

Supporting Partner Organisations

Could you develop partnerships with local non-church organisations who are also trying to help the local community? Could you offer your premises for their projects? Could church members volunteer their services through such organisations? (E.g. Cumbria Community Foundation's Pro-Help scheme acts as a brokerage to link retired people with professional skills to local organisations with a need for those skills: enquiries@cumbriafoundation.org or 01900 825760).

Political Engagement

The Church can act as a voice for the local community by engaging with those who make decisions.

The Church has at least one representative on every Local Strategic Partnership. These representatives would value the support, interest and input of the local churches. To find out how to get in touch with the church representative on your Local Strategic Partnership, contact Helen Boothroyd (details at foot of page).

Your church can also make representations through your local MP or district or county councillors.

There are more and more quangos in Cumbria with significant powers to make decisions in the local economy, e.g. Cumbria Vision, West Lakes Renaissance, the Rural Regeneration Company, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

Do not be afraid to make representations to them on behalf of your local community at any time, and look out for the consultations that they engage in from time to time.

Social Responsibility Forum Discussion Papers

This is the third in a series of occasional papers that the Social Responsibility Forum (SRF) of Churches Together in Cumbria produces to stimulate discussion and action in the churches of our county focussed upon a variety of social issues. These papers are suitable for use in a house group, study group or discussion group or by the whole church.

Previous discussion papers focus on

(1) the arms trade and (2) dialogue with people of other faiths.

Further copies of all papers are available from:

Helen Boothroyd, Social Responsibility Development Officer

01768 550045 hbctic@tiscali.co.uk

Please feel free to photocopy these papers.



July 2005

Social Responsibility Forum

Discussion Paper
No. 3

CHURCHES
TOGETHER
in CUMBRIA

Churches Together
in Cumbria is part of
the national network
of Churches
Together in Britain
and Ireland

Churches Engaging with the Challenges of the Cumbrian Economy

Employment in Cumbria

60,000 in distribution, retailing, hotels & catering

38,000 in manufacturing - of which about 12,000 at Sellafield

37,000 in public sector (education, health, local government)

13,000 in agriculture

83% of businesses in Cumbria employ less than 10 workers.

Problems in the Economy

Inequality

Extremes of disadvantage and wealth exist side by side in Cumbria. Some wards in West Cumbria are in the 1% most disadvantaged in England, while others are in the best 5%.

Economic Decline & Urban Poverty

Severe and continuing job losses, especially in traditional industries in Barrow and West Cumbria.

37% of unemployment long-term in Copeland; 35% in Barrow.

Half of Cumbria's most deprived wards are in Barrow.

West Cumbria: dependency on Sellafield

Almost 50% of jobs in Copeland rely on Sellafield.

Predicted 8000 job losses at Sellafield itself in next 10+ years leading to a severe knock-on effect in the whole economy.

Rural disadvantage: low wages; expensive housing

Incomes very low throughout rural Cumbria, where tourism and agriculture dominate.

Housing costs very high - 10 times wages in some areas.

Sharing Experiences

Discuss within the group what you think are the major economic problems in your area of Cumbria.

What policies do you think are needed to address these?

Challenges to the Church

The Church is present in every community in Cumbria. We must engage with the economic and social issues facing our communities. This is a huge challenge to all our churches.

Consider and discuss the following questions:

- How can we be a voice for the needs of our local communities in the places where decisions are being made about their future?
- How can we more effectively work in partnership with other local agencies and support their initiatives?
- How can we maintain a strong pastoral presence in and for our community, even if less people come to church and we have less money available?
- How can we support local producers and businesses?
- How can we support those needing housing locally?

Responses by the Church: Ideas to Consider

Discuss the following ideas and consider whether your church might be called to pursue some of them as a response to the economic issues in your local community.

Buying Local

As a church and as individuals, you could make it a policy always to buy local where that is an option:

- Buy Cumbrian food, crafts and other products rather than those that have been transported in from elsewhere.
- Shop in farmers' markets and local shops, rather than the supermarket.
- Buy resources for the church as locally as possible; use local contractors for work at the church.
- If you run a business, source locally and so support other Cumbrian businesses.

Housing to Meet Local Need

Could your church release land or buildings for this purpose? Discussion paper 4 looks at this issue.

Using Church Buildings

Could your church building be put to wider uses by the local community?

Could you initiate a drop-in or advice centre facility for those struggling with financial or other problems?

Could your building provide a facility for training, retraining or continuing education?

Are there needs in your local community that could be met by a social enterprise project employing local people?

Contact Churches Trust for Cumbria for advice and help: ginadowding@ctfc.org.uk 07501 469374

Outreach Projects

Could your church reach out into the local community through pastoral care and evangelism?

In many places of economic disadvantage, self-esteem and self-worth are very low. Could your church help to build these up in your community, both through love, understanding and practical support offered to individuals, and through facilitating appropriate courses and events to help people take more control over their lives and futures?

Ecumenical Working

Is your church struggling on alone?

Could you be a lot more effective by working with the other churches, of different denominations, in your local area?

If you have ideas for outreach or new plans for your building, could you combine forces with other local Christians to develop a project together, sharing resources, energy and enthusiasm?

Many hands make light work!