

Faith in Derbyshire

Contact Details for the Council for Social Responsibility

Joy Bates, Community Action Officer (Job-share)
Telephone 01332 388686
Email joy.bates@derby.anglican.org



Stella Collishaw, Community Action Officer (Job-share)
Telephone 01332 388685
Email stella.collishaw@derby.anglican.org

Richard Jordan, Church and Society Officer
Telephone 01332 388668
Email richard.jordan@derby.anglican.org

General Office
Telephone 01332 388684
Email social.responsibility@derby.anglican.org

Derby Diocesan CSR
Derby Church House
Full Street
Derby
DE1 3DR



Working towards a better Derbyshire; faith based contribution

Introduction

Notes

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

This was the text that Jesus chose as he started out on his ministry in Galilee (Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61:1-2); his preaching would be good news for the poor and would include actions that would make that good news real. David Bosh, one of the most influential recent writers on mission, put it this way “In our time God’s yes (see 2 Cor 1:20) to the world reveals itself, to a large extent, in the church’s missionary engagement in respect to the realities of injustice, oppression, poverty, discrimination and violence”. Later he says “although evangelism may never simply be equated with labour for social justice, it may also never be divorced from it”.

Jesus’ followers too, are expected to be known by their “fruit”, the Church’s mission has to be more than words. Over the centuries the church has, in varying degrees, been faithful to this call; *Faith in Derbyshire* set out to show that it still is.

The report could never hope to catalogue all the loving “missionary” work that is being done by Christians in Derbyshire, there are times when it is appropriate that “the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing”, but there are also times when it is right to “let your light so shine before people that they may see your good work and praise your Father in Heaven”. In these sessions we will reflect on some of the work that is being done, to encourage one another and stimulate initiatives, but above all, to bring glory to God.

Each session reflects on issues around one of the six recommendations at the end of the report. You will be encouraged to read

Notes

some of the case studies and reflect on them in the light of passages from scripture. These are offered as suggestions, other passages of scripture, or indeed other books, may seem more appropriate; if so please do what seems most appropriate in your situation. You may feel that some of the case studies are too long to read out in full. If so the group leader could ask a member of the group to read a case study during the previous week and then tell the story in their own words. Where there are various suggested case studies or passages of scripture you could select just one, or divide the group into twos or threes to look at different passages and then come together to share insights.

Faith in Derbyshire was paid for with a government grant to help funders and other decision makers understand the contribution that churches and other faith communities make. As such it needed to include detailed statistical analysis. While these statistics contain valuable and interesting information for most people they really come alive when we read the stories told in the case studies and so the case studies will be a focus of this study. Also, if the report is to make any real difference it needs to make practical recommendations and so each session is built around one of the recommendations in chapter 8.

Since *Faith in Derbyshire* needed to be useful to decision makers whose responsibility is to work with people of all faiths, we tried to include data from Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Baha'i and Buddhists as well as Christians. We are Christians who believe in God's unique revelation in Jesus Christ. The huge issue of how we relate to members of other faiths is not the focus of this study but can be addressed in the final session.

The preparation of *Faith in Derbyshire* has been a journey of faith, from time to time we have been surprised and challenged by what we have found. We pray that as you think, talk and pray about these matters God will speak with you too.

The Council for Social Responsibility Team

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Centre case study (pages 39 and 40).

Lunches are provided twice a week. If this were in a church we would call it a Lunch Club, but for a Hindu this is simply what always happens in a Temple (Sikh Gurdwaras always have food available for visitors). Jesus said “by their fruit you shall know them”; is there anything we can learn from the life of the Hindu or Sikh Temple?

Are there other things we can learn from the case study?

Bible readings

There is a tension in the Old Testament between two traditions, those who would exclude any foreigner (and therefore a person of another faith) and those who welcomed them.

The story of Ezra instructing Israelites to divorce their foreign wives comes from one tradition (see Ezra 9:1-4), the book of Ruth where Boaz marries Ruth (a Moabite) and were celebrated as King David’s great grandparents (see the story of Ruth, especially Ruth 4:13-22).

Talking to the woman at the well he said to her ‘you worship whom you do not know’ (Paul said something similar in Acts 17:16, 22-23) but he was still able to use the example of the “Good Samaritan” and commend the Samaritan leper who, when healed, came back to give thanks to God.

Should we always have a consistent response to other faiths or should our attitude vary with circumstances, if so which circumstances?

What are the pressures to follow Ezra’s example or Ruth’s? Are these pressures always benign or should they be resisted?

Prayer

“The concept of ‘Faith Groups’ as a single entity is an unhelpful misunderstanding” (page 44). We know that, but it is important that policy and decision makers understand it too.

Pray

- for those who try to develop and influence Government policy to respect people who hold faith convictions and their differences.
- for those of other faiths that they would encounter Christ in our attitudes (many of them think of Christians as aggressive and antagonistic).
- for any needs that you identified in the opening activity; what difference can you make if only for one or two people?

Additional Session: To an unknown God?

Introduction

Those who have had contact with Muslims in recent years will be aware of the way that community has suffered increased prejudice in the light of the heightened terrorist threat. Yet the terrorists no more represent Muslims than the IRA represented Catholics or the UDA Protestants in Northern Ireland. Perversely even some Sikh's have been attacked for wearing a turban like Osama Bin Laden. What prejudices do we have?

If Jesus wanted to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan in Britain today, would he consider telling the story of "the Good Muslim"? Can we see lessons in godliness in people of other faiths as Jesus did?

How do we respect people of other faiths but disagree? How do we welcome and remain faithful to our conviction that Jesus is the unique Son of God?

In this session there will not be sufficient time to explore all these issues in detail. The intention is to open ourselves to the possibilities and allow God to lead us. As with any of the issues raised in this material the staff of the Council for Social Responsibility will be happy to help find further resources to take this issue further, and no doubt others would also be willing to help.

Activity

Do you know Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews or people of other faiths? Do you know what their particular concerns are at the moment?

If you do not, are there ways in which you could get to know real people of other faiths rather than hear them described in the media (often by people who do not share their faith). Perhaps you could start to make plans to visit a Mosque, Temple or Gurdwara. (If you would need help arranging that please get in touch with us.)



Case Studies

Read the Hindu Cultural and Welfare

Background of Faith in Derbyshire

Over the past ten years the Government has become increasingly aware of the potential contribution that 'Faith Communities' can make to the nation's life, especially in areas of deprivation. This has taken two main forms, providing services through faith based projects and working with communities to defuse tension and increase social cohesion. This second aspect has taken a higher priority since the riots in Oldham and Burnley in the summer of 2001, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001 and 7/7 in 2005.

There has been some confusion over just what a 'Faith Community' consists of. Few if any would say that they are from a 'Faith Community'; they would say that they were Christian, Muslim, Sikh or Hindu etc. Obviously the differences are important. There was also some confusion over exactly how much work was going on and who was doing it.

In order to clarify the picture in Derbyshire a government grant (from the Change Up programme) was awarded to The Council for Social Responsibility to do some research and that resulted in Faith in Derbyshire that we will study together. The remarkable thing we found was that even the local churches leaders did not know much about the good things that were going on in our name ...



Music which may be useful during prayer or worship times in each session

Session 1

These are the days of Elijah
Help me to shine
One shall tell another
You laid aside your majesty

*Robin Mark
Paul Oakley*

Session 2

For I'm building a people of power
Let there be love shared among us
What a friend I've found

Session 3

Bind us together
Make me a channel of your peace
Lord I lift your name on high
Are we the people who will see God's kingdom?

Session 4

Faithful one so unchanging
Go forth and tell
Befriended
Sing to the Lord for he is good

Matt Redman

Marc James and Andy Ferrett (Thank You Music)

also like to think back over some of the other case studies you have looked at in previous sessions.

Quotations from Faith in Derbyshire may help discussion ...

"The beginnings of vision can be in response to need which can be seen or events which have happened in an area, for example closure of a post office or school, although it was pointed out that only responding to visible need may mean that other needs remain hidden."

"Effort needs to be put into vision in order to build up a shared sense of responsibility and to network with other local agencies and organisations."

"It is important to check out your ideas and to look at the motives and assumptions within them."

Bible readings

1 Corinthians 12:27, Acts 11:27-31 (also 1 Corinthians 16:1-4), 2 Samuel 24:1-10, Luke 14:28-33

What sort of research is necessary to understand what we are called to do? For David it went terribly wrong, why? Are there any lessons for us?

Prayer

Recommendation 6 is to "Develop an agenda for continuing research to refine the insights developed in this research".

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. (Matthew 6:22)

Pray

- for good eyes, that we will have a right perspective and see the world as God sees it.
- for the leaders of the church locally and also those whom the press call on to give simple answers to complex questions.
- for those who speak as Christians in Councils and partnerships, that they may discern the real needs and speak wisely and boldly.
- for those in the press who report on Christian activity, for ordinary people who write in, for reporters and for the editors who choose what will get in and where it goes.

Session 6: What next?

Introduction

There was something hugely satisfying about seeing boxes of *Faith in Derbyshire* (paid for by a grant from Change Up, a government agency) arrive just in time for the public launch; even better when some of the compliments rolled in. But the launch event was not intended to be just a celebration; it was the start of trying to put some of the lessons learnt into practice, we were asking “what next?” This course is part of this ongoing work, we hope that you will learn about what is happening through churches and individual Christians, and celebrate the achievements. But above all that it will help you to discern God’s leading in your own situation and to respond to his call. Reflection however must continue in some form, we need to keep looking and listening for signs of God’s Kingdom. How are we going to continue with reflection while getting the right balance with active service? That is the question for this session.

Activity

Think back over the previous sessions and decide two things; first, what have you decided to do (or do differently) as a result of coming to these sessions and second, what do you want to find out more about. Then write yourself a note and put it some where that you will find it in a month’s time and second share either or both of your resolutions with the group.

(You may want to reconsider these at the end of this session or move the activity towards the end of the meeting. There is space for notes at the end of this booklet—but will you look there in a month’s time?)

Case Studies

Read the case studies Chris Eames (pages 27 and 28) and Today and Tomorrow (pages 34 to 36).

What preparation was needed before starting these projects? Where was the inspiration? How do you think that people know that this is what they were called to do ... indeed could they be certain? You may



Session 5

Heaven shall not wait
Men of faith rise up and sing
Lord for the years

Session 6

Dance of our God
All the kings will bow
We Believe

Geraldine Latty

David Gate

David Hind (Thank You Music)

Additional Session

Jesus be the centre
All things are possible
I’ve filled my days with details

Michael Faye

Darlene Zschech

David Gate (Thank You Music)

If you have further suggestions of songs or hymns which others may find helpful please let us know so that we can add them to this section.

We hope to commission a CD to accompany the worship, this should be available with the final version of this study guide.



Session 1: What difference does faith make?

Activity

If this is a new group, or a group with new members, go round the group so that everybody can introduce themselves.

Introduce Faith in Derbyshire, read section 3.i Purpose (page 5) and the introduction to this study guide. You may want to take some time to think about how you will organise your group and to think about any preparation group members may be asked to do for future meetings.

If you have time, think about one person who showed faith in a practical way which influenced you and if it feels appropriate share it with the group. In a moment of silent or open prayer thank God for those who have been faithful so that we could hear about and experience faith.

Case studies

Read case studies Asylum (pages 26 and 27) or Gypsy Liaison Group (pages 29 to 31) and Informal care (pages 28 and 29). In larger groups divide into twos or threes to read one of the stories and think about the difference that faith made. Gathering again in the larger group, briefly share what you have found.

Bible readings

Read Luke 4:16-20 and Micah 6:6-8.

What difference do we think God wants our faith to make in our lives both as individuals and as churches? How does it affect the way that I do things, at work, in my family, among my neighbours ...?

Quotations from Faith in Derbyshire may help discussion ...

“It is important to check out your ideas and to look at the motives and assumptions within them” and “Beliefs around what it means to be church greatly affects vision.” (Page 41)

“Groups are most effective when a range of feelings and hopes can be expressed” (Page 42)

Prayer

Recommendation 5 is to “Develop the understanding of the nature of Faith Communities, including their needs and potential” (page 45).

National government has started to recognise the contribution that “faith

Case Studies

Read the case studies Number One (pages 38 and 39) and Hindu Cultural and Welfare Centre (pages 39 and 40).

These projects work in partnership with other secular agencies, including their Local Authorities. What compromises would that entail? What benefit would work in partnership bring? What opportunities for service to partners (as opposed to clients) would partnership offer?

Quotations from Faith in Derbyshire may be relevant ...

“Partnership springs from networking and can happen easily where there are motivated workers”, “Partnership is hindered by territorialism” and “Develop new ways of thinking about community activity”

Bible readings

The bible gives us a wide range of examples of attitudes to authority. At the moment there is a real welcome for “faith communities”, including Churches to engage with government. This is a gift of which we are called to be stewards (the parable of the talents Matthew 25:14-28, also Luke 19:12-26) but that does not mean that we should be uncritical – sometimes it is appropriate to “look a gift horse in the mouth”!

Read the following passages; how do they affect the way you think of those in government or who have other forms of authority, running business or public sector bodies like the Police or NHS?

Romans 13:1-7, John 19:1-16, Isaiah 45:1-5, Mark 6:14-29

Prayer

Recommendation 4 is to “Develop the engagement of Faith Communities in local governance”.

Across Derbyshire there are a range of partnerships, local strategic partnerships, NHS trusts, police etc. Some have official faith representation, including representation of the churches. Others do not, but even there Christians are present representing other constituencies. The recommendation is that faith groups are invited to play their part and then contribute.

Pray for all those involved in making decisions for our communities, whether in Local Strategic Partnerships or other bodies such as councillors. Pray especially for wisdom for those who represent our faith.

Pray for members of the group, or families and friends of members, who have any responsibility or authority, even within families!

Session 5: Render to Caesar?

Introduction

Did you vote in the last Local Elections? If so, you were in the minority. How should we relate to those who make decisions on our behalf? How can we help them to make good decisions?

Working on projects often means working in partnership, usually with secular agencies and sometimes with people of other faiths. Can we do this without compromising our own principles?

One of the case studies in this session raises the issue of working with those of other faiths. This is clearly an important and complex issue which, if it is to be dealt with in any depth, would require considerable time and attention. Should the group wish to explore the matter further an additional session has been included at the end of this material.

Activity

Think about the last time that you spoke to somebody about your local council. Was it to say that they had done well or ... not so well? Sadly most conversations about local authorities are about things that have gone wrong. Think about two things, one good thing that the local authority is responsible for and one thing that needs to be improved. Then decide on a way of showing your appreciation for the good thing, perhaps writing to the department that is responsible or your councillor and pray about the thing that needs to be improved.

Think about how the fact that we live in a democracy affects our attitude to those in authority, compared with the situation of Jesus and the early church?



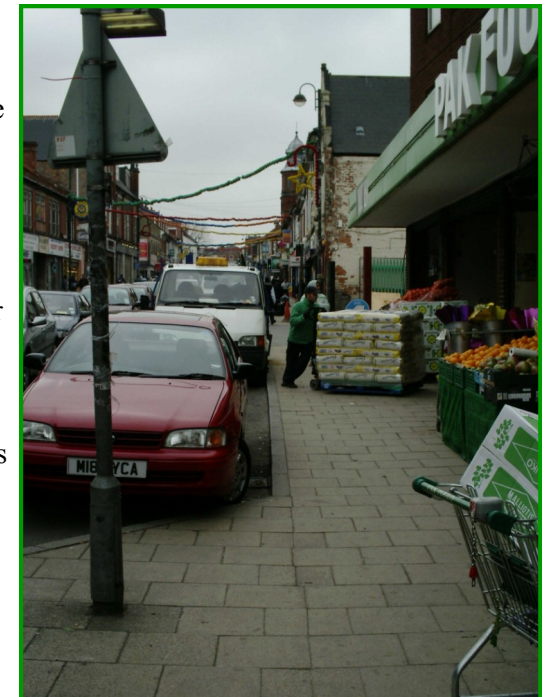
communities” play in society, particularly in areas of deprivation. This ranges from providing informal opportunities for people to get to know one-another reducing the risk of isolation, especially for vulnerable, disabled and long term ill people, to organising social projects (like some of those in Faith in Derbyshire’s case studies) to tackle major issues such as the needs of asylum seekers or homeless people. So far so good, but there is still a long way to go.

Many government strategies and officials would like to see all faiths as being the same, and able to produce a single representative for all faith communities to sit on local or regional committees. Often they would like us to provide the services offered by these projects but hide our faith as we do so, not recognising that we believe that our faith is an essential part of what we offer to those in need.

Policymakers have started to recognise the value of what we have to offer but clearly find it hard to understand the faith that motivates us. Such understanding requires the grace of God. Pray that policymakers will have a greater understanding of our faith.

Pray too that our life as Christians will speak of the love of God for all people and prompt people who as yet have no faith to turn to God. Pray that you will be faithful to the vision for your church or possibly for a renewed vision.

Pray for one another that, as we go about our lives this week they will shine as a light, revealing God’s love.



Session 2: Let your light shine?

Introduction

One of the most impressive findings of Faith in Derbyshire was the amount of informal neighbourliness we found, and this only scratched the surface. Regular visits to elderly, disabled or long term ill people can enable them to stay in their own homes rather than having to go into residential care. This not only makes a huge difference to the individuals concerned (which is why we do it) but also saves public funds on the care budget.

But what about less definable benefits? Has anybody listened to you when you were angry, and allowed you to blow off steam so that you could handle a problem more rationally? How many relationships, even court cases, have been saved by that sort of listening ear? At a time when our society is becoming increasingly fractured this informal care, sometimes referred to as social capital, is becoming rarer and more valuable by the year. This is one of the most significant contributions offered by people of faith,

Activity

Think about a significant time when someone took time to listen to you, whether they were a member of church or not. Either aloud in the group or privately, think about the difference that person made to you and give thanks to God for them. Did you ever thank them? If not, and if it is still possible, why not resolve to get in touch with them as soon as possible?

Case Studies

Read the Informal care case study on pages 28 and 29

Although this sort of work is described as “just part of everyday life” the interviewee clearly saw the danger of commitment getting “out of hand”. How can the church support carers when clergy or other church leaders may not be aware of what is going on? Do you know a carer in need of help, could the group help indirectly or help to find other support? (The Council for Social Responsibility team may be able to offer contacts for specialist voluntary organisations.)

Quotations from Faith in Derbyshire may help discussion ...

Case Studies

Read the case studies West Street Partnership (pages 32 to 34) and St Alkmunds’ (page 36).

Think about the ways in which these projects made the buildings places where people could meet with God. Do you think that anything of value may be lost, especially in the proposed transformation of the West Street Chapel? “*Making changes to premises can involve big sums of money and fear of debt*” (page 41) but there can also be a human cost.

Do you know of a church that has been significantly changed?

What were the pros and cons? Was it worth it?

Bible readings

Buildings do feature in scripture. Read some or all of the following references; Jeremiah 7:3-8, John 2:13-16, 2 Samuel 7:5-7, Isaiah 2:2 & 66:20, Mark 1:21-27, Acts 17:1-4 and Romans 16:3-5.

What part do you think God intends buildings to play in the life and mission of the church? How important are they to you, your prayer life and your sense of belonging to the Body of Christ?

Prayer

Recommendation³ is to “Develop support, with other appropriate groups, for Faith Communities who struggle to maintain buildings to make them available and of an acceptable standard for community use. Increase availability of capital grants for these buildings.”

There can be significant problems in maintaining a church building, especially if it is listed. These problems can often sap the life from a church council and even a whole congregation.

Pray

- for wisdom and vision in the use, maintenance and development of your church buildings
- for wisdom for those who write or enforce regulations about buildings in areas such as heritage, health and safety, disabled access and faculties
- for appropriate help and support when the government wants the church to help maintain the “nation’s heritage”
- that our homes may be places where we and our visitors can experience the love of God.

Session 4: Destroy this temple?

Introduction

Church buildings can be a liability! How much time on church councils is given over to them and how much of our budget do they soak up? Some congregations get so frustrated that would like to be able to move out of their church and rent a hall to meet in! On the other hand church buildings can have great value; in a very special way we can find that “Surely the LORD is in this place” (Genesis 28:16) where God has been worshipped and prayers offered, sometimes over many years .

Churches can also be a valuable community resource, a focus for the community, a place to meet, and somewhere that people can have a taste of the incarnate love of God. The temple had to be destroyed because it separated people from God, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year. But church buildings can also be off putting places for people who are not familiar with them. In this session we will reflect on buildings; do they separate people from God or are they a meeting place where people can have their first taste of God’s love?

Activity

Think about the first time you can remember entering a church building; how did it feel, welcoming or hostile?

If you cannot remember the first time, think of times when you have both experienced God’s presence in church and when you have felt excluded. If appropriate share these experiences with the group.

It may be that everyone in the group has grown up as part of the church, if so spend some time thinking about those who may feel unwelcome (whether they are or not) because they or their family feel different from those who regularly attend.

Perhaps you could start by thinking ‘what sort of people *don’t* come to our church?’



“Understanding of the project and ownership by the church can be extremely important and when this is not fully in place those on the front line can feel very isolated”

and *“long term commitment of decision makers is worth a great deal”* (this refers to support from out side the church – is it equally true of support within the church for informal carers?)

Bible readings

Read both Matthew 5:14-16 and Matthew 6:1-4.

When is it right to broadcast good works for the Glory of God and when should we keep them to ourselves?

Prayer

Recommendation 1 is to “Develop accountability structures which are appropriate to Faith Communities while meeting the needs of funders and other statutory partners.”

When projects are funded the funders give money because the project promises to do particular pieces of work and bring specific benefits to people in need. It is only right that having provided the money “up front” that they should check that it is being spent appropriately and effectively. The danger is that projects are sometimes simply asked about the number of clients and this can lead to pressure to try to meet the needs of a lot of people superficially rather than working for real longer term benefit.

Pray that projects maintain their standards of care even when they are under pressure to achieve numbers.

Pray that in your own church fellowship there would be an appropriate accountability that means that people do not become isolated when trying to offer care but at the same time are able to work confidentially and, where appropriate “not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing”.



Session 3: Talents and Towers

Introduction

In this session we will look at case studies which highlight both the potential problems associated with setting up a major project but also some of the benefits. Jesus gave us two parables, one of which points to the need to make use of the gifts that he has given to us, even when that involves risk (the parable of the talents Matthew 25:14-28, also Luke 19:12-26) and another about weighing up the cost of discipleship before we make commitments (the parable about building a tower Luke 14:25-34).

Activity

In pairs spend some time talking about two things, first a gift (or talent) that God has given to you and second something that you find difficult or would like to change in our Christian discipleship. Talking about what they are good at may make some people uncomfortable; remember that we are talking about what God has given to us, so we are being grateful rather than boasting. Partners could help and encourage each other to identify their gifts! Gathering together into the wider group each person should briefly describe their partner's talent and their own challenge. The challenge may be very personal so it is always acceptable to say "Pass".

Case Studies

Read the Touchstone (pages 31 and 32) and Agricultural Chaplaincy (page 37) case studies.

These projects have clearly done some wonderful work but both needed a lot of "back room" support. Graham has clear gifts in helping farmers and agricultural workers but needs the support of a project committee to ensure that he has all that he needs to do the work, not least funding. Touchstone shows how uncertain funding can be but if they had not stepped out in faith how many people would have missed out on this practical expression of God's love? Are there ways in which you (as individuals or a church) can help someone else use their gifts in God's service or is there help that you need in serving God?

Quotations from Faith in Derbyshire may help discussion ...

"Avoid overloading the expert who may be called on to advise or be a representative too often" (page 41)

"Volunteering is done long term only through the support of volunteers' spouses, friends and wider family members" (page 42)

Bible readings

Read Romans 12:1-8 and/or Eph 4:7-13 (growing up into the fullness of Christ).

The Holy Spirit is working to transform our lives both as individuals and as a church to bind us together as the mature body of Christ. Our gifts compliment one another. How is God at work in this transformation, what are the signs of its progress and what are the obstacles that we place in its way?

Prayer

Recommendation 2 is to "Develop the skills base within Faith Communities to enhance the capacity to engage in community regeneration."

Pray

- for those who have the gifts, opportunity and calling to contribute to community initiatives to have the faith, courage and wisdom that is necessary
- that where skills are lacking they will be able to access the appropriate training
- that as they engage with secular partners in training and funding etc they may be faithful to their distinctive calling to express the love of God and have the wisdom to understand what that means in each particular circumstance.
- for ourselves and our churches that we will be faithful in following God's calling, weighing the cost but willing to take appropriate and necessary risks.
- for those (including those within our group) who find their calling to serve God in secular projects and charities.