house-husband. These are riotous occasions. They choose their menu in advance and bring their own drink. The food is locally grown and bought. This encourages local production and trade. Volunteers help with food preparation, serving and washing up. These are currently two 'indigenous' ladies who are long known and trusted by the diners! They are also pastoral carers in other areas of church and village life.

The major achievement of both suppers is that they cross social, intellectual, and marital status boundaries. All say they love to have a home cooked meal and they all sit down together and enjoy each others company. The occasions have become a 'safe' and fun place in which to tell their stories.

This is remarkable, given that this is not only a rural but still almost a 'feudal' society. If people are having fun and sitting around a table together, there is a sense of equality and honouring of one another as guests. Maybe only in a rural setting would you find those who have served, sitting alongside those who have employed them in the past! This reflects an important Christian teaching of Jesus, of our challenge to not so much be served as to serve (the 'grandest' lady of all takes home all the washing and ironing of table linen and napkins).

Several guests have been bereaved and those who live alone don't much bother to make the sort of meals they really love for themselves. One said, 'I enjoyed that much more than sitting eating at home on my own.' The young mums' meal enables those who are full time mothers to get to meet those who work outside the home, and therefore to reconnect after the baby stage. They appreciate the

³⁰ unpaid

opportunity to meet without their children and talk together.

The reading group attracts mainly women in their 40s and 50s who enjoy secular, well written and insightful modern literature. It circulates amongst the homes of the members in turn, as does the choice of the novel to be read and discussed. The group is a place where richness and diversity of experience can be shared, and is a trusted place to dare to share insights, knowing they will be 'heard' in the integrity of what they are offering. They show a lively and challenging response to the books, and often ethical, moral and spiritual issues naturally emerge.

Both suppers and book group seem to have enabled single women to emerge and retake their place in a community whose social life largely flourishes around 'couples,' thus facilitating opportunity for friendship and companionship. Both projects give credence to one of the more accurate pictures the Church of England has of itself, that it is a club, which exists largely for the benefit of those who are not of its membership. This is important in a rural community where all villagers feel they 'own' the village church building, but rarely attend regular worship.

Our achievements have been made possible by 'daring to try'. Also by my having 'on board' trusted local people to 'front them up'. Possibly also because I do not stay as a minister confined by the church walls, but by having a 'we see 'er about' ministry – for instance, shopping locally and joining their local groups etc. I use the local pubs there too, now and again, and sit on the bar stool where all the stimulating conversations happen and the challenging questions are asked!

What was challenging about the older person's Meet and Eat was suspicion and fear of a hidden agenda. 'I could do it cheaper myself,' 'Is she just doing this to get us to say prayers?' 'Is she trying to raise money for the church?' This reflects the sociological theory that old villagers can attempt to retain their power by disapproving of the newcomer. The challenge for the book group was finding a time which everyone could make on a monthly basis. Some have needed gentle encouragement, because those who are most lonely are often the most nervous to 'dare to try'.

The suspicion around the meals was overcome by one of the 'old villagers' going round with the menus and collecting the money at the same time. This avoids people dropping out at the last minute! Suspicion was also overcome by experiencing the warmth of hospitality and quality of the food and wine! The book group is kept very flexible in terms of membership. Each meeting and book to be read are planned at the previous occasion. All members note these details and people come if they can.

We just wait and see about the future. We will see how both evolve. The book group can easily function without my input. It is my aim that other volunteers might eventually cook the meals! Some do cook parts of it now. Growing numbers might eventually become a space problem.

Kirton-in-Lindsey United Mission Church

Anne Wild (Project co-leader)

Aims and objectives: social outreach

Activities: community outreach centre (the Wesley Centre)

Location: Kirton-in-Lindsey is a small, historic, rural town with a population of 2500 or thereabouts

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: local community including young people, families, single mums, the elderly and children

Resources: buildings, ministers, committees, financial, volunteers

Partner organisations: Anglican, Baptist and Methodist Churches

In 2003 the three denominations in Kirton-in-Lindsey: Anglican, Baptist and Methodist, came together in a very brave and purposeful way to create the United Mission Church (UMC).

This was not just to share a building, but also to share services, ministers, committees, organisation and – as soon as we are designated an LEP (Local Ecumenical Partnership) – we will share all our financial resources too. There has been a lot of grace and generosity shown by all three congregations over the compromises that inevitably had to be made. The Methodists and Baptists lost their buildings, the Anglicans gave up their beloved liturgy and the contemplative formality of their previous services. But though some members left to attend neighbouring churches, there has been a remarkable growth in the numbers of regular worshippers, with young people and families attracted to our livelier services. Although we knew that separately none of our churches would survive for long, the main thrust of our coming together was for consolidation and outreach to our community.

This initiative has proved extremely successful, despite losing all three of our previous ministers within a year or two, and battling with four outbreaks of dry rot in the 800 year old building of St Andrew's. Meanwhile alterations to turn the nearby Baptist Church into offices and meeting rooms are slowly getting under way. However, it is the sale of the Methodist Church and Hall that has spearheaded the 'vision' we have recently had of ways to further serve our small town. We hope to transform these Methodist buildings into a community outreach centre (The Wesley Centre), a place to attract those who wouldn't otherwise come near a church, yet a place where people are already used to going, to attend clubs or meetings of one sort or another.

During the morning we could perhaps provide a regular Mums and Toddlers group for single mums and isolated young families, especially those at the local RAF camp which might help them feel less lonely, as well as a café where help and advice could also be offered. Lunchtimes and early afternoon might focus on the needs of the elderly. Afternoon clubs, tea dances, film shows, tuition on computers, with light lunches served in the café section...All sorts of things could be provided. And

then in the late afternoon perhaps something in the way of after-school activities for bored youngsters. A homework club and internet café each afternoon/early evening seems possible. There is very little for children to do in Kirton after school and at weekends and the lack of public transport can isolate youngsters somewhat.

One thing we are very clear about. We are in no way to undermine other community efforts already in place. The Wesley Centre would support the development of the Baptist buildings and Town Hall by adding extra facilities for groups not covered by their remit. But both of these two projects have had to limit the scale of their proposed extensions and alterations, so the space the Wesley Centre could offer might prove invaluable for larger groups and events.

Our initial ideas were just the beginning. We began to envisage discos and dances, skills training sessions with back-to-work advice, other workshops including arts and crafts and modern dance, Citizen's Advice sessions, counselling etc. We thought of establishing a 'Dad's Army' of volunteers to help the elderly and also working with the Police to help combat the drugs and crime culture amongst the young by giving them a new focus. Transport is also a major problem in rural areas, and some sort of 'taxi service' might also be possible to bring elderly people to the doctor's surgery, chemist or shops for example.

None of this is established as yet. The sale of the Methodist Church and Hall has been delayed because of the discovery of listed status on the interior as well as the exterior. To make it a reality we need to find funding both to alter and equip the buildings (which also includes permission from the Methodist Property Office, who deal with altered-use for their buildings) and also, most importantly, to fund a full time organiser. Taking on a project of this scale is too great a task for volunteers to manage, although they would form the 'troops' who would do most of the work.

As you can see from the above this is a very new project, recently formulated. Achievements are few at the moment. In August we presented our plans to the UMC council, the Anglican body and the Methodist Property Office and they have all been supportive in principle. We have applied, through the Methodist Superintendent, for permission to use and alter the Methodist buildings as necessary and are waiting to hear from the Methodist Property Office whether this will be possible. A number of church members have offered practical support, and a reliable team of volunteers will be vital. However our greatest challenge at the moment is to find funding for a full time paid organiser, without whom such an ambitious project will never materialise.

Update

Since this case exemplar was first written things have moved ahead for the project. We started an After School Care Club for primary school children in January, with 12 or so children on the books and a good team looking after them. Also we have secured funding for one year for a full-time paid organiser, which is wonderful. Things are moving - or I should say that it feels like God's pushing us!

Save Our Parsonages

Anthony Jennings (Director)

Aims and objectives: to oppose the sale by the Church of England of its traditional rectories and vicarages

Activities: research, support and lobby on behalf of parsonages threatened with closure across the country

Location: based in London with a nationwide remit

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: members, including supporters of our cause in general, and clergy, churchwardens, parochial church council members and other concerned parishioners

Resources: membership subscriptions and donations

Partner organisations: amenity societies, heritage, environmental and conservation groups and other campaigning organisations

Save Our Parsonages (SOP) was set up in 1995 to oppose the sale by the Church of England of its traditional rectories and vicarages. We oppose these sales on pastoral, practical, and financial grounds, and also for community and Church heritage reasons. We believe that traditional rectories and vicarages are part of our ecclesiastical heritage, as much as churches, and also major resources for the Church, and, just as importantly, focal points for parish and community life.

Our objectives are: to encourage the Church to use, value and maintain its historic parsonages and to recognise them as important assets and as fundamental to its mission; to provide support and advice to parishes and communities that seek to retain their historic parsonages; to research, study and promote understanding of the role of the traditional parsonage in the life of the clergy and the community at large; and, in these ways, to facilitate the mission of the Church and preserve community values.

Our members come from both urban and rural parishes, but the great majority are from the latter. The rural parish differs from the urban in its approach to faith and to the community. The rural rectory or vicarage is perceived as an important part of the identity of the community, in the same way as the pub, shop or post office. Rural areas have lost a lot of these infrastructures. As a result the loss of the vicarage has a particularly adverse effect on the rural faith community. If there is a new vicarage at all, it is usually in a new estate far from the church, involving more environmentally unfriendly use of the car.

SOP responds to requests for help and advice from parishes up and down the country when threatened with the disposal of their parsonage by their diocese. We also lobby General Synod or its committees when review groups, reports or forthcoming legislation may affect our cause. We conduct research projects and we publish a newsletter for members.

Our beneficiaries are our members and we are funded solely by membership subscriptions and donations. Our members are either supporters of our cause

in general, or clergy, churchwardens, parochial church council members and other concerned parishioners who come to us for help. We have an active committee, comprised of both clergy and laity, which holds regular meetings in London, where matters of strategy, policy, organisation and casework are discussed.

Our major achievements have seen some success in drawing attention to the plight of the traditional parsonage, with the help of our distinguished patrons and our press campaigns, and those cases where we have succeeded in persuading the Church to retain a particular rectory or vicarage. These achievements have only been possible through determination, publicity and hard work on behalf of, and with the help of, our members. Reflecting our membership, most of our achievements have been in rural areas, where the Church's arguments are even harder to justify than in the cities, and campaigning has been easier due to strength of support.

Our main challenge has been, and remains, to change the 'mindset' of the dioceses and the central Church organisations by persuading them that their policy of selling off these great assets simply diminishes the influence of the Church and undermines the community. This is a huge task. In rural areas we have also faced particular challenges such as (1) overcoming lack of self-confidence in sometimes unsophisticated parishes, (2) diocesan policy of discouraging the idea that the vicarage is part of the rural community and (3) the fact that the diocese has normally taken its decision before making any attempt to involve the parish.

For the future we are seeking to become more structured with a more focussed role for each member of the committee.

Sheriff Hutton Junior Church

Caroline Hunt (Voluntary leader)

Aims and objectives: to encourage and support local children

Activities: praise sessions, music club, Sunday school

Location: rural village half way between York and Malton, North Yorkshire

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: local children, toddlers, babies and their carers

Resources: 2 Churches, a small dedicated group of 5 volunteers (all parents)

Partner organisations: 2 Churches (Church of England and Methodist), parish benefice

The two village churches (Church of England and Methodist) in Sheriff Hutton are involved in the Junior Church project. The project includes a weekly praise session (Chatterbox) for babies, toddlers and their carers and a weekly United Sunday School for children from 0-12 (currently!) in the Methodist Church (warm and carpeted). A Church Music Club for children aged seven and above is run in our house so we don't need babysitters for our own children! Monthly Family Praise services are alternated between the two churches.

All children are welcome but we particularly encourage children whose parents attend Chatterbox or Family Praise services. A number of families *only* come to Chatterbox, Family Praise or the annual Christingle service and no other church services in the village. These are the families we are trying to serve and help to grow.

The leaders are a small dedicated group of five volunteers (all parents). We are supported by both churches and are also linked to our parish benefice (five churches) which involves: helping to run another Chatterbox; providing a band for other bi-monthly Family Services; supporting benefice youth clubs; and confirmation classes.

Junior Church has grown in status from a child-minding crèche to a real priority in both churches! Our monthly Family Praise service is now the only service in Sheriff Hutton on that morning and has the largest congregation (about 75). Most people are now supportive - at least in principle - to the notion of children and families needing services which are relevant to their needs. However some people prefer more traditional services and therefore may choose to go somewhere different instead of coming to a Family Praise service. In rural locations people expect their 'local' church to meet all their needs whereas in towns and cities people can choose between churches. Replacing the morning services once a month with Family Praise was a major decision by the Church and was made jointly by both churches. This decision from the joint liaison committee has made it really clear that Junior Church is a priority.

We have a core group of children who need nurturing. At the Sunday School one eleven year-old said, 'It's very important that there's something for us to do,

because this is the age when we decide whether or not we're going to be Christians'. The Sunday School has become a very supportive family group.

As for the older church members, two Mums have come forward for confirmation. We have also held faith exploration classes for older members late on a Sunday evening. These times have been absolutely amazing - really open, honest, questioning and very moving. As I mentioned, many parents only attend church when it is Chatterbox, Family Praise or the annual Christingle services so we have an *enormous* responsibility help these adults grow in faith.

Some of the challenges we face are that the Sunday School is for a large age range of children and has only two alternating leaders! There are also ageing populations (mostly retired) in both churches. I think many of the key lay people in the church communities - church wardens, secretaries, Parochial Church Council and church council - are getting older. Many of them retired a number of years ago and are now looking to lighten their loads, but there are very few younger people around. We had a wonderful evening in Easingwold with Archbishop John Sentamu (with a band made up of local young people), when he challenged the congregation to decide where their priorities are - growing the graveyard or growing their congregation. I think this helped! We need younger adults to take on roles and responsibilities in the near future.

To overcome the challenges I find that praying and taking one day at a time are key actions! I do my best with the other volunteers to provide appropriate activities for the different ages - and they all know that it's difficult at times. We try to plan for the older children at their own level but they also help with younger children. The confirmation group and youth groups also provide additional 'input'. The two Sunday School leaders support each other and often run a session together. Music Club gives another opportunity for input.

Our challenge for the future is to continue to grow and develop so that we nurture these children and families and encourage more and more people to come. The adult faith exploration group officially should have finished, as three of us are getting confirmed! However we are all keen to carry on meeting so now we want to find a way to help more adults - such as the parents who come to Family Praise and Chatterbox - to have an opportunity to explore their own faith in a similar way. Perhaps in time they will want to lead and help? We also want to develop Family Praise, Chatterbox and Sunday School so that they really hit the spot and meet people's needs. The older children will be starting a monthly Youth Club in 2007 (which I will *not* be leading!) and I hope that will help our young people to feel that church is looking after them too.

Holy Trinity Church

Cathy Horder (Vicar)

Aims and objectives: environmental campaigning

Activities: Ecocongregation church, campaigning against expansion of Bristol airport on environmental grounds, school walking bus

Location: Cleeve, North Somerset

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: church members, children, villagers

Resources: Ecocongregation award scheme

Holy Trinity is an Anglican church of about 40 members in a village of around 2000, about ten miles south west of Bristol. The church is situated on the A370 Bristol to Weston Super Mare road, and just five miles from Bristol airport.

As Christians we believe that this world was created by a loving Creator who cherishes it and seeks wholeness, shalom (peace, wholeness, wellbeing), for all creation. Human beings are to treat the creation as a gift and to cherish it also. Our mandate, to love God and love our neighbour, is expressed in the way we live our lives, and how we use the resources of this planet affects our neighbour.

In 2002 the church registered with Ecocongregation, a scheme aimed at promoting awareness of environmental concerns and finding practical ways of encouraging the church and its members to find ways of living more sustainably. There is also a community element to the scheme whereby the church takes on a project within the community. Two projects our church has undertaken are:

- We are aware of the increasing volume of traffic in our area. To get our voice heard we organised a petition against the expansion of Bristol airport on environmental grounds. Around 50 people signed and it was sent to the airport with a copy to the local MP Dr Liam Fox, who has written to us to agree with our position. This is very much a live issue: the expansion plan has now been published and has been sent to the Department of Transport and North Somerset Council.
- We also run a 'Walking Bus' once a week from the vicarage to the local primary school. We first approached North Somerset Council with our idea and they sent someone to train us and carried out a hazard test. We then advertised the 'Walking Bus' and now have over twenty child 'passengers'. They are given stickers to collect on a card for every journey they make and prizes are awarded when a child completes the card. The bus is run by the vicar and two church members with a few mothers walking with us.

The church also organises open meetings such as a public showing of the film 'An Inconvenient Truth' and a meeting on carbon emissions. This meeting was open to all residents and councillors from the two parish councils of Cleeve, and Yatton and Claverham were invited. The speaker was Ian Roderick who is a Director of the Schumacher Institute and the instigator of the 'Go Zero' project in Chew Magna, North Somerset. The aim was to begin discussions on what we can do in these villages to work towards being carbon neutral.

Caring for God's Acre, Leintwardine

CASE EXEMPLAR 6

Culain Morris (Committee Chair)

Aims and objectives: to manage the churchyard for wildlife and people

Activities: management e.g. 'haymaking', elder control information supply
e.g. conducted tours, visitor leaflets, events in the churchyard
e.g. Loose Goose Festival

Location: the churchyard of St.Mary Magdalene, Leintwardine

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: members of the local community
e.g. primary school pupils, visitors e.g. tour groups, tourists, festival participants

Resources: committee/work party of 6, paid local lengthsman, probation service teams, Local Heritage Initiative grants for first two phases of the project

Partner organisations: Leintwardine Church Council, Local Heritage Initiative (Countryside Agency), Caring For God's Acre Head Office Leominster

The Caring for God's Acre (CFGAs) Project here in the village manages the parish churchyard for people and wildlife. I have been involved with the project since early 2003, by which time it was up and running with funding from the Local Heritage Initiative. Our funding has enabled us to produce an information-board and accompanying leaflet, to commission three oak benches from a local craftsman with design input from the primary school children, and to publish a small book *Beyond Ourselves*.

Our main public event for the past three years has been a Michaelmas *Loose Goose Festival* which has featured live geese and a range of all-age activities – this year archery, goose-skittles, basket-work – plus stalls selling produce, art/craft items and refreshments. The aim has been to combine fun and fund-raising.

In June/July, the senior class from the Primary School carried out their science field-work in the churchyard. We are developing this programme so that the children achieve their curriculum targets, appreciate the churchyard as a wildlife resource in the centre of the village and also give us data to help assess how well our management plan is working.

Key factors to our success have been the availability of grant-funding to kick-start the project, support from the CFGA head office staff in Leominster, the commitment of the small local team who provide year-round planning and comprise the basic work-force.

A major challenge has been the 'Why is the churchyard looking so messy?' comment. We are encouraged that gradually, this is giving way to appreciation of the flowers and butterflies and an understanding that long grass, ivy and brambles have their importance. Explaining, sharing enthusiasm and being prepared to listen – these have helped to generate acceptance.

We are now effectively self-funding. For the future we need some 'new blood' in the local team. We also hope that skills-acquisition through CFGA Leominster contacts and courses (scything, use of grazing animals in a modified management

plan to tackle current problems such as hog-weed) will enable us to increase the biodiversity of the churchyard and to share it with more and more people. Our trial plot of grassland flowers has done well in its second year, with all 13 species in evidence in 2006.

CFGA is faith-based in the sense that we are managing a 'sacred space', with the permission of (but significantly independent of) the parish church. As a Christian, one of its attractions for me is the opportunity to make bridges into the community and build relationships on the basis of shared interests.

The Eathorpe Roast

CASE EXEMPLAR 7

David Ellis (Churchwarden, St John the Baptist Church)

Aims and objectives: building friendships across the villages of the Feldon Group

Activities: traditional Sunday lunch and speaker with discussion

Location: Wappenbury, Leamington

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: people living in Eathorpe and surrounding villages

Resources: volunteers, food, village hall

The Eathorpe Roast, an initiative to serve Sunday lunches in Eathorpe village hall, was started in February 2005 in order to:

- build friendships across the seven villages of the Feldon Group of parishes;
- provide Sunday lunch and company to those living alone; and
- promote debate on topical issues, highlighting the Christian perspective.

A traditional Sunday lunch is organised once a quarter, with an open invitation to people living in Eathorpe and surrounding villages. There's no set charge for the meal but guests are asked to give a donation towards the costs. After the meal, a guest speaker presents 'food for thought' – a short talk on a topical issue (for example, in the light of recent publicity over Muslim women wearing 'the veil', how we should respect people of other faiths and cultures). The idea is not to preach, but to present a point of view and open the floor to discussion.

The event is run by the church council but relies upon volunteer help from across the villages. Much of the food is cooked in people's homes then brought to the village hall ready to be served. Some bake puddings or cook vegetables, others roast a joint of gammon, turkey or beef. There's also a team of volunteers to set up the tables and chairs, lay the tables and serve drinks as guests arrive.

There were many uncertainties when we held the first Eathorpe Roast. Would people come? How would the 'food for thought' be received? Would we have sufficient food? Could we make custard for forty people without it going lumpy? But practice makes perfect, and each time we've run the event we've become more accurate on quantities and more punctual in serving. We have also learned to be more business-like when taking bookings: on one occasion we were expecting 42 people and were alarmed when over 50 turned up. Needless to say, nobody went hungry: an extra 10 portions is nothing to Him who can feed 5000!

We've drawn in people from across the villages – new residents keen to make friends and folk who've lived in their village most of their lives. At one lunch, two couples who had lived in Long Itchington for over 20 years met each other for the first time.

The 'food for thought' has gone down well too, thanks to the generous support of some fascinating speakers. We've heard from:

- a school chaplain who needed to be as well acquainted with the rules of rugby as he was with scripture;
- the director of a Christian charity helping refugees in Chad to rebuild their lives;
- a university chaplain working as part of a multi-faith team;
- the former bishop of Bolivia and Peru; and
- our own Father Ted on the value of human life.

The talks have helped to expand our horizons and have always concluded with a time for questions and discussion.

The biggest challenge continues to be how to attract those without any church connections; our aim is to serve and engage with the whole community, not just the church regulars. Each Eathorpe Roast brings new faces, and as village news spreads quickly, we trust that it won't be long before those who to date have regarded the event as being 'not for them' are tempted to come and see (and taste!) for themselves.

St. James' Church

CASE EXEMPLAR 8

David Richardson (Church Warden and Chair of Development Group)

Aims and objectives: working in partnership with the Parish Council and the community

Activities: community consultation

Location: Welland in Worcestershire

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: local community, churchgoers

Resources: Church, grants of £6,500 from the Central Church Fund and Worcestershire and Dudley Historic Churches Trust, £14,000 borrowed from the Diocese, other funds raised locally and from reserves

Partner organisations: Little Malvern and Welland parish council

Welland is a village of 1,200 people in rural Worcestershire. In common with many rural churches, St. James' church, a large Victorian building able to seat over 200 people, was open for just an hour on a Sunday for a few regular worshippers. The stimulus for change was the attendance by a few members at a seminar 'imaginative use of church buildings'. Inspired by this, a 'Vision for St. James' was established to extend the reach of the church beyond the existing congregation by seeking to serve the needs of the community whilst remaining above all a centre for worship.

To implement this, a Development Group was set up in November 2003. Their first task was to determine the community needs by research, surveys and meetings with various existing local organisations.

At this stage the importance of involving non-church members in our Development Group was recognised. With the approval of the Parochial Church Council, the six church members co-opted a further four people from the community. These included a farmer (also Chair of the parish council), the village postmaster (also a parish councillor and Malvern Hills district councillor), a retired security manager and a teacher (also a parish councillor). The parish councillors were pivotal in the early stages in ensuring that the group did not seek to duplicate existing village facilities or organisations. With their enthusiastic support, valuable momentum for the change process was created. The church was invited to address open meetings of the parish council and received wide encouragement and support for its Vision. A parish plan is currently being produced and the church has been invited to participate in this process.

Major progress has been achieved over a period of three years. Priority needs were identified:

1. Facilities for teenagers in the village
2. Additional social contact for the older residents
3. A facility suitable for concerts, drama and artistic exhibitions

One particularly successful project arose from tensions over teenagers congregating in the village in a perceived threatening manner. Their request at a parish meeting to use a bus shelter as a meeting place attracted opposition. The church offered a disused crypt, a cellar with its own entrance, as a drop-in centre. With the benefit of grant funding for refurbishment, the teenagers now use it as their own room to meet, socialise, play pool and listen to music. A code of conduct was jointly agreed with the teenagers after a few meetings and the facility is used unsupervised with adults sharing the responsibility for health, safety and security.

Other projects include a nearly new sale, popular with older villagers, held in the church each Tuesday in which residents donate unwanted goods for resale, and the staging of professional concerts in which the church is frequently full to capacity. Challenges have been the poor electrics, lighting and heating systems in the main body of the church. We had to fundraise and involve the local community to reach a sum of £37,000 to facilitate the improvements to our facility. We applied for at least 15 grants for adapting the church for community use. The disappointment was that despite very professionally written applications, there was a complete lack of interest in supporting a church building even though the main beneficiaries would be non-churchgoers. Grants of £6,500 were received from the Central Church Fund and Worcestershire and Dudley Historic Churches Trust. £14,000 was borrowed from the Diocese and the rest was raised locally and from reserves.

Some church members (and irregular churchgoers) were lukewarm about the ideas, particularly of a 'shop' in the nave of the church. However, the nearly new sale now raises nearly £5,000 per year, has community support and there is less opposition to the idea. Roger Cousins, the Chairperson of the Little Malvern and Welland parish council commented recently 'The church and parish council work in harmony to achieve benefits for the whole community. The church is now seen as a major asset to the village and is at the heart of the community'.

Our plans for the future depend on finance! We need to install kitchen facilities and toilets to enable greater community use because the village hall is fully booked and unsuitable for many activities. A separate meeting room which can be hired out is also a future aspiration.

Chichester Diocesan Association for Family Support Work

CASE EXEMPLAR 9

Foster Murphy (Development Consultant)

Aims and objectives: family welfare

Activities: advice sessions, support groups, signposting, respite residential holidays

Location: rural areas of East Sussex (Horsham and Chichester districts) and West Sussex (Wealden and Rother districts)

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: parents, children (pre-school and school age), young people

Resources: staff, funding from Big Lottery Fund

Partner organisations: schools, education welfare, health visitors, social services, voluntary organisations, employment services

Chichester Diocesan Association has existed since 1890. The current focus on family support work, mostly with lone parents, has existed for 15-20 years. Family Support Work (FSW) exists to help people rebuild their lives, regain a sense of self-belief, self-confidence and, eventually, self-reliance.

Our focus is on the welfare of families, with a strong emphasis on supporting lone parents, with responsibility of care of children on their own, through a spectrum of difficulties. We run one-to-one advice sessions and support groups, signpost to relevant agencies and organise respite residential holidays at the Association's Centre near Hurstpierpoint. We work with schools, education welfare, health visitors, social services, voluntary organisations, employment services – all of whom refer clients or to which we signpost clients.

The areas in which FSW works include many built-up areas where deprivation and need are concentrated. But we became aware that the need for our services existed throughout the counties of East and West Sussex and that we should start a focussed project in rural areas. We therefore prepared a bid to the lottery based on the premise that whilst we often gained support from the churches in rural areas we should seek to place workers in such areas and respond to need as it emerged. Since 1st April 2006 we have had two staff working on our Rural Project (one for East and one for West Sussex) funded by the (now) Big Lottery Fund for three years. They are managed through the Association's supervision structure.

The first six months has involved considerable networking in the chosen districts and as a result we are seeing a build-up of clients. In rural areas networks are more scattered, need is often less obvious and distances are, by definition, greater to travel to where services exist. At first it seemed we were not having referrals. Now, given the networking success, a challenging case-list has been built up.

The Association has a Five-Year Plan whereby it seeks to expand its services throughout Sussex – this Rural Project is partially a fulfilment of that expansion. Our work is based on a preventative strategy which we see as of continuing significance in relation to government policy concerning families and children.

Farm Crisis Network South East Project

Glyn Evans (South East Regional Coordinator)

Aims and objectives: to relieve need, hardship and distress in the farming community

Activities: providing pastoral and practical support, raising awareness of farming issues

Location: south east region

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: anyone in need within farming communities

Resources: one part-time paid member of staff and 25-30 volunteers, supported by a small paid national staff

Partner organisations: many including other members of the Farming Help partnership

Farm Crisis Network (FCN) is a national organisation founded in 1995 with its headquarters based in Northamptonshire. It is a Christian organisation with a strong Christian ethos but it exists to support people of all faiths and none. The aims of FCN are to relieve need, hardship and distress in the farming community by providing pastoral and practical support through periods of anxiety, stress and related problems. This may involve problems within the farm business and/or the farm household. As well as providing this support FCN also aims to raise awareness of farming issues and the needs of the farming community within the churches and in the wider society.

FCN is part of the Farming Help partnership which includes the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, Samaritans, and the ARC-Addington Fund. We work with a wide range of partners who support our work at regional and local levels ranging from those able to provide technical advice such as the Farm Business Advice Service, Defra, Natural England, National Farmers Union and Tenant Farmers Association, to Rural Community Councils, health organisations, Councils for Voluntary Service, Citizens Advice Bureaux, churches, and individuals.

FCN has a national helpline staffed by volunteers who are trained and supported. Volunteers come largely from the farming community, related industries and from churches. County groups are formed, supported by a Local Coordinator. Helpline volunteers pass cases to Local Coordinators who then assign a volunteer to visit the farm and provide whatever support is appropriate, for as long as it is needed.

The South East Development Project is aimed at increasing the number of county groups and the number of volunteers able to resource this work across the south east region and to raise awareness of farming issues in a predominantly urban minded region.

An example of a recent case involved a farmworker and his family being evicted from a tied accommodation because the farm had gone bankrupt. Another recent case involved a farmer's wife worried about her husband's depression; a visit to the farm by the FCN volunteer enabled the farmer to eventually talk about his worries

about the future of the farm and to help husband and wife to be more open about their fears and anxieties, and hopefully find a way forward together.

In the south east region there is a long established county group in Sussex. Since the project started in July 2006 two further county groups have been started; a group was launched in Oxfordshire in October, and the first meeting of a new group was held in Hampshire in early November. Discussions to start a group in Surrey are underway. FCN will work in partnership with an existing group known as the Surrey Rural Stress Initiative. We have already begun to recruit new local volunteers in all three counties and to raise the profile of the organisation where it has previously been unknown.

The development of the groups has been made possible by the appointment of a dedicated Regional Coordinator's post allowing concentrated officer time to be given to support the few volunteers in place, network with other agencies and provide development opportunities to establish the work.

The nature of the region often means there are difficulties persuading wider society that rural and agricultural issues and particularly rural stress exist. So getting the funding in the first place to develop the work in the south east was quite a challenge. In addition the south east region is not naturally cohesive as a region: work across the whole region is difficult due to travel issues including the expense and time involved in travelling.

We are still at an early stage of the project but are working with existing networks which have been beavering away raising the profile of rural needs and issues, and this is an important feature of the work. The establishment of strong local groups will form a momentum in itself, raise the profile of the work of FCN, and provide for a strong vision for ongoing work at a local level. The regional project itself is likely to last only two years, though there is still hope to find funding for a third year to give the network a stronger base for future development.

Church Action Within Society Group, The Diocese of Worcester

Reverend John Paxton (Social Responsibility Officer)

Aims and objectives: to reduce exploitation among, and help to provide facilities for, migrant workers

Activities: research, pastoral and spiritual care, awareness-raising, myth-busting, lobbying for appropriate healthcare, accommodation, training, education and translation and interpretation services

Location: originally Wychavon District, but now across Worcestershire

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: migrant workers

Resources: churches with volunteer members, local clergy, Community Union, 7 Citizens Advice Bureau advice centres, 7 Worcestershire Hub centres, limited translation and interpretation service in Worcester, two Diocesan officers

Partner organisations: Worcestershire Partnership, Primary Care Trust, Evesham College, Wychavon District Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, Ethnic Access Link, Community Union

The Diocese of Worcester tries to work both locally and county-wide in its concern for migrant workers. A leaflet, prepared by the Agriculture and Rural Life Chaplain, has been circulated to all parishes in the diocese, helping congregation members understand the issue of migrant agricultural workers, and making suggestions on how churches may help to make the workers feel welcome in their new communities. This might involve providing worship opportunities, organising social events, providing advice and information and being supportive at moments of crisis. The leaflet also sets out how important migrant workers are in modern food production processes.

Following a widespread survey of rural economic issues in the Wychavon District, the Diocese shared in commissioning and funding research into the numbers of migrant workers in the District, their needs in terms of health provision, training, particularly in the development of the English skills, housing and community cohesion. Although limited in scope, the research provided a baseline of data, against which other research findings can be measured. We are supporting the decision to undertake region-wide research.

Challenges for the Diocese include the difficulty of gaining direct access to migrant workers, particularly when much of this work is illegal or part of the informal economy. There is still evidence of exploitation of workers, and therefore fear of losing one's job may prevent contribution to research and debate. We will also learn from the experiences of TUC research methods.

To develop and expand the existing advice services, we are investigating external funding sources. The time limit for applications to be submitted has proved very short, given that a number of partners have to be approached and consulted and agreement reached. We are becoming increasingly aware that the number of migrant workers in the manufacturing, hospitality, tourism and transport sectors, as well as agriculture will continue to increase, with stories of exploitation, low

pay, poor housing and inadequate services. The Diocese is keen to reduce the abuse of workers and help answer their specific needs, particularly as more children arrive, and workers move to jobs more suited to their qualifications.

We want to increase the capacity of local churches in the diocese to relate to migrant workers and respond to their individual, family and community needs. Churches must not just act as hosts, but work with migrant workers to improve facilities and reduce exploitation. Following the publication of the regional research, we will review our actions according to the conclusions. One hope is that we will be able to contribute to a volunteer recruitment and training programme for people to staff expanded advice centres.

Luddendenfoot United Reformed Church

Mark Woodhead (Active Faith Communities Programme Outreach Development Worker)

Aims and objectives: to strengthen community life and encourage greater participation in community activities in Luddendenfoot

Activities: events, establishing and securing a community building

Location: Luddendenfoot, a village in the Calder Valley between Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: Luddendenfoot community

Resources: volunteers, consultant (BASSAC Impact programme), development worker

Partner organisations: Civic Centre user groups

The Active Faith Communities Programme (ACFP) works across West Yorkshire to support faith community groups to engage in a range of community development and social action initiatives. I have been working with Luddendenfoot United Reformed Church (URC), in Calderdale, since December 2005 although the church had had some contact with ACFP before then.

Luddendenfoot is an area where new housing is being built as it is increasingly popular as a place to live for people commuting to such places as Bradford and Leeds. But alongside this there has been a decline in community facilities in the village. My role in working with Luddendenfoot URC has been broadly a community development role, including helping them to think through a range of issues, supporting them with project planning, identifying possible sources of funding and helping them to make links (e.g. with BASSAC's Community Impact Programme).

The aim of the work on which I have been supporting the group is to strengthen community life and encourage greater participation in community activities in Luddendenfoot (as opposed to the overall aim of Luddendenfoot URC which would presumably be about promotion of religion). Key areas of work include supporting existing community groups and organisations and ensuring that these groups continue to have a community building in Luddendenfoot to use for both regular and occasional activities.

Currently the URC and various other groups (e.g. Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, Playgroup) meet in Luddendenfoot Civic Centre, and this centre, owned by the local authority, is now threatened with closure. It is also used by some sports teams as a changing facility and sometimes for one-off activities such as parties.

The Civic Centre has been, it is probably fair to say, rather a well-kept secret: there seems to have been little awareness of its existence and certainly of its availability and the activities that go on there. The URC and other user groups are seeking to increase this awareness and to broaden the group to include participation by a wider range of Luddendenfoot residents.

The various Civic Centre user groups, including the URC, got together to form Luddendenfoot United Campaigners. Regular meetings are held, about every three weeks. Special events are organised, and have been quite successful, for the purposes of fundraising, having fun, publicising the centre and the groups, and widening participation. Such activities have included a well attended and successful Gala in September. In terms of participation much work has been done, on a volunteer basis, by the various user groups in the building, in providing services to various sections of the local population, through playgroup, church, etc. There has been increased awareness locally of the civic centre and activities taking place there.

Since the local authority seems intent upon pressing ahead with closure of the building, the focus of the group, which was initially on trying to secure the long-term future of the existing building, has shifted to looking beyond closure and seeking to ensure the establishment of some kind of new community building for the village. Some lobbying of the local authority has taken place to seek their commitment to assisting with the creation of a future community resource for the village.

As was mentioned above, links have been made, e.g. with BASSAC's Community Impact Programme. Through involvement in this programme, the group has been supported to do some work on identifying the impacts and outcomes of their work on the life of the village. The group will be getting the help of a consultant to work with them on business planning and further fundraising.

Successes so far (whilst not losing sight of the bigger and more long term issues) have been achieved by setting targets and activities that are 'quick wins' such as the gala. This was fairly easy to achieve and provided a chance to have some fun even though the volunteers were overworked. Another contributor to success so far has been what I would call an asset-based approach: recognising that although there are needs and problems (i.e. the threatened closure of the building) there are also assets (i.e. people, groups, networks, local knowledge, skills, stories of local struggles and successes). This is a good foundation to build on, people in Luddendenfoot cannot be defined entirely or even mainly in terms of their needs.

The achievements have been made possible mainly by the commitment and effort of volunteers. There has been some guidance and input from others, such as the consultant (Steve Skinner) who worked with the group on the BASSAC Impact programme. I think the main challenge facing the group is the future closure of the building, and the consequent challenge of replacing it. This raises the further challenge of keeping up enthusiasm and momentum in the group.

In the future certainly there will be change. Some of this will depend on such factors as securing funding, appointing a consultant to help with business planning etc. I hope that the change will include increased local awareness and wider local participation in the group, increased confidence, and eventually the creation of a new, well-used community facility for the village, perhaps managed by local people and groups: what some might call a 'community anchor'.

St Giles' Parochial Church Council

Monica Long (Churchwarden and Market Secretary)

Aims and objectives: supporting local farmers and smallholders through holding a Farmers' Market

Activities: Farmers' Market

Location: Shipbourne, near Tonbridge

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: farmers, smallholders, customers, parishioners

Resources: volunteers, church

The idea of a Farmers' Market started with a discussion at the Parochial Church Council. We live in a semi-rural area and we knew there were farmers and smallholders who were going through hard times. What could we do to help the community? The only resource we had was our church. The village shop had closed down in 1981 and the pub had changed hands a number of times, losing all sense of identity.

We did some research and decided we would try to run a Farmers' Market inside the church and in our small car park. It took months of work to sort everything out, but on 22nd May 2003 we held our first market. It was almost a disaster: heating was being installed in the church and the work had over-run, so customers had literally to walk the plank over an open trench to get into the church! An enormous skip took up most of the car park. But we survived and most of the producers who braved that first market are still with us.

Volunteers from the congregation help with getting goods into the church. Our 'porters' include two engineers, a company manager and a bank inspector! Other volunteers make refreshments for customers and stallholders. Our aim is to make it a friendly and welcoming market.

Our market is unusual (and possibly unique) in that it is run by the Parochial Church Council and all profits at the end of the year are given to farming charities in this country and the developing world. This took a bit of doing as our roof needs replacing and the profits might have come in handy! But we have stuck to that original intention.

The market runs every week and has provided a 'surgery' for the Rector who is there to chat informally to parishioners and visitors. It is also a place where customers can meet and talk to each other over a cup of coffee or tea. We have made links with the local pub which has become very successful under new management and is supportive and helpful to the Farmers' Market. In 2005 the market was voted 'Best in Kent' in the Taste of Kent Awards.

Of course there will be changes in the future, but we hope that the solid start will ensure the continuation of the market for years to come. One of our regular customers who is almost blind says 'it's the only place where I can do my own shopping'. Stallholders and customers have become friends.

Sunday 4.6

CASE EXEMPLAR 14

Mandy Wright (Church Army, initiator and leader of group)

Aims and objectives: to be a relevant and accessible Christian community where disciples are grown

Activities: services of worship and community building events

Location: Clawton Village Hall, Holsworthy, Devon

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: between 20 and 30 people drawn from villages around Clawton (age group: 40-90)

Resources: 1 paid member of staff, group members, hired building, voluntary contributions

Partner organisations: Church Army and The Church of England (Exeter Diocese)

The aim of Sunday 4.6 is to create an inclusive and open form of Christian community where those of any Christian tradition and none, can feel they belong. We meet every fourth Sunday at 6pm (hence the name Sunday 4.6). We aim to be accessible to those inside and outside the Church of England and to help members explore ways of connecting with them. We want to create a space for experimentation in worship where 'having a go' is more important than 'getting it right'.

Our major achievement is to bring people from different villages, church cultures and denominations together to form community. We encourage every member to participate in forming community, in worship and in mission. In worship we help people experience different ways of worshipping where we are all participants rather than observers. People have grown in confidence and in their willingness to take 'up front' roles: one of our aims is to enable and train future leaders of Sunday 4.6. People are also growing in their faith and in understanding different people's beliefs and points of view. In mission, we aim to develop so that the people are to be 'good news' to their communities: the aim is not just to come to Sunday 4.6 for our own benefit but to be built up so that we might benefit others. Examples of this might be in visiting the elderly or sick, or (as we are planning) organising a litter pick up followed by a picnic in the summer. The aim is to show the Church can be of benefit to the community.

These achievements were made possible firstly by choosing a 'neutral' and user friendly location to meet in. By not meeting in an existing church building we could grow our own culture rather than being influenced by the prevailing culture in a particular church. Having a clear leader with a vision for what could be also helped in the early days. Financially it was made possible by the staff member being funded by the Church of England and Church Army. Above all, the achievements have been made possible by the courage and willingness to experiment and take risks by all the members.

Our biggest challenge is how to grow. We have not yet found a way of growing but we are working on it. Our average attendance is between 25 and 30, but we seem to have hit a bit of a ceiling. It is not an easy place to travel to, being in a deeply

rural area, and also older people do not like coming out during winter evenings. Forming helpful relationships with the local churches is another challenge but I work hard among the local clergy to reassure them that we are not a threat but a resource.

In January 2007 a core group took over the running of of Sunday 4.6. I will slowly disengage so they will eventually be self facilitating. The whole group will then set their own vision, aims and activities for Sunday 4.6. In the future we plan to form midweek groups for the Sunday 4.6 membership where we can explore our spiritual journeys and deepen relationships.

Yesu

CASE EXEMPLAR 15

Sadie Houghton (Senior Youth Worker)

Aims and objectives: support and develop the local community

Activities: coffee bar and 'help shop'

Location: Sheringham, Norfolk

Beneficiaries, users and/or members: community of Sheringham especially families, single parents, unemployed and young people

Resources: 1 centre, minibuss, donated furniture, 2-bedroom house, staff, volunteers, several grants

Partner organisations: independent counselor, off centre counseling, Matthew Project, Mind, Council Housing, Social Services, NHS Mental Health Team, Connexions, Disability rights Norfolk, Pregnancy Crisis, Transformer Dance

Yesu is a coffee bar and 'help shop' for the community of Sheringham and the surrounding towns and villages, situated in the High Street of Sheringham. The centre opened in July 2002 and aims to: build strong relationships within the community; provide a welcoming environment and place of excellence that the community appreciate as their own; improve the quality of life for young people (by making them feel valued and letting them know there is a place they can come for help and support); increase the availability of information and advice services; improve the level of life skills; and enhance support for families, single parents and the unemployed.

Our ethos is best described by the statement below:

'Yesu is a project about **you**.

We see you as special, valued and important.

We want to serve you and give you our best.'

To work towards our aims Yesu provides: a coffee bar; a comfortable lounge area; a pool table and computer games; theme evenings; various groups for under 18s including a 'tots group' and 'under 18's evening'; an achievement project (young people at risk of exclusion); a mental health support group; parenting courses; a lifestyle course (looking at coping strategies); and a 'help shop'. The 'help shop' houses: drug and alcohol support; debt help; benefits help; Citizens Advice Bureau; pregnancy crisis; Mind; housing support; and Befrienders.

We help join people together and create a supportive environment between agencies and the community. We work in partnership with agencies that may have their own premises nearly 30 miles away in Norwich by making our premises available for them to use. For example, services that are provided from our premises involving partnership include benefits advice with Disability Rights Norfolk and advice for young people with Connexions. This benefits both the agencies and the local community. These different agencies work alongside the paid staff team of seven (four full time, two part time) and volunteers. Over 100

people have completed our initial basic awareness training which allows them to volunteer in the centre. Out of those 100 we currently have 52 active volunteers.

We have one centre but hire local school and community centre facilities in the surrounding area to run specific groups. We also have a two-bedroom house to accommodate one family at a time in need of housing. The centre receives very positive feedback on its facilities. Everyone is impressed with the excellent decoration of the centre which helps to show people that we value them.

We use a combination of both 1 to 1 support and focused group work. These approaches compliment each other and contribute to the success of the project. We have all age groups using the facilities at Yesu from the surrounding area. The support that is available is wide ranging and we find that a person who accesses one service may quickly take advantage of other services. Yesu is also open to the general public on several days a week and a few people use the centre just as a coffee bar.

From its inception the project has continued to grow and now we are in regular contact with 300 children and young people, about 50 families and 20 individuals each week. Earlier this week a gentleman from our mental health support group commented that 'this place has helped me a lot and has helped change my life'. He now has the confidence to come along whenever we are open, to drop in for a coffee and a chat. One parent from the 'tots group' refers to her time at Yesu as a 'lifeline'.

The achievements of Yesu have only been possible because of the commitment and support of New Wine Church. The church members have given substantial finances, time, energy and skills. We have also benefited greatly from grants from charitable trusts and East of England Development Agency. Fundraising however continues to be a challenge and we are attempting to generate more income through sales at the coffee bar.

Other challenges include meeting the needs of our volunteers. Our volunteers have a wide range of abilities. Ensuring that everyone is happy in their role as a volunteer without giving people too much responsibility or not enough can be a difficult balance. As a project serving rural areas, isolation is always an issue for people who rely on public transport to access our facilities. Although we are situated in the town centre public transport often isn't suitable due to the needs and location of the service user. We can enable some service users to access our centre and other services by volunteers using their cars and our minibus. For those with cars we have no parking facilities and the town is often busy so it can be quite difficult to find somewhere to park.

In the future we will continue to adapt to needs of the communities. We would like to establish further housing projects and would also like to replicate the Yesu centre in other market towns in North Norfolk.



This publication can be made available in large print and alternative formats on request.

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faith in the community

the contribution of faith-based organisations to rural voluntary action