

Many churches and faith based organisations view service to their local community as a key way in which they can live out the principles of their faith. In these difficult economic times the needs of those within our local communities is steadily increasing, as is our imperative to help.

A loose network of representatives from local Christian denominations and other faith based organisations (including Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland, Salvation Army, CARE, Churches' Community Work Alliance, Evangelical Alliance, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Congregational Union of Ireland, Elm Pentecostal Church in Ireland) has recently come together to discuss issues faced in relation to accessing funding to provide these services, particularly amongst those who conscientiously object to receiving funding from BIG Lottery.

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**Position Paper on Faith Groups & Lottery Funding**  
**Faith & Funding Network**  
**May 2009**

**Background**

1. Northern Ireland continues to have a strong 'church-going' tradition with church attendance nearly three times higher than that of England.<sup>1</sup> While the role of the Churches during the 'Troubles' has sometimes been criticised, it is also acknowledged that during the very darkest days the Churches had a considerable contribution to make in providing a stabilising influence locally during some of the darkest periods. This was most recently acknowledged in the Report of the Consultative Group on the Past<sup>2</sup>. Indeed for many communities in Northern Ireland, particularly in the inner urban areas, churches or other faith based groups were the only 'service providers' left when statutory agencies could no longer operate.
2. However many faith based organisations face obstacles in serving their local communities, particularly with regard to accessing funding streams distributed by BIG Lottery. A large proportion of Christian charities and many denominational bodies in Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup> are of the view that in accepting money associated with the Lottery they would be supporting gambling, a pursuit driven by values clearly condemned in the Bible. Research commissioned by the Department for Social Development indicates that these objections also impact other religious groups, not just those from the Christian faith<sup>4</sup>.

**Government & Faith Groups**

3. Political progress, including the establishment of the power-sharing Executive, has gone a long way to help normalise life and relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland. Civic society as a whole continues to have an important role to play not only in supporting these institutions but also in contributing to the wider debate about the sort of society we would like to create in Northern Ireland and the values which underpin it. It is vital that Churches and other faith based organisations have an opportunity to be heard in this area, both at a strategic policy level and also practically in serving the local community.
4. Both Government and faith based organisations have much to learn from each other in both these respects<sup>5</sup>. There are already a number of forums established through which Government can consult with wider civic society on the basis of gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity for example. However there is no formal mechanism available for church and other faith based organisations to meet regularly with Government covering a range of issues. It is our understanding that Social

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics from Tearfund's *Churchgoing in the UK*, 2007; see [www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org)

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Consultative Group of the Past, 2009 p.64

<sup>3</sup> Denominations include Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland, Congregational Union of Ireland, Elim Pentecostal Church in Ireland, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Salvation Army amongst others, constituting a significant proportion of the population of Northern Ireland given last census figures.

<sup>4</sup> Community Relations Council and Department for Social Development, *Summary of a study into the accessing of Lottery monies by religious groups and the impact on groups with religious objections to applying for Lottery funding*. 2002

<sup>5</sup> A CCWA/DSD conference in April 2007 specifically addressed this issue

Development Minister Margaret Ritchie intends to bring forward proposals to address this deficit in the near future and we would welcome the opportunity to comment on those as quickly as possible.

### **Contribution of Churches and Faith Based Organisations to wider society**

5. The positive contribution made by faith based organisations has been acknowledged by Government over many years through reports like *Acting in Good Faith* which applauded the fact that faith based organisations 'bring to regeneration activity distinctive and strong motivations for social action, their long term presence, the provision of informal settings and activities and a commitment to listening to local people'<sup>6</sup>.
6. Most recently in March 2009 Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie, addressed the launch of the Churches' Community Work Alliance Northern Ireland<sup>7</sup>. During her speech she announced a three-year funding package for CCWA (NI) precisely to encourage community development work in churches. This is a welcome development.
7. At a national level the Labour government has, over the past few years, repeatedly voiced and re-voiced their awareness of the contribution that faith based organisations make to the voluntary and community sector. Most recently in relation to the current economic crisis Local Communities Minister Hazel Blears recognised that religious charities deserve to be recognised for their 'astonishing work'<sup>8</sup> in helping families and addressing issues.
8. Despite the affirmation of the contribution of churches and faith based organisations to their local communities and wider society the extent of that contribution has never been fully quantified here in Northern Ireland. A study recently undertaken in Wales '**Faith in Wales: Counting for Communities**' demonstrated that 'faith community congregations contribute £102 million to the Welsh economy per annum, which if projected upwards on a proportional basis for the UK as a whole would mean faith community congregations are contributing at least £2.1 billion'<sup>9</sup>.
9. There has however been some quantification of the contribution of faith based organisations to youth services in Northern Ireland in terms of volunteers. A recent study of youth provision across Northern Ireland suggests that in 2005 almost 70% of registered youth groups in Northern Ireland are run by faith based organisations<sup>10</sup>. The report went on to say that in the same year nearly 74.4% of all volunteer leaders in registered youth groups in Northern Ireland were volunteering in faith/church based groups.

### **Churches, faith based organisations and funding**

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<sup>6</sup> *Acting in Good Faith: Churches, Change & Regeneration* CCWA (NI) 2004

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-dsd-310309-ritchie-announces-funding>

<sup>8</sup> Hazel Blears speaking to leading Christian debt counselling services 05 February 2009  
<http://www.eauk.org/media/debt-care.cfm>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.gweini.org.uk/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=93&Itemid=101](http://www.gweini.org.uk/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93&Itemid=101)

<sup>10</sup> Footnote re Tony McAulay report.

10. Against this backdrop of such significant contribution to local communities many churches and faith based organisations can find it difficult to access appropriate funding to undertake activities which will adequately serve their local communities.
11. As documented in the *Faith in the North East: Social Action by Faith Communities in the Region* survey carried out in 2004 by the Churches' Regional Commission in the North East, many churches claim that the 'mention of Church in [their] name often creates barriers [to funding applications] even when it is for community projects' and that they were 'excluded from grants because [they] are seen as 'church not community'<sup>11</sup>.
12. This distinction between 'Church' and 'Community' is also implicit in Northern Ireland where the NICVA State of the Sector report which 'provides a snapshot of this diverse and dynamic environment within which the voluntary and community sector operates'<sup>12</sup> does not however include much of the work undertaken on a voluntary basis by Churches and faith based organisations.
13. It has been stated already that for many socially deprived areas often it is the Churches that have remained during the bleakest times when all other agencies have moved out. However as many churches draw their congregations from their local catchment area they are therefore disadvantaged regarding capacity. It may be that there are not the skills within a local church community to fill out grant applications, make representations to funders or even develop strategic and business plans. Certainly help is available from various organisations and agencies but again there might not be the capacity within a local church community to know how to access these services.
14. This is highlighted by the *Faith & Voluntary Action Research Bulletin* from the Institute of Volunteering which suggested:
 

'In fact, with only occasional exceptions, the faith communities studied seem to have few external links of any kind, either with local or national government or with the voluntary sector. They know little about the sources of support available to the mainstream voluntary sector and often lack the contacts and the confidence to find out.'<sup>13</sup>
15. Against these real and existing barriers there is a perception among outside groups and agencies that 'faith communities are well resourced and do not need public funding'.<sup>14</sup>

### **Churches, faith based organisations & the lottery**

16. Another barrier in terms of accessing financial support for many churches and faith based organisations is that they are unable to apply to funding delivered by BIG Lottery its affiliated funding bodies for reasons of values, ethos and religious belief.

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<sup>11</sup> The Churches' Regional Commission in the North East, *Faith in the North East: Social Action by Faith Communities in the Region Survey* 2003, pp. 33-34

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.communityni.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/StateoftheSectorIV>

<sup>13</sup> Faith & Voluntary Action Research Bulletin – [www.ivr.org.uk](http://www.ivr.org.uk)

<sup>14</sup> Local Government Association, *Faith & Community: A good practice guide for local authorities*, Feb 2002, par.5.4

17. From a Christian perspective these include values clearly condemned by the Bible including greed/love of money (Ex 20:17, 1 Tim 6:10), a lack of concern for the poor (who spend proportionately more of their income on gambling than other sections of our society) (Phil 2:3-4), the addictive nature of gambling (Rom 8:21, 1 Pet 2:16), and the desire for a 'get rich quick' solution (Prov 28:22, Eph 4:28).
18. Further, within the Christian faith religious faith and practice are inextricably linked. Those within a faith tradition do not merely advance their faith through worship, teaching sacraments and ceremonies. Most religious people who are serious concerning their faith act it out with integrity on a 24/7 basis. It is their life motivation and it is usually characterised by strong moral codes concerning what is right and wrong. They advance it through their everyday holistic lives manifested in a vast array of public and private expressions, services, associations, lifestyles, businesses, livelihoods and ministries.
19. Therefore those who hold legitimate and coherent moral or religious objections to gambling or profiting from the gains of gambling, while they are free to apply to BIG lottery, are penalised because they choose not to do so. Furthermore, many such organisations are working in areas of deprivation or with those who are most vulnerable in society and who can often be most at risk from the harmful effects of gambling.
19. In 2002 the Community Relations Council and Department for Social Development supported a study into the accessing of Lottery monies by religious groups in Northern Ireland. It noted that the issues relating to the lottery as outlined above are not limited to the Christian faith.<sup>15</sup>
21. The report also "...concluded that this was a more prevalent problem in Northern Ireland as there was a smaller proportion of religious groups making application for lottery funds compared to Great Britain."<sup>16</sup> The study went on to point out that this is of particular issue for groups that run programmes for which the main funding source is perceived to be the Lottery. Such an example can be found in the running of after-school clubs, an activity many churches believe they are well placed to provide.
22. There are however churches and other faith based organisations that do consider it appropriate to apply for lottery funding, and we do not wish to pass judgement on them. Some choose to do so only to preserve built heritage (again highlighting the grey areas within this debate) while others also apply for grants towards the provision of services. In some instances this may be because there are no alternative funding sources available. However a quick view of grants awarded by BIG in Northern Ireland from April 2008 to March 2009 shows that that none of the projects were run by explicitly Christian charities.<sup>17</sup>
23. The issues faced by churches and faith based organisations have been addressed on a small scale level in specific schemes. For example Belfast City Council made

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<sup>15</sup> Community Relations Council and Department for Social Development, *Summary of a study into the accessing of Lottery monies by religious groups and the impact on groups with religious objections to applying for Lottery funding*. 2002

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p2

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.biglotteryfundgrants.org.uk:8080/grant-search/gs\\_007.xsql](http://www.biglotteryfundgrants.org.uk:8080/grant-search/gs_007.xsql) (accessed 12 May 2009)

alternative funding available to allow such groups to access small grant support for special occasions. On an individual basis when a Lottery supported IT initiative was promoted for teachers, the Department for Education provided alternative support for those who would object to receiving support from Lottery sources. Similarly in the Republic of Ireland a few years ago a decision was made to allocate all youth funding through the National Lotto. However following representation a sum was set aside which those who objected to the Lottery could access.

### **Social Impact of Economic Difficulties**

24. Within the current financial climate we are more than aware of the difficulties faced by Government and others, the pressures to make efficiency savings and the highly competitive nature of the funding arena.
25. The latest figures indicate that unemployment stands at 6.1%, up from 4.6% this time last year.<sup>18</sup> This includes high profile job losses including Visteon, Bombardier, reports that 8000 jobs have been lost in the construction industry and the associated consequential impact on small local businesses. These figures however mask the day to day reality for many families facing financial hardship.
26. However during tough times such as these it is often the most vulnerable and marginalised who are most adversely impacted through cuts in services and other provision and we are highly concerned about the potential for such negative consequences. The contribution that churches and faith based organisations do (and have the potential to) make to their local communities is often highly cost effective, being mostly volunteer led and motivated from a desire to serve others.

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<sup>18</sup> 'Labour Market figures released' [www.detini.gov.uk](http://www.detini.gov.uk) Accessed 21 May 2009

## Recommendations

27. Given the issues outlined above we would wish to make the following recommendations:

### General

- i. The establishment of a Government facilitated cross-departmental Faith Based Forum (similar to the Race Equality Forum) providing a bridge between government and faith based groups for networking, consultation and information sharing on broad policy and social issues, including funding for faith-based groups.
- ii. Continued recognition from the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly of the positive contribution of churches and faith based organisations to local communities.
- iii. This recognition should be demonstrated through endorsing the commissioning of a study to quantify the contribution of churches and faith based organisations to society in Northern Ireland. This could be based on the *Faith in Wales: Counting for Communities* report.

### Funding

- iv. The Government and its associated statutory agencies should recognise the genuine difficulties faced by churches and other faith based organisations when a decision to not apply for lottery funding is made. Such difficulties are based on reasoning which is both legitimate and coherent, resulting in indirect discrimination.
- v. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a separate fund for those who object on moral and religious grounds to applying for Lottery funding.. The possibility of establishing a mechanism outside of Lottery distribution systems should be given serious consideration.
- vi. There should be a moratorium in directing any further non-Lottery monies which may come on stream through National Lottery distribution mechanisms. Alternative means should be found to allocate all such funds. To do otherwise would clearly discriminate against and compound the already adverse impact on the community work done by those churches and faith based organisations who stand by these principles.

## Conclusion

28. (i) We believe that this presents a clear opening for Government to 'come good' on their welcome promises to recognise and support the unique contribution being made by churches and faith based organisations in Northern Ireland.
- (ii) The position that we take is neither capricious nor malicious. Standpoint – belief/lifestyle. Ask government to recognise legitimacy and coherency of the argument
- (iii) We strongly encourage the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly to fully engage with this issue.