

**MULTI
FAITH
CENTRE**



Keeping the Faith event:

Reflecting on Derby Faith communities' contributions during the Covid emergency

Report highlighting the key themes and messages

June 2021



Derby City Council

Community Action

The Multi Faith Centre is a charity that encourages and facilitates dialogue, co-operation, mutual respect and understanding between a diverse range of people from different faith communities and civil society who, by coming together, aim to improve the wellbeing of people living in Derbyshire.

Derby Community Action is a registered charity providing support and guidance for voluntary groups and community organisations. As the Volunteer Centre for Derby city it offers a brokerage service for potential volunteers and organisations and supports them to develop volunteering opportunities. It also provides a wide range of advice, information and training to voluntary and community organisations.

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About the event

In May 2021, the event brought together the diverse faith communities of Derby to:

- Reflect on faith contributions to the city's Covid response.
- Identify and understand the common themes, bonds, attributes and assets across faith communities.
- Build a network of diverse faith communities and activists.
- Connect with local authorities and key agencies with faith communities.
- Explore the "What Next?"

Derby's faith communities and groups have been crucial partners in Derby's emergency response to the pandemic. New experiences of collaboration and partnership across the city point towards changing relationships and mutual perceptions between faith organisations and local authorities, and what the implications might be for future policy.

Whilst there has been a lot of dialogue and research nationally, the local picture in Derby is not understood or appreciated to the same degree. The aim of the Keeping the Faith event was to make a helpful contribution in this regard and to enable deeper, more honest communication between faith communities and with public sector stakeholders to start building a local Derby perspective.

The evening included:

- Case study presentations from eight faith organisations to stimulate thinking and illustrate the breadth and diversity of social need within the city and the inspirational work that is already happening in the city.
- Two facilitated breakout sessions. The same open-ended questions were asked in eight breakout rooms to stimulate in-depth conversations and key observations that were reported back to the main session.
- A final Plenary session summarised the key learnings and identified the next steps to take forward.

This report reflects those discussions. Key messages and themes have been highlighted with unattributed quotes to support included.

The event was organised by the Multi Faith Centre and Community Action Derby with the support of Derby City Council's Community Development Team. A Steering group was convened including representatives from Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian faith communities. The group was chaired by The Very Reverend Peter Robinson, Dean of Derby.

We would like to thank the Open Centre, Muslim Burial Council, Derby City Mission, New Life Church, Derby Langar, Upbeat Communities and Geeta Bhawan Hindu Temple for their inspirational presentations, and all our attendees for their warmth and generous contributions to the discussions and helping to make the evening such a success.

What are the contributions / added value that faith communities have to offer? What can we uniquely offer?

Our Faith

It's our faith that gets us through. Even when there's a brick wall and you're thinking you can't do it, but faith keeps us going, and we get that desired result, and we get things done because we want to do it.

Faith requires action. As the scripture says, faith without action is useless. Faith really allows people to act, not just a mere belief or an idea. As opposed to not having faith, it's just more like just doing it because you have the resources to.

If you have faith, it's that inner belief, and it's about your intention, rather than the attention that you're trying to draw to yourself to get something done.

If you're doing it for the right reasons, it doesn't matter whether you have the resources or not. You want to make that positive change that you want to see in society, and you want to do it with the right sort of people.

Shared Values

I'm very driven by my want to support other people to have the best opportunities, and no one should be in poverty. And I think most faiths would have that same underpinning principle, to help, to support, but also recognise that it's more organised, it's in a more organised sense as well.

I would say the most important thing is to show love. And that is part of my faith, and other peoples' faith, I'm not saying just me. That's really important. But that was also true for the presentations from the non-Christian, the Muslim, or the Sikh one or whatever environment. That I mean we might use slightly different language, which we probably do.

Love, compassion, humanity, respect. They exist across all faiths. And it's those commonalities that we all share that brings us together to respond to a challenge.

Personal conviction

That's just part of how we operate. To be loving to your neighbour and to care for those in need is inbuilt within in us.

We don't just volunteer because it's a good thing to do. There's something inside of us that cares for the whole person because we care about what we're doing. It's not just a sense of duty. It's much more holistic. It's a holistic offer, and I think people pick up on that.

Volunteers

Faith is the first voluntary sector, going back thousands of years. People that morally, and for the faith, are driven to support and to help, so I think that's important.

We have volunteers who are there and happy to help at times when there is a need. So, I think we can offer structures and people in times of need.

Seeing the person beyond the immediate need

I think it's about relationship as well. It's going the extra mile and looking to build that in the future. It's not just a one-off giving them material things, but it's building that opportunity, if they want, to build a relationship.

When people come to the food bank, you see their immediate need. But I think with the faith communities, if they want, if they all want that, we've got that extra bit that we can offer them. So, it's just not body, but it's body and soul, I suppose.

It's not just the practical needs but holistic.

Bringing hope and a sense that things will get better

Faith communities can bring a sense of hope, bringing hope to community, to society, to life.

Willingness to go the extra mile

Faith creates a place where more than just the practical needs of someone can be met. That you can potentially go deeper with someone. A statutory agency delivering a food parcel or providing a service, it's quite a transactional process often for that kind of thing. Whereas a faith community whether it's a charity like ours or a church community or another faith group has that opportunity to step a little bit deeper into someone's situation.

Offering that extra level of care that people might be needing certainly at times when people are grieving and struggling.

Development of authentic, long term relationships

That aspect of developing relationships is important as well. Not just providing the practical, getting to know people, being there so they know we're there for them.

Commitment is not defined by the resources available

Faith is about acting, even if you don't see the resources, about knowing that this is the requirement, this is something that you respond to and then see the provision. I think in other cases you can have the resources and not have the faith to put it in action, to let it happen. So, I think that's the added value of action, does instead of just hearers.

Other sectors try to address social issues in the community because the resources are there, or the funding is available. But I think if you have faith, you're doing it from the inside going outwards, and you're more likely to succeed, and the outcomes are a lot likely to be better.

Longevity & continuity

Faith communities have been in this for a very long time haven't we, so you would hope that both as organisations and as individuals we have a history of skills and expertise. From pastoral skills listening to people through to in some cases logistical skills because we deliver projects. Churches have always delivered projects, community projects, so all that is there just waiting to be tucked into.

Part of that is continuity, because rightly, sometimes, project-based things are ephemeral. There are some that have a longevity, but many come, and they go. But the fact of the continuity of faith communities over many years, of being there, that's something that is, I think, not so present in the rest. It is there in secular groups as well. But I think it's a special feature perhaps.

We're not a one-off. It is that longevity, isn't it? It's that ongoing kind of relationship.

Unique motivations for social action

There's something around the source of your motivation in faith sector. So, at the end of the day, some people volunteer because it's to boost their CV. Some people volunteer to keep themselves occupied or develop some new skills. But it's that very honest, compassionate, humanity motivation within the faith sector. That does set you aside from, I feel, from the community and voluntary sector.

Trust

I think the faith sector has the advantage that it's understood. People understand and trust the faith sector, you're doing what you're doing because you love God, and you're reaching out to people in the neighbourhood.

Communications and community networks

Faith communities, especially if they're communities of colour and faith, they have a pretty unique way of already being organised, whether they're in touch through their internal channels of communications. For example, as COVID hit, it was faith communities, as we just heard, that were able to mobilise the fastest and the quickest, and with the broadest reach, that even non-profit organisations or governmental initiatives were not able to in that capacity.

Dynamism and responsiveness

The faith sector's very dynamic. And it has that ability to respond immediately without sometimes the bureaucracy of public sector organisations. And indeed, for that matter, some community and voluntary sector organisations that have amassed a number of convoluted and complex processes that need to be followed. I think the faith sector's able to just hit the ground running.

People have been surprised even more how quickly churches; faith groups have pivoted towards to the need as it was expressed.

Most people might think that faith communities are just for gathering and praying, they're actually really amazing at mobilising and standing in solidarity with people.

Bringing people together – Our convening power

Places of worship can do projects that other secular, non-profit organisations do as well. But those secular non-profit organisations, they can't provide what churches and mosques provide, what places of worship provide, which is a place where faith brings communities and families together. That, in and of itself, should not be underestimated.

What emerged during a crisis has created a longevity in Muslim leadership. Particularly around amplifying the voices of young people, it's been phenomenal. Albeit born out of quite tragic circumstances.

What other examples of faith action are already happening? What can be scaled up?

Food for Thought is a great example. We've got several food banks within churches that are connecting with each other. But what happened over the last 12 months is that it kind of set the blueprint for significantly scaling up the way in which this city supports people around assisted food.

Physical activity in church spaces.

Working with families.

Existing partner partnerships that can be strengthened, solidified, and taken into the future.

I wonder whether as furlough ends there will be more need. Employability schemes, coaching to help and whether those kinds of things will need to scale.

Needs will change, won't they? As we're already seeing. The food issue perhaps might not be the primary issue at this point as people are able to return to the shops. Those that were vulnerable are able to return to the shops, etc., and their needs might change.

Muslim Burial Council and Mosques continuing to work together closely.

We need help finding out what the problems are.

How can the potential of faith communities be unlocked?

[We need to build] an awareness of where and what the needs are. What might be helpful particularly within the council for us to be involved with, where is the need that isn't being met?

Talk about faith contributions and promote it. Really shouting about our accomplishments.

Being connected enough with each other to be aware of what each other's doing and work out a way it makes sense to work together and support one another.

Continue having that kind of outward-looking approach, so that we don't just squirrel away in our own little area, but we look to coordinate as well. So, that we can get the benefits of scale when that's helpful.

Too often we have small groups of people doing their own thing. And I think if we can all unite, share our resources and common practice, what has actually worked and what hasn't, that will be better in the long run to enable us to serve the wider community.

If there is something that needs to be done, we need to combine all our forces together, raise the funds and make sure that the funds are used appropriately in the right place.

What challenges are likely to hit society hardest in the coming years?

Mental Health

People's experiences, people's fears, fears of what's going to happen once the lockdown is completely eased and people are free to be out. Some people don't want to be out. Some people would rather stay at home. Some people want to work at home indefinitely now. Some people are afraid. This fear factor of being next to colleagues.

Very young people who haven't been able to go to school and have that peer interaction to older people who are socially isolated and alone. And I think it's going to impact more than we're seeing at the moment.

We are seeing that among students already certainly, for the 16 to 19-year-olds, lockdown did no favours. At Derby College, our student support, they're not taking any more referrals because their backlog.

Access to medical care

Usually under normal circumstances looking at the year prior, mental health took up between 20 and 30% of their case load as a GP and it's now taking up about 50 to 60% of their case load. And that means that people with physical disabilities how it's having a knock-on effect with them because they're not able to get the appointments to see to having their physical issues being resolved.

Economic impacts

In terms of employment, in terms of education gaps. And of course, there's all kinds of knock-on effects for that. For crime and drugs, and all that potential as well. So, just huge.

End of Furlough - economic shock is down the road. Advice agencies who at the moment aren't seeing so much around debt because of all the debts being forgiven, the mortgage holidays and that. And we're expecting that soon aren't we at some point to start to hit, as well as the mental health issues.

However, despite the challenges that the pandemic's created for our communities, there is also a sense of optimism from faith communities that it's also created opportunities.

We need to design a new normal.

Negative impacts of technology

Zoom Meetings will never replicate the dynamics and the chemistry of us being able to sit face-to-face and shaking hands.

Some people who still can't or don't or won't or can't connect electronically.

More screen addiction from the youth.

The legacy of negative social media
– frustration, hate, misinformation.
Normalisation of bad and unchallenged
online behaviour.

Growing divide between young and old

Young people. There was already a
generation gap regarding that, the gap
will be even bigger. Make sure that we
are supporting our young people. Tension
between young and old.

Delayed grief

Bereavement, because it's just been so
difficult for people in the last year, and that
could well have an impact which is linked to
perhaps the mental health issue.

Not being able to grieve and celebrate life,
that people would have liked to, would have
done in the past, has been a challenge.

What's going on in care homes as well when
people haven't been able to be with their
loved ones.

Other

We also noted that issues relating to the
environment and physical health and
obesity were also recurring themes within
discussion groups.

What would facilitate faith communities working more effectively together? Or with the council, other key agencies or the community and voluntary sector?

Build and broaden strategic relationships, structures, and networks

Ensure the local authority is listening to the faith sector, and that the faith sector has influence within the public sector.

There's no good having fantastic support from one team that sits within a local authority. You've got to have the support of the entire local authority. And that's important for us to crack.

We need to build on the strengths that have been developed over the last 12 months. Focus entirely on a strength-based approach, rather than a deficit-based approach.

In the past we haven't, as faith communities, always been terribly strategic with what we've done. So, we've done some good stuff, but it has been quite disjointed. And it is that big picture thing in lots of ways that's been lacking.

Building strategic relationships across the different faith groups, and community groups, and just becoming much more aware of each other.

Linking in with council, etcetera to say exactly what there is to offer, if that makes sense - working as an entire community.

Create a platform for all faiths to come together around a common purpose.

Learn from and inspire each other

Continue the shared human learning thing, across different faith groups. And we could perhaps benefit a lot from that.

Create active networks

I think we are getting more aware of that and better at that, but things like this really do help. So that, yes, we're not all trying to do the same thing, or trying to do it on our own, basically.

Be better connected. This platform in itself in bringing different faith groups together, it's always great to have that shared space, where we can talk with each other.

Wherever there's personal relationship and connection, there's more chance of working more in partnership, I think.

Be more visible, approachable and accessible

Make faith communities more visible to public authorities of various kinds.

It's the presence within the community, as the faith groups and the places of worship, making that more visible and more contributory. That the faith groups themselves can open themselves up more in that way, but also, they can be valued for just being part of it.

It's about mandate within the council. It's around accountability, but mutual accountability.

Communicate the value of faith communities more confidently

What we're doing now is fantastic and I think faith communities have been coming together and that's the other thing. I think we must shout about it a little bit more as well how amazing our faith communities have been.

Stories are important, and I think there's been lots of that happening, but it's been happening quietly, and we've all been getting on with it. And actually, it's about shouting about that and encouraging more people to come forward to become part of their faith community.

Communication is fundamental to that shift change in attitude with local authorities and other public sector bodies, to sit up and listen and see the strengths of the faith sector.

Highlighting some of this amazing work and those amazing stories. Celebrate the things that are happening and when people hear what is going on, they will be inspired to do something themselves. And it's brilliant to break down the prejudice and stereotypes, negativity. To publicise what's going on is great.

Build on this whilst there's this window of opportunity to showcase what the faith sector brings to the city, which is phenomenal.

Help local authorities and other stakeholders see all faiths as an asset and valued partners

In some community settings faith can often be seen as a problem to manage rather than as a resource to draw upon and I think COVID has helped shift some of that dynamic.

We don't just simply return to the way we were beforehand but can somehow keep that momentum going.

Address the self-limiting behaviours that prevent some faith groups from doing more

Sometimes organisations and faith communities feel constrained within the regulations of their own organisations and that almost COVID allowed a lot of them to think, forget that committee, we'll just get on with it, kind of thing.

Retain some of that fluidity around not being too precious around our own structures to enable us to engage with communities who we wouldn't necessarily have thought to connect with before.

A change of mindset

Be led by the needs of the community not our agendas.

We need to be able to do those real community-based, seeing community as assets and their own solution and as the experts. And for me that reflects as much in faith communities as it does in any community. And we've all put all of our differences aside and I think that starts being really positive for me.

The faith sector has responded better in some sense than the voluntary sector because a lot of the voluntary sectors were closed or had to change their model of operation. And actually, the faith communities have continued to meet and to respond.

Faith communities should be seen as a huge part of the solution instead of a problem, particularly the Muslim communities.

Create a new model of leadership – utilise the strengths of the networks.

Ensure all faith communities are represented and have a voice

Make sure that the voices of all communities are heard, from all faith communities.

Reaching out to some of those smaller Black church groups, Muslim community, the temples and making sure those voices are being heard as well and reflected in terms of future planning will be important.

Christian main churches are there and at the table, and I'm not sure that's the same for some of those smaller faith organisations and those other more diverse faith organisations. In terms of planning and recovery, certainly, is my experience.

We hear predominantly the Christian voice, but we also need to enable and empower the voice of the smaller faiths in the planning and the recovery.

Better co-ordination and awareness of what others are doing

If we coordinate it and we let people know and encourage others by sharing that good practice, then it's almost second nature to the city. So, we talk about it, we do more of this, we celebrate the good that's happening, we become advocates in our city, so that everybody, let's all do it. We don't have to wait until things are stripped away.

And it's about building stronger communities for me, and faith communities are part of that, that local piece, that local colour in terms of what makes a vibrant community.

We need to establish relationships with each other.

Support and encourage partnership and collaboration

It's a fantastic way to meet social need if we can all work together, but it's just how to facilitate that, how to make it happen when we're all very busy people.

Partnership working can be just very effective. How do we make these relationships work, so that we can all work together more?

I do think the challenges still are that I think it's a great idea, but practically, all of a sudden if there's a lot more meetings... It's a great idea, but how do we get people to prioritise this thing?

Build inter faith networks and relationships

Make it easier for people to make connections, then that would certainly help.

It's all about communication and keeping those channels open, and being tolerant of everybody else's opinions and listening, I think. And forums like this, it's ideal, isn't it?

Do more of this, because selling what we do and celebrating what we do, be it in the community or in the council, and bringing that together, it enables the establishment of healthy relationships,

Some forum that would bring people together, I think would be a really good idea.

I think we all respond to personal relationship and contact, don't we? And I think there's less chance of prejudice and misunderstanding that way. And more chance of recognising common ground and trying to work together to meet needs.

And how we get beyond that to the people who are just general members of our church groups, members of our communities, to actually sit and share together. And I think that's the key, how we get it drilled down into that level.

Harness the positive aspects of technology

Virtual meetings have unlocked the ability to meet with people who ordinarily wouldn't come to a physical meeting.

Build on the momentum

You don't have to wait for a pandemic to happen. There's always going to be somebody in need. There's always going to be somebody who needs help for their family. There's always going to be somebody who needs hot food.

What next?

The conference mandated the Steering Group and asked it to take forward several recommendations on behalf of the faith sector:

1. Produce a briefing paper to capture the event findings and circulate to faith communities and local authority and other stakeholders.
2. The Steering Group will develop a faith forum or equivalent body to enable the sector to act strategically as a valued partner in the city's recovery and beyond.
3. The Steering Group will be mindful of the faiths communities and groups who are not currently engaged, recruit additional members, and develop proposals to ensure broad representation and diversity of membership.
4. The Steering Group will develop a regular programme of networking opportunities to build engagement, develop relationships, share best practice and intelligence, create awareness of what others are doing, and identify priorities and partnership opportunities.
5. Support all faith communities and groups to invest time and effort in building relationships with all denominations within their own faith and across faiths.
6. There is a need to continue developing our knowledge of where faith communities are now, what their contribution has been or could be in the future, and what support might be needed to enable communities to contribute sustainably.
7. The faith sector will continue to celebrate and communicate the strengths and considerable contributions of faith communities.
8. Clarify the support and role of the Multi-Faith Centre in convening and facilitating the work of the faith forum or an equivalent body on behalf of the sector.

Contributors

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Derby Walbrook Epiphany

Derby Jamia Mosque

Derby Muslim Burial Council

Upbeat Communities

St James' Centre

The Open Centre

Derby Homes

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service

University of Derby

Coventry University

Tell MAMA

St Martin's Methodist Church

Derby Cathedral

Derby City Deanery

Diocese of Derby

New Life Church

The Source Church (Kedleston Road, Derby)

Derby Langar

Togs Clothing Bank

Geeta Bhawan Temple

St Alkmund's Church

Oakwood, Mayfield Rd and Alvaston
Methodist Church

Derbyshire Constabulary

Derby City Church

Church of God of Prophecy

Derby College Group

Derby City Mission

Mickleover and Dean St Methodist Church

St Werburgh's Church (Derby City Centre)

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