

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A FAITH MAKES

Insights on faith-based charities

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November 2016



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our funders, cross-faith reading group and all our interviewees and survey respondents for their support of this work.

In particular we would like to thank the following organisations for their engagement throughout the course of our research:

Bates Wells Braithwaite: www.bwblp.com

Charity Clarity: www.charityclarity.org.uk

Charity Commission: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission

Digital Dandelion: www.digital-dandelion.com

FaithAction: www.faithaction.net

Humanity First: uk.humanityfirst.org

Muslim Charities Forum: www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk

NCVO: www.ncvo.org.uk

Quakers in Britain: www.quaker.org.uk

Stewardship: www.stewardship.org.uk

Sufra Food Bank and Kitchen: www.sufra-nwlondon.org.uk

Tearfund: www.tearfund.org

The FM Trust

The Marshall Institute: www.lse.ac.uk/MarshallInstitute/home.aspx

Theos: www.theosthinktank.co.uk

Together for the Common Good: www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk

World Jewish Relief: www.worldjewishrelief.org

SUMMARY

Faith is deeply embedded in the charity sector. More than a quarter of charities in Great Britain have an association with faith.¹ In some areas of work, like overseas aid and human rights, faith-based charities make up almost half of the charities focusing on a particular issue.²

We define a 'faith-based charity' as a charity that embodies some form of religious belief—or cultural values arising from a religious belief—in its vision or mission, founding history or project content.

The dimension of faith and the role faith plays in a charity can vary. However, our research identified some distinctive attributes of faith-based charities, for which a grounding in faith can:

- help them stay motivated and persevere with causes others may see as hopeless;
- make them more resilient to changes in the policy and funding environment;
- enable them engage 'hard to reach' and 'vulnerable' groups in our society; and
- allow them to deliver culturally appropriate services that consider a person's spiritual needs.

All of this means that faith-based charities have huge potential to create impact for their beneficiaries and for society as a whole. And yet, outside of the faith community, many people are unaware of the contribution and potential of faith-based charities in our society—believing their numbers and influence to be low. Others are unappreciative of the strengths of faith-based charities and some are even actively suspicious of them.

Our society's complex and changeable relationship with religion and faith can influence how people view faith-based charities and how they interact with them. It can also have an effect on how faith-based charities interact with one another, as well as with the wider voluntary sector and society more generally.

We believe that the entire voluntary sector needs to understand faith-based charities better. This includes improving how individual faith-based charities understand the wider faith-based sector to which they belong. This improved understanding could help all charities to create more impact for the people they intend to help.

Faith-based charities are a valuable part of the voluntary sector and have some useful perspectives and approaches to contribute. We would like to see:

- more open recognition of the size and significance of this part of the sector;
- more discussion about the positive aspects of its work;
- more openness about how faith manifests itself, and support for people to understand this and what it means;
- more evidence gathered on the value that faith-based charities can bring, and how organisations can work together to realise this;
- greater celebration of the work and donations of people of faith;
- more tackling head on of critiques and concerns—increased openness and transparency can help build trust.

We hope that this research will help to improve the understanding of the faith-based charity sector. We welcome your thoughts and contributions on this research—contact details are at the end of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Faith, charities and British society

Faith and charity have long gone hand in hand. The origins of early charitable activity in Great Britain are closely tied with religion and faith. Many of today's significant charities and funders, such as The Children's Society and the Barrow Cadbury Trust (see Box 1), were founded in a strong tradition of faith. NPC's first piece of research on faith-based charities in 2014—*Questions of faith*³—found that nearly one in five charities in England and Wales was faith-based. From international development to homelessness, faith-based charities operate throughout the charitable sector. Yet despite this diversity, faith can be the thread that links these organisations, often bringing both strengths and challenges to the way they work.

Box 1: Barrow Cadbury Trust

The Barrow Cadbury Trust was founded in 1920 by Barrow and Geraldine Cadbury, who were Quakers. Charity and philanthropy are very important in the Quaker tradition and the founders of Barrow Cadbury Trust had worked and campaigned throughout their lives for greater social justice. The Trust continues this work today and is committed to creating a more equal society. The Trust has built on its Quaker roots and its strapline is the eighteenth century Quaker imperative to 'speak truth to power'. The Trust works to bring the voices of marginalised and disadvantaged people to the 'corridors of power'.

Whilst research exists into the influence of faith on giving,⁴ volunteering⁵ and communities,⁶ remarkably little is known about how faith affects the approach, activities, achievements and experiences of charitable organisations. For a group of charities collectively spending hundreds of millions of pounds each year and harnessing the skills of thousands of volunteers and paid staff, this seems an oversight. The lack of knowledge about faith-based charities makes it harder to understand the challenges and benefits that being a faith-based charity might present. For example, does faith confer an advantage in working with the most vulnerable, creating greater impact? Or does the presence of a faith-based motivation bring challenges in interactions with the wider world?

The relationship between faith and society provides interesting context to this research. There has been much debate about the changing role of faith in our society and the changing make-up of religious populations in Britain. A report from the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life in December 2015 highlighted trends such as: an increase in the number of people with non-religious beliefs and identities; a general decline in Christian affiliation, belief and practice; and an increased diversity amongst people who have a religious faith.⁷ However, these debates are multifaceted and complex. For example, a rise in the number of people identifying as having 'no religion' does not necessarily equate to a decline in spirituality or a rise in secularism.⁸ This complexity, combined with conflicting views on the role of faith in our society, and a high public awareness of a small number of negative impacts of faith and religion, can result in an attitude that is suspicious—and even hostile—towards religion and faith in some parts of the population, and in sections of the media.

The political climate for faith-based charities has also changed in recent years, ranging from strong practical and financial support for faith organisations and particularly inter-faith work from the Labour government under Tony Blair,⁹ to diminishing support from the Coalition and Conservative governments that has paved the way towards

what some would say is a hostile attitude, for instance, towards Muslim charities.¹⁰ It is against this backdrop that faith-based charities must operate today.

About our research

With these questions and context in mind, our programme of research has sought to:

- understand the faith-based charity sector in more detail, including the size and make-up of it;
- understand more about how faith motivates and influences the work of faith-based charities;
- identify the benefits and challenges that an association with faith can bring to the operations of faith-based charities;
- understand more about the impact faith has for charities and their beneficiaries;
- consider the implications of our findings for faith-based charities and the wider sector.

Our research touches on seven of the UK's faith groups: Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Quakers. We recognise that there are diverse denominations and traditions within each religion and other religions that are not included here, but the project was not able to cover these in its scope.

About this report

This report is the final output of our programme of research into the role of faith-based organisations. Here we draw together the key findings of this work. Interim publications and blogs from this programme of research can be found over on the NPC website.¹¹ In this report you can find:

- an outline of our research methodology for the programme;
- a short profile of the faith-based charity sector in England and Wales;
- key findings from our survey of faith-based charities;
- a discussion of the key themes that have emerged from our research. We pay particular attention to exploring the question of whether there are differences between faith-based organisations and non faith-based organisations;
- a summary of key findings and whether we can draw conclusions or make recommendations for future work.

Through this research and efforts to engage people with the findings and in discussions, we hope to:

- stimulate a wider range of people from across the sector to think about what and how faith-based charities contribute to the charity sector and wider society;
- help a wide range of stakeholders in the sector (including charities, funders and policymakers) to develop an increased and more nuanced understanding of faith-based charities as a group and as individual organisations;
- identify future actions that could improve understanding of the sector—whether research, information provision, networking, influencing or something else.

Box 2: Methodology

Our research consisted of four main components:

- analysis of Charity Commission data;
- an extensive literature review;
- a survey of faith-based charities, which ran from June 2015 to September 2016;
- qualitative research with charities, funders and key stakeholders.

More detail on each of these processes can be found here [*Faith data: Methodology*](#).

We faced a number of challenges in our research and there are some limitations with our research that are useful to consider when reading the report:

- We did not have enough responses to our survey from all faiths to compare answers between them or make very robust quantitative conclusions. The majority of our responses came from Christian charities. Our qualitative research included all faiths, as did our literature review, and we have reflected this throughout the report.
- When we discuss results from our survey, these findings reflect how faith-based charities self report.
- Our research was focused on charities registered with the Charity Commission so excludes excepted or exempt charities, such as some churches. Excepted charities are not required to register or submit annual reports to the Charity Commission if they have an income of below £100,000. It also excludes subsidiaries registered with the Charity Commission and small groups whose income falls below the registration threshold (£5,000).¹²
- Due to limitations in the scope of this research, our findings focus on charities in England and Wales.

WHAT IS A FAITH-BASED CHARITY?

We define a ‘faith-based charity’ as a charity that embodies some form of religious belief—or cultural values arising from a religious belief—in its vision or mission, founding history or project content. The discussion below provides some additional depth to this definition, which is relevant to understanding the findings of the research.

Faith and religion

Faith and religion are complicated areas. The two concepts can be both distinct and intertwined. Faith can be defined in many ways but it includes sharing a common culture, set of traditions and a set of beliefs or way of thinking. Religion can be seen as the organised practice of faith through dedicated bodies, organisations or institutions. Faith in religion manifests itself through ceremonies, rituals and scripture or holy books. An individual can often have faith but not necessarily be committed to a religion.¹³

When we talk about faith in this paper, it can include religious aspects. Faith-based charities can include religious institutions, such as churches or mosques, and they can be heavily influenced by religious components. For example, scripture may be incorporated into their operations or activities. However, faith-based charities also include those where faith plays only a small role and religion is absent. In these charities, faith is more about culture, community and individual beliefs.

Dimensions of faith within charities

For our research, we identified three dimensions of faith within charities that reflect the organisations we engaged with and helps bring clarity to understanding the place of faith in organisations.* We explore how the different dimensions of faith affect charities throughout the report.

For some faith-based charities everything they do comes from their faith. Their mission, activities and operations are all heavily influenced by their faith or, to put it another way, everything is done through a faith lens. For other charities, faith is just one dimension; it may influence the charity’s mission but its influence on the activities and operations is not so central. Finally, for certain faith-based charities, their faith dimension merely reflects the faith of their founder or the community they came from; it no longer influences their mission, activities or operations.

Within these dimensions, faith can also be implicit or explicit.¹⁴ When faith is explicit, it is clearly visible and is a core part of a charity. Faith can be communicated explicitly through activities and projects, for example, having a space to discuss scripture, and through a

Figure 1: The dimensions of faith within charities



* We do not claim that these are the only levels of faith in an organisation nor that there is no overlap or blurring between levels.

charity's marketing or branding. Internally, explicit faith can be expressed through individual prayer. Organisations that are explicit about their faith can have stronger links with the religious side of their faith, incorporating teachings from holy texts into everyday work or providing space for spirituality. When faith is implicit, it features in the background of a charity. It can underpin the work and inspire staff and volunteers, but it is not communicated overtly to beneficiaries or sometimes even other staff. Implicit faith is much less likely to incorporate religious elements into the charity, and staff and volunteers may not even be particularly religious.

Dimensions of faith in an organisation can change and as the place of religion in our society changes some charities may re-evaluate the role faith plays in their organisations. It often depends where you start on the spectrum shown in Figure 1 and where you want to end up.

Box 3: Historical faith charity

The children's charity Barnardo's was founded with Christian values but, as it grew, it wanted to ensure its doors were open to as many people as possible and it realised that coming from a religious background might not always be appropriate. The explicit role of faith in the charity changed and Barnardo's placed itself firmly in the children's rights sector. However, its Christian values do still resonate for certain donors and volunteers and the history of Barnardo's is still very important to the charity.

Box 4: Mission based faith charity

Quaker Social Action (QSA) was established in 1867 and was originally named the Bedford Institute Association. The Quaker values of solidarity, integrity and longevity are still very important to its mission and the Quaker phrase 'Live adventurously' helps QSA keep a creative impetus in its work. Yet, despite the importance of Quaker values to its mission, the projects QSA run all have strong identities unconnected to the Quaker faith. It is important that beneficiaries, funders and other stakeholders know that, even though Quaker values underpin the mission of QSA, its programmes are open to all and do not have any religious elements.

Box 5: Central faith charity

The international development charity CAFOD (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development) was founded in the Catholic faith and Catholic values are still central to everything the charity does. Its vision and mission are based on scripture and its strategy is influenced by Papal encyclicals[†]. Faith is fundamental to its activities as well as mission. CAFOD helps everyone, regardless of faith, but it uses church networks to assist with its work, and its activities are a practical undertaking of its faith. Faith is also important internally to CAFOD. Employees do not need to be Catholic to work at CAFOD but an understanding of the Catholic faith is necessary.

[†] A Papal encyclical is specific category of document, concerning Catholic doctrine, written by the Pope. See www.papalencyclicals.net

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE FAITH-BASED SECTOR?

Faith-based charities as a group are not well understood, and one objective of our research was to deepen understanding of this part of the wider voluntary sector. Our analysis of Charity Commission data¹⁵ is, we believe, the most advanced and up-to-date analysis of faith-based charities in Great Britain. Our survey of faith-based charities provides insight into how these charities think faith influences their operations.

The shape of the faith-based charity sector

One in four charities in Great Britain is faith-based. From a total of 187,495 registered charities in Great Britain,[‡] over a quarter (49,881) are faith-based. This is higher than our finding from our first piece of research in 2014—*Questions of faith*¹⁶. The level of influence that faith has on these charities will vary, but all have either defined themselves as being faith-based, classified themselves as delivering religious activities, or have a reference to faith in their objectives.

Nearly two-thirds of these are Christian, or of a Christian tradition. ‘Generally faith-based’ charities account for 23% of the faith-based sector. These are organisations identifiable as faith-based but not able to be categorised as being within a specific faith (see *Faith data: Methodology*¹⁷ for more details). ‘Multi-faith’ organisations state a specific mission to work across faiths in their objectives.

In the past ten years, a higher proportion of faith-based charities (34%) was registered with the Charity Commission than non faith-based (25%).[§] Our qualitative research suggests this is a reflection of charities being set up to provide aid in conflict zones.

Table 1: Total number of faith-based charities in Great Britain

Religion	Number	Percentage
Christian	32,183	64.5%
Generally faith-based	11,575	23.2%
Muslim	2,407	4.8%
Jewish	2,278	4.6%
Hindu	490	1.0%
Sikh	362	0.7%
Buddhist	347	0.7%
Quaker	174	0.3%
Multi-faith	65	0.1%
TOTAL	49,881	

[‡] Excludes charities based in England and Wales with an income below £5,000 and other excepted or exempt charities, see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-register-your-charity-cc21b>. Excludes subsidiaries registered with the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission register includes charities that have not filed accounts in previous years and may be inactive.

[§] This piece of analysis looks at the age of faith-based charities using date of registration for those charities that were still active at the start of February 2016. Analysis does not look at trends in registration and removals—this is because removals data in the Charity Commission database does not readily provide a clear picture of trends. Charities can be removed from the register for many reasons other than their closure, and charities may be assigned a new registration number where there is a change in their legal status. In many cases a single registered charity has many data points for registration and removal (sometimes in error). We take the earliest date recorded.

£16.3bn (23%) of the total income of registered charities in England and Wales is received by faith-based charities.††** The data does not provide information on expenditure of faith-based charities, so we do not know the proportion of income going to funds or activities that solely benefit people of faith.

80% of this income is received by 4% (1,719) of organisations that have an income of over £1m per year. The remaining £3.3bn is shared by more than 41,000 charities. This broadly reflects the distribution of income among non faith-based charities, with a large proportion of income being concentrated in a small number of large charities.

Christian, Quaker and Jewish charities all receive a higher proportion of the income compared to their representation in the faith-based sector. For example, Christian charities have 68.6% of the faith sector’s income but make up 63.5% of the total number of faith-based charities. Quaker charities make up 0.36% of the faith-based sector but the proportion of their income is higher at 0.64%. This is similar for Jewish charities, which make up 4.65% of the faith-based sector but the proportion of their income is 6.19%. In comparison Muslim charities receive a lower proportion of the income (3.3%) compared to their representation in the sector (4.7%).

Table 2: Number of charities and income by faith as a proportion of all faith-based charities in England and Wales

Faith group	Proportion of income (n=£16.3bn)	Proportion of charities (n=43,352)††
Christian	68.61%	63.51%
Generally faith-based	20.02%	23.78%
Jewish	6.19%	4.95%
Muslim	3.32%	4.74%
Quaker	0.64%	0.36%
Hindu	0.51%	1.06%
Sikh	0.38%	0.74%
Buddhist	0.30%	0.72%
Multi-faith	0.05%	0.13%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Of all the charities that indicate they work in overseas aid, we classified 49% (5,763) as faith-based. That is the largest representation of faith-based charities working in any area.

Human rights is the sector with the second largest representation of faith-based charities: **45% of all charities that indicate they work in human rights are faith-based** (1,774 charities). This is followed by poverty (39%) and housing (33%).

Education and training is the sector where the largest number of faith-based charities (over 20,000) report that they working. This means that **faith-based charities represent 24% of all charities working the education and training sector.** Other areas where a large number of faith-based charities work include ‘Other charitable purposes’^{§§} (14,769 faith-based charities) and poverty (12,601 faith-based charities).

** Income based on the most recent figures available. These figures cover the last three full tax years from 31 March 2013.

†† All income analysis excludes 6,740 ‘inactive’ charities. We have classified a charity as ‘inactive’ if it has failed to submit financial information for the past three full tax years, from 31 March 2013.

‡‡ The total number of faith-based charities excludes 1,633 ‘inactive’ faith-based charities, bringing the total from 44,985 in England and Wales to 43,352.

§§ For this paper, the Charity Commission classifications ‘General charitable purposes’ and ‘Other charitable purposes’ have been combined into the category ‘Other charitable purposes’.

How faith influences charities

Box 6: Survey of faith-based charities

The findings in this section come from our survey of faith-based charities: 134 faith-based charities responded to the survey; 69% of respondents self-selected the 'Central Faith' category, meaning 'faith is relevant to our mission and the projects and activities we undertake'. It is not possible to work out from our data analysis what proportion of charities in the overall faith-based charity population regard faith as central to their work.

Of the respondents to the survey:

- The majority were Christian (58%).
- The majority (58%) have five or fewer full-time members of staff and 30% are entirely volunteer-led.
- The majority (64%) are engaged in delivering services, alongside a wide variety of activities, from research to advocacy and campaigning.
- Religious activities were the largest primary area of focus (43%), followed by education and training (31%), health and well-being (26%), community development (26%) and welfare/poverty relief (24%).
- They work with a wide range of beneficiaries, across the UK and internationally.

Faith has a strong influence on the charities that responded to our survey. 82% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that leadership decisions in their organisation are influenced by their faith. These respondents also linked their faith with strong performance in areas including: perseverance in challenging situations; the commitment of volunteers; and guidance provided by trustees. For example, almost 90% of respondents rated the commitment of their volunteers as excellent or good and 59% of those respondents believed this had a strong link to their faith.

Faith is seen to contribute to a charity's ability to reach and developing trusting relationships with beneficiaries. 61% reported their ability to access hard-to-reach groups as good or excellent and 46% of these respondents believed this to have a strong link to their faith. In addition, 70% of all respondents agreed that 'faith helps us develop trusting relationships with beneficiaries', with little variation across religious traditions.

Faith was also reported to be linked to an ability to collaborate. Over 85% of our respondents collaborate with other organisations and 80% of our survey respondents rated themselves as good or excellent in their ability to collaborate with other organisations. Reasons for collaboration were varied. Organisations collaborated because: they share the same values and they want to share resources; there were other organisations nearby; and they want to increase their influence/impact. Faith-based organisations also collaborated in a wide range of areas, including: discussion and debate; campaigning on issues; mobilising volunteers; fundraising; and service delivery.

Improving understanding of their faith through serving their community was also important to the majority of our respondents.

Faith-based charities reported challenges similar to those expected from non faith-based charities—such as gaining sufficient funds and meeting demands for services. And despite the perceived commitment of volunteers, many respondents said that recruiting and retaining volunteers was also a challenge.

Public trust is, over all, not seen as challenging. This was the prevailing view held by all faiths. The reason for this response could be that many of our respondents were small- to medium-sized charities that are focused on working locally, and therefore feel they have a high level of trust at a local level.

However, the portrayal of faith in the press is seen as more of an issue. Christians and Quakers find this less challenging compared to the other faiths (18% of Christians and Quakers found portrayal of faith in the media very or fairly challenging, compared to 40% amongst the other faiths.)

Impact measures related to improving the lives of beneficiaries, demonstrating impact against goals and reaching beneficiaries were important to most of our respondents. Measures related to increasing engagement with faith amongst beneficiaries and fulfilling a spiritual mission were also frequently mentioned.

The majority of respondents thought they had the capability to engage in measurement and evaluation but were concerned they lacked the capacity to engage. Generally, our respondents felt that measurement and evaluation helps make organisations significantly more effective. More than half of respondents also felt there is a culture of collecting and using evidence. However, a significant minority (41%) felt evaluation takes away resources that would be better spent elsewhere.

WHAT STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES DOES BEING FAITH-BASED BRING?

Faith-based charities make up a distinctive part of the voluntary sector. An association with a faith can influence the way that a charity operates, and brings strengths as well as obstacles.

In this section we explore four attributes of faith-based charities: **motivation and values**; **assets**; **reach**; and **faith in interventions**. Throughout, we look at the opportunities and challenges that being a faith-based organisation brings in these areas. The extent to which these apply to individual organisations will vary according to particular circumstances and the dimension of faith in the charity—historical, mission based or central—but we aim to give an overview looking across the faith-based sector.

Motivation and values

The first distinctive element that faith can bring to a charity relates to the source of its charitable motivations. In charities across the sector, whether faith-based or not, the founders, deliverers and supporters of charitable work are motivated by their values in what they do and how they work. In faith-based charities, many values—such as compassion, love for others and justice in society—are underpinned by faith. Faith culture and tradition, along with religious beliefs and teachings, can provide important motivation for those of faith to engage in charitable work, even if they do not participate in structured religious practices.¹⁸

Faith-based values can influence the very culture of faith communities and many faith-based motivations for charitable work are linked to theology, religious texts and stories, which inspire action in those who believe. These stories exist across many faiths and often link the idea that, by showing kindness and love to others, you are demonstrating your love to God or Gods. It is this link that means religious organisations have a strong history of charitable engagement. Religious teaching can be incorporated into faith-based charities and bring a particular distinctiveness to their motivations, values and the type of work they do. For example, a sense of justice and helping the poor are important themes within many religions. This helps to explain why we see so many faith-based charities working in the human rights, overseas aid and poverty sectors. This link between religious texts and practice can deepen values, and provides an aspirational context to the work of faith-based charities.

Box 7: Sikhs and voluntary service

In Sikhism there is the concept of *Seva* or *Sewa* (self-sacrifice or selfless service).^{***} *Seva* is a religious and cultural value that motivates Sikhs to help others, often through voluntary work, both faith-based and non faith-based. The British Sikh Report 2016 found that 64% of the Sikh community in Britain engage in some volunteering work, while 40% give between one and five hours of their time per week on voluntary activities. On average Sikhs spend about 200 hours per year on voluntary activities.¹⁹

Below we look at how faith-based values and motivations can present themselves in a faith-based charity.

^{***} *Seva* or *Sewa* also exists in Hinduism and functions in a similar way—both religiously and culturally.

Strengths and opportunities

Shaping attitudes towards those in need

Concern for the most marginalised and forgotten in society is central in many faith traditions. Many faiths have a strong tradition of fighting injustice, inequality and poverty. It is common for faith-based charities to say they work with those who are 'hard to love', meaning those living on the margins of our society such as people with drug dependency, sex workers and refugees. This focus on vulnerable people—and a resulting willingness to help everyone with no criteria—is reflected in the work of many faith-based groups, such as those running shelters and outreach services for the homeless, sex workers or asylum seekers. Many faith-based charities are very traditional in their reach and areas they choose to work in and have been set up to alleviate an immediate need among the most vulnerable—this is very much connected to their core faith values and is seen across faiths.

Building perseverance and dedication

Our qualitative research highlighted the idea that perseverance in challenging situations is often connected to faith. Many charities (including non faith-based) would say they persevere in challenging situations, but being faith-based can add a different dimension to the feelings of perseverance. Faith can bring with it a strong conviction, inspiring commitment to a cause or an individual, and dedication to achieving positive change.

Bringing together groups with a common focus

Faith can act as a common denominator between organisations. Although rituals of worship and beliefs may be different between faiths, values are often shared, along with a dedication to the marginalised and vulnerable in society. We found examples of this encouraging and easing collaboration between groups of the same faith, those of the same faith but different denominations (Box 8), different faiths (Box 9), and between different sectors, like the voluntary and the private sectors (Box 10). Faith-based organisations told us that when working with others of faith, similar values and beliefs can help foster a deeper understanding of an organisation's and individual's motivations.

Box 8: Street Pastors

Street Pastors is an initiative that began in London in 2003. It trains volunteers from local churches to help people out on the streets of their local town centre on Friday and Saturday nights. This help can range from handing out flip flops to women with sore feet, helping people sober up with coffee and food or diffusing confrontations. Street Pastors is explicit in its Christian faith but is not denominational and brings many different Christian churches together to help people.

Box 9: The Council for Christians and Jews

The Council for Christians and Jews recently partnered with a Jewish charity—Mitzvah Day—and a Christian charity—The Trussell Trust—to run food collections across the country for those in need. Mitzvah Day is rooted strongly in Jewish values of *tikkun olum* meaning 'healing', *gemilut chasadim* meaning 'giving of loving kindness', and *tzedek*, which can mean 'righteousness' or 'justice'. Mitzvah itself has come to mean 'good deed' or 'charitable act'. Mitzvah Day is an annual event dedicated to social action through volunteering, where individuals are encouraged to give their time—rather than their money—to charitable causes for a single day. It usually sees around 37,000 people volunteering across the UK. These Jewish values are strongly shared by Christians and can help faith-based charities work together.

Box 10: The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility

The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) is a membership organisation with members including corporates, faith-based investors, religious communities, charities, ethical investment managers and committed individuals. Its Christian values about financial ethics, social justice and the environment underpin the areas it works in, like human trafficking, rebuilding trust in the banking industry and ensuring environmental sustainability in extractive industries. It undertakes research, advocacy and engages in dialogue aiming to encourage companies to meet the highest standards of corporate responsibility and transparency. It also works with churches to help congregations communicate with companies and champion ethical moneylending. Its programmes link its faith values with social action, corporate responsibility and ethical investment.

Challenges and concerns

Faith-based charities and commentators on the faith-based sector have repeatedly highlighted the fears that others may have about engaging and working with faith-based charities, because the source of their motivation is faith.

Fear of proselytism

At the forefront of many concerns is proselytism—attempts by those of faith to convert people to their belief—and particularly in the context of working with vulnerable people who may be easily influenced.

Proselytism can be a challenging topic for both faith and non faith-based charities, as there are different interpretations of what proselytism means and involves.²⁰ Our survey results showed a mixed response to the issue of proselytism. We asked respondents to state how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: ‘Through our activities we aim to increase the number of people who share our faith’. The statement did not include the word ‘proselytise’ but at the time we thought the intent of the statement was clear. Responses were split across all answers. Although almost 23% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 19% of respondents strongly agreed. We thought this distribution of responses reflected the faith of organisations that engaged with our survey. Christian charities were the majority of respondents and Christianity is a religion that practices conversion. When we looked into these results further, our reflections proved correct. Figure 2 shows that 26% of Christian respondents to the question strongly agreed with the statement whereas almost 35% of respondents of other faiths strongly disagreed. This reflects the fact that, excluding Christianity and Islam, the other major religions in Great Britain do not believe in or actively proselytise.

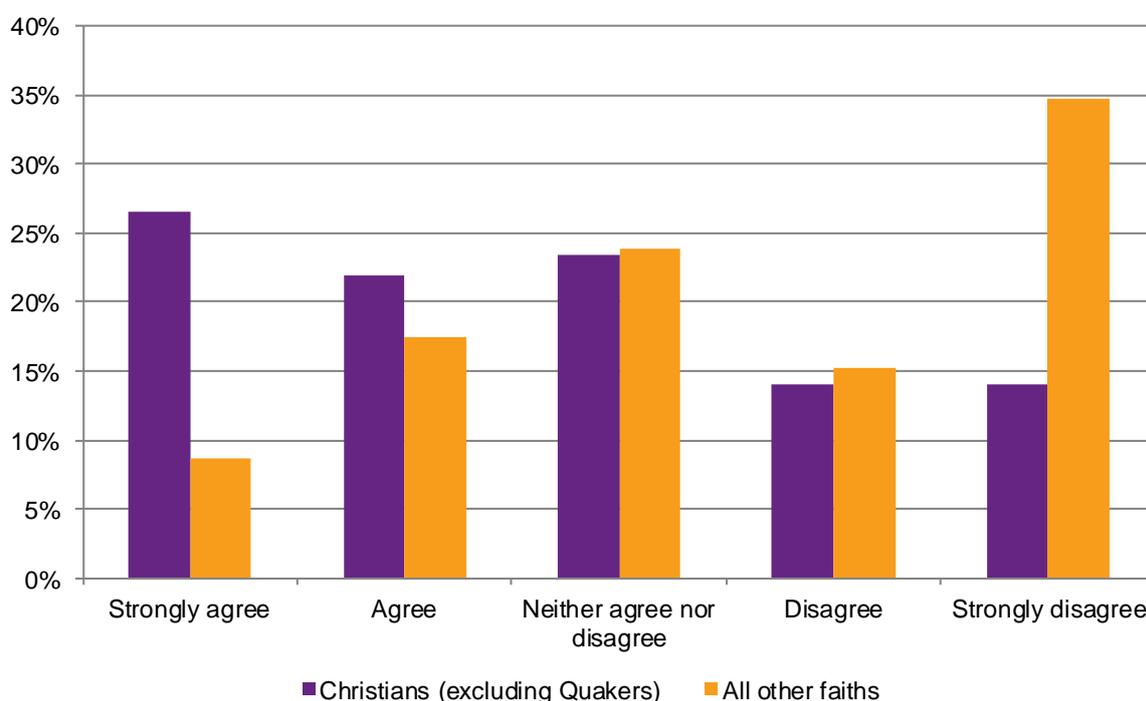
Box 11: The Trussell Trust

The Trussell Trust is very clear that it exists to put into practice the Christian values of feeding the hungry and reaching the poorest, but it is also very clear that promoting Christianity is not their mission. This clarity of purpose reassures beneficiaries of non-faith as well as secular local agencies that money is not going to build a church but to relieve very real problems of poverty in local communities.

However, we now understand that perhaps intent of the statement ‘*Through our activities we aim to increase the number of people who share our faith*’ was not clear to all respondents. For many faith-based organisations sharing one’s faith and proselytism are not the same. Proselytism is often viewed as negative and coercive whereas sharing faith is seen as a way to increase understanding of faith and help beneficiaries with spiritual needs.

Our qualitative research showed that many faith-based charities feel that simply talking about faith can sometimes be seen as an attempt to proselytise, instead of a way to increase understanding of, and share, their faith respectfully. Sharing one's faith is not necessarily a negative but it can add to fears surrounding proselytism, and opinions differ on how appropriate it is to share faith in a charitable context.²¹ Research has revealed that local authorities and commissioners may be wary of recruiting a faith-based organisation to deliver a service because they believe that, as a faith group, they will want to share their faith with service users.²² These fears are in part based on: the fact that the advancement of religion is a valid charitable objective; and the long history of proselytising and conversion in Christianity. However, research has found that there is little evidence to justify fears of proselytism and that local authorities can benefit greatly from including faith-based groups in service delivery.²³

Figure 2: Percentage of responses to the question, 'Through our activities we aim to increase the number of people who share our faith' (n=112)



Fears of proselytism and conversion from faith-based charities can be even more damaging for those faiths that do not believe in or practice conversion. Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Hinduism do not engage in proselytism, but poor religious literacy can leave people with a fear that all faiths aim to convert. When services are offered by charities of these faiths and the services are open to all, there should be very little worry that these charities aim to convert.

Issues around openness towards people of different faiths

Another concern surrounding the motivations of faith groups is that they will prioritise working with people of their own faith.²⁴ Our research found that, generally, faith-based groups are incredibly inclusive and belief is not a requirement for accessing services. Other literature on faith-based charities supports the view that many faith-based charities offer a 'no strings' approach where anyone can use services and beneficiaries do not need to meet any criteria.²⁵ Our survey results showed that only 5.4% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement 'We only work with beneficiaries of our own faith', whereas 55% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Faith-based charities can fear the motivations of non faith-based charities, as well as the other way around.²⁶ Our qualitative research highlighted an example of when a non faith-based partner wanted to control who could

access services with criteria that the faith-based partner felt were too restrictive. The criteria meant that targets were more likely to be reached but those most in need would not be able to receive help. Faith-based charities may also have concerns over the motives of other faiths and the motivations of those who share their faith. This can have consequences for growth and collaboration, potentially negatively impacting on beneficiaries.

Associations with radicalisation or extremism

A final concern our research highlighted was the fear that the motivations of some faiths will lead to radicalisation. Currently, this is a challenge that predominantly affects Muslim charities.

The rise of Islamic terrorist groups and an increase in the number of terrorist attacks in Western countries has led to a narrative on Islam that is more focused on terrorism and the actions of minority Muslim groups. This narrative can be reinforced by the media and Islam can be portrayed in a very negative light. Our qualitative research told us that Muslim charities are hyper aware of the negative stereotypes of Muslims, and of the damage that can be done if there is an accusation of association with radical values and extremism (see Box 12). This has led to a situation where Muslim charities are disengaging from each other and the wider charity sector.

Box 12: The Muslim Charities Forum (MCF)

MCF aims to help Muslim charities working in international development professionalise and engage with the wider humanitarian sector. In 2013 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funded MCF to run a project to improve governance amongst minority places of worship. However, some MCF members were falsely linked to an organisation called the Union of Good (UoG), which was designated by the US Treasury as a terrorism-supporting entity. Though MCF members were cleared of this association by the Charity Commission, and the MCF itself was not accused of having direct relation with UoG, the reaction by the press was very damaging. Funding was later withdrawn and the project halted. The incident hurt the reputation of MCF and made it difficult for its members to trust in the idea of collaboration and information sharing.

Assets

An association with a faith can bring access to resources or assets that support a charity to deliver services, achieve its mission and make an impact. Here we discuss the range of these resources and assets, acknowledging that the situation for individual organisations will differ.

Strengths and opportunities

Religious buildings

For some faiths, religious buildings function as places for the community to gather, as well as places of worship. Faith-based charities with a strong connection to their faith may find that they have buildings more readily available to them and that delivering a service out of the building works well for intended beneficiaries and volunteers, as well as making good financial sense. Being able to run a community group out of the local church for free or for a nominal fee, for example, can save a lot of money and time. Churches, mosques, temples, gurdwaras, meeting houses and synagogues can all play important roles in supporting the community and charitable activity.

Religious buildings can also act as a centre for finding volunteers and fundraising, drawing on the often extensive networks surrounding a place of worship.²⁷ For Hindu and Sikh charities, temples are strong sources of funding and strong centres of service delivery. Temples raise money from their congregations for a wide variety of things,

from the up keep of the temple to providing meals. Many temples in the UK provide a daily or weekly free meal for older or vulnerable people in the community. The Jalaram Temple in Greenford, for example, provides free daily meals for anyone, as well as donating supplies to foodbanks and providing the food that Greenford Church cooks for local pensioners.

Box 13: Focus on foodbanks

The assets of faith-based charities can help them set up easily replicable models that have an instant effect, which appeals to faith-based volunteers and donors. Foodbanks are one such model.

Many foodbanks operate out of churches, mosques and other faith buildings. This can help them appear well established in the community, even if they are new. It also reduces costs as the charity is likely to be using the building for free or at a reduced rate. A faith connection can also infer an element of trust and that they have a community's best interests at heart. Establishing a service from a faith-based building can give the charity access to large networks of potential volunteers. Congregations can be mobilised to volunteer and donate. These assets can explain why we have seen a proliferation of faith-based foodbanks in recent years to cater for the increasing need.

Funding and fundraising

There has been a lot of research into motivations for giving to charity, and it is acknowledged that many factors can affect an individual's propensity to give—including age, income and level of education.²⁸ NPC's research paper [Money for good](#) found that faith and religion are also key factors that influence giving.²⁹ A 2013 survey by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) of its users who donate revealed that 71% were religiously motivated to give. Many also pointed to traditions of giving in their beliefs as a key influence on their commitment to charity.³⁰

When it comes to fundraising, faith-based charities can have access to an audience with a propensity to give. Many faiths have a tradition of regular giving and then giving beyond that. For Muslims, *Zakat*—one of the five pillars of Islam—requires the giving of 2.5% of the year's total cumulative wealth, above a minimum amount, to the poor. Many Muslims choose Ramadan as a time to pay their *Zakat*—as rewards for good deeds are multiplied during this period—and many chose to give more than 2.5%. Muslims are estimated to give around £100m during Ramadan—making it an important fundraising month for all charities (Muslim charities in particular).³²

Box 14: Jewish tradition of giving

Jewish law states that Jews should give one tenth of their income to charitable causes. *Tzedakah* (charity) and giving are seen as fundamental aspects of being Jewish. A recent report from the Institute of Jewish Policy Research revealed that Jews are much more likely to give to charity than the population in general. It found that 93% of Jews donate to charity, compared to 57% of the general UK population.³¹

The tradition of giving in many religions comes from the belief that ultimately everything a person has is a gift from God so it is only right to share this. It is easier to give something away if it was not yours to begin with. Our qualitative research and other literature highlighted that religious beliefs and faith values can have an impact on giving, even if the people do not consider themselves active in their faith, potentially giving faith-based charities more donors than those they may traditionally find at places of worship.³³

Faith has also been shown to affect the causes that donors give to. CAF's annual UK Giving research has shown that giving to religious and faith-based causes has attracted the highest average donation in the last three years of the survey.³⁵ Some causes are of particular interest to faith communities. For example, orphan sponsorship is a common area for giving amongst Muslim donors, as it is directly referenced in the Qu'ran. Other issues such as feeding (through foodbanks or food parcels), WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and homelessness are popular causes for Muslims as they are spoken about in scripture.³⁶

Box 15: Giving trends among Jewish donors

For Jewish donors, scripture and religious teachings have less influence on the causes they give to. Research has found that, while religious Jews are more likely to give to Jewish charities, a far greater proportion of Jews give to non-Jewish charities. Jews are in fact more likely than non-Jews to give to non-Jewish charities.³⁴ The main sectors that Jewish donors give to are children, overseas aid and homelessness.

Our qualitative research suggested that faith-based donors like to give to causes where they can see their money having an effect quickly. Recently there have been reactions against charities with high administration and operations costs.³⁷ Within the Muslim community this has led to more people giving to smaller charities where they believe the administrative costs are low and more funds reach beneficiaries—for example, giving to convoys that take food and goods to Syria has grown. Administrative costs for these charities are low and donors like seeing their gift having a more immediate effect—although this does not necessarily mean that these charities are creating more impact.

Faith-based charities will access donors in different ways. Some actively raise funds from within places of worship. For example, CAFOD works with churches at different times of the year (for example, during Lent), perhaps showcasing some of their work after a service and sending money collected from a congregation directly to CAFOD. Khalsa Aid, a Sikh-inspired overseas aid charity, began by fundraising from a gurdwara after a disaster. Others will fundraise from their wider faith community, drawing on trust and awareness of their work, and perhaps having a local faith leader as a volunteer or trustee.

For some charities, the result of this is a fairly predictable stream of unrestricted donation income, with access to a source of potential funding for needs that arise. This can help charities to remain responsive to local needs and direct their resources where they believe it is most required.

Volunteer recruitment

Undertaking charitable work, as well as giving, is an important part of many faiths. In the Hindu and Sikh faiths, as we have mentioned previously, 'Sewa/Seva' or 'selfless service' is central to their beliefs and traditions. Sewa Day is a US-based Hindu charity that mobilises volunteers, encouraging them to undertake community action globally. In 2013, for example, it brought together 76,000 volunteers across 25 countries on one day to take part in everything from bake sales, local woodland clean ups and working at night shelters. It hopes that this one-off volunteering will translate into more regular and committed volunteering.

For faith-based charities, this motivation to help others can make it easier for them to recruit volunteers. Like giving, there are many factors that affect an individual's likelihood of volunteering—including age and level of education—but it is widely held that faith is a factor affecting an individual's decision to volunteer.³⁸ A lot of faith-based volunteering takes place through places of worship and is both regular and formal, as well as spontaneous and informal.³⁹ Volunteering can be for the place of worship, for example, leading a Sunday school group for children at church, cooking meals at a temple or cleaning the premises. Volunteering can also be organised through a place of worship. This type of volunteering can include helping at a youth club organised by the local

mosque, driving people to hospital appointments or working in the local homeless centre. For faith-based charities that use religious buildings to deliver their services, the additional access to volunteers is also an important asset.

Our qualitative research revealed that working and volunteering with a faith-based charity allowed people to express their faith without engaging with religion. For people who disagree with some of the views held by their religious institution—for example, towards homosexuality—volunteering in a faith-based charity allows them to engage with their faith in a different way. They do not have to condone the views of their religious institution but they can still practise and express their faith in an individual way through the act of volunteering.

Moral leadership

The trust and respect afforded to faith leaders—from the high profile to those in the local community—can provide moral leadership on issues that faith-based charities can capitalise on. Different faith-based charities can unite on moral issues, especially when many religious leaders also come together, setting an example and raising awareness.

We have seen this recently with the growth of faith-based organisations working on ethical finance projects. Many faiths have strong values connected to money and social justice and in 2013 Archbishop Justin Welby called for more to be done to combat controversial money lenders like Wonga.⁴⁰ Since then there has been a flurry of activity by faith-based organisations looking to promote responsible alternatives to payday lenders.⁴¹ Credit Unions are working in collaboration with churches to encourage lending through these channels and the Islamic Finance Council is developing a Muslim and Christian interfaith project. It is using the shared values of Muslim and Christian faiths to help develop best practice guidelines between the two faiths on ethical finance issues. Charities are also working to combat wider issues of debt and poor financial management, such as Christians Against Poverty, which has set up 306 debt advice centres in churches across the UK.

Box 16: LifeSavers

The Church of England is running a programme called 'LifeSavers' that aims to give children the skills and knowledge to manage money in the future. As the Church of England is responsible for one in four primary schools in England, it is well placed to deliver this. Part of the programme wants to show how values influence financial behaviours. It aims to promote constructive attitudes around financial matters such as understanding the impact of money, considering economic justice, and promoting generosity. The way society interacts with money is changing and faith-based groups are coming together to consider how we teach positive financial values to children.

Challenges and concerns

Difficulty raising funds

However, it is not all rosy for faith-based charities. Although the majority of our survey respondents (60%) reported that faith was an enabler to fundraising, at times faith can make fundraising more challenging. While some larger charities like Christian Aid have built communities of faith and non-faith donors, smaller and more local charities can find it difficult to raise funds from outside their faith or local community. This can be a particular difficulty for faith-based organisations that are working with a defined group. For example, Charedi Jewish charities may exclude non-Charedi's from receiving their services, something which can be at odds with the values of many trusts, foundations and individual donors.

Box 17: Big Lottery Fund

Our qualitative research highlighted the concerns that some faith-based charities have over accessing funding from lottery-based organisations. Many faiths are strongly against gambling as they believe it can affect the moral and spiritual well-being of society. Gambling is seen as making people greedy, and for Quakers it is also seen as making society less equal—a few may benefit but the majority are worse off. These beliefs mean many faith-based charities will not access lottery funding and even those that do can feel conflicted about it. Churches often have to apply for funding from the Heritage Lottery for building restoration and maintenance but having to do so can make them feel they are compromising their beliefs.

Our research suggested that faith-based charities have concerns that a negative perception of faith-based charities and a low level of religious literacy can count against them in funding decisions, particularly with local authority commissioners.⁴² Faith-based charities have been doing a variety of work in this area to help further cooperation and collaboration with statutory bodies. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society has drafted a Faith Covenant—a document that sets out a joint commitment between local authorities and faith-based groups to guide engagement between them.⁴³ Its aim is to promote trust between the groups through more joint working, and to engage faith groups in the shaping of local services. The Covenant is currently working in six areas and FaithAction has been working with local authorities and local faith-based groups to help with its implementation.

Some local authorities and areas across Great Britain have been working to increase religious literacy and engagement with faith communities through the establishment of faith forums. The Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum, for example, aims to help promote religious harmony and tolerance within the borough. It hosts regular meetings for faith groups and charities to speak with counsellors and staff from the local authority about problems they are facing. It also holds events for local people, such as interfaith walks and local campaign rallies on issues like xenophobia and refugees.⁴⁴

Tensions between organisational and volunteer beliefs

Faith-based charities can encounter challenges with volunteers of faith, in particular with regards to motivation and proselytism. Some faith-based organisations also feel there can be tensions between spirituality and the everyday tasks of the charity. For volunteers, their faith is often what motivated them to volunteer and they may want to share this with beneficiaries, staff and other volunteers. In situations where the charity does not want this, tensions can develop—especially if it relies heavily on volunteers. However, sharing of faith is not necessarily proselytism and volunteers may not see it this way. For volunteers, their faith can be an important part of their identity and they wish to talk about this and share it with others.

Looking at the dimension of faith in the organisation—whether it is historical, mission based or central (see Figure 1) and whether this faith dimension is explicit or implicit—can help faith-based charities address issues of sharing and expressing faith. As long as a charity has clear guidelines for volunteer behaviour and what they see as appropriate, tensions in this area can be managed. Organisations such as Church Urban Fund and Livability provide guidance to faith-based charities about expressing their beliefs.⁴⁵

Changes in engagement with faith

Looking to the future, faith-based charities must think about how trends in engagement with their faith, and an ageing population, might affect them. For Christian charities, declining church attendance outside of London and an ageing congregation could limit the amount that can be raised now and in the future. An ageing Christian population coupled with a decline in the number of people identifying as Christian will make it harder for Christian charities to find and rely on volunteers in future.⁴⁶

Reach

A link with faith can give charities the ability to reach out and connect with communities that potentially others cannot, through a combination of access to, and trust of, a particular beneficiary group. This can help them have an impact where other charities or services might struggle.

Strengths and opportunities

Working with vulnerable people

Some beneficiaries may be more comfortable receiving services from those who share the same faith or in a faith-based setting. Faith can enable some charities to reach vulnerable groups with culturally appropriate services. For example, the multi-faith network FaithAction run a programme designed to teach English. The English classes are delivered in places of worship, such as mosques, temples or churches, by an appropriate teacher—for example, a woman teacher for women-only classes. Having the classes delivered in such a way means that certain groups, such as women, who might not feel comfortable attending a mixed language class at a local college or community centre, can receive services in a way that is best for them and more likely to have an impact. In circumstances like these, faith-based charities can be more effective than non faith-based organisations.

As mentioned earlier, many Hindu temples provide free meals for elderly or vulnerable people in the community.^{†††} Non-Hindu's are welcome at these events, but vulnerable people in the Hindu community are particularly likely to attend as they may feel more comfortable attending services provided by or in the temple than secular services provided outside of their community. In this way, faith-based charities can reach people who would not seek help elsewhere.

Accessing groups and communities through faith

A faith-based organisation can be more likely, in certain situations, to be granted access to vulnerable communities when they are of the same faith. This is one reason why we see so many faith-based charities working in overseas aid. For example, it is can be easier for a Muslim charity to gain access to vulnerable communities in Pakistan and it can also be easier for them to gain the trust of these beneficiaries. Being the same faith as the people you are trying to help can engender strong feelings of trust between the charity, beneficiaries and wider community, before a project has even begun. This is because all three parties share similar values, and beneficiaries can understand the charity's motivations.

Our qualitative research suggested that, for some vulnerable communities of faith, receiving services from others of faith is easier than those of no faith. Belief, even if it is not the same faith, can give staff, volunteers and beneficiaries a common point of reference and basis to develop understanding that is absent with non faith-based charities.

Another benefit to being a faith-based charity working overseas is that sometimes faith institutions, such as the Church, can be seen as more trustworthy than government institutions. Beneficiaries may see the Church as an accepted moral institution that shares the same values, whereas they see their local and national government as being plagued by corruption and instability. In these circumstances faith is providing a legitimacy to charities, and beneficiaries feel more comfortable engaging with them.

Our survey results showed overwhelmingly that faith-based charities saw their faith as helping them to create trusting relationships with their beneficiaries, and as something that helped them access hard-to-reach groups.

^{†††} Many Sikh temples also provide free meals for their local communities.

Challenges and concerns

Suspicion about motives

Faith can amplify the reach of charities but it can also be a hindrance. A history of missionary work and proselytism can make some beneficiaries and local partners suspicious towards certain faith organisations and worried about the potential for conversion or radicalisation of vulnerable communities. In some circumstances this can make it harder to reach potential beneficiaries. If these feelings are held by potential partners or local statutory agencies it can also affect the ability of faith-based organisations to collaborate with others. These stereotypes can be difficult for faith-based charities to deal with, particularly when they are grounded in historical issues or moulded by media reporting of the actions of a minority group in certain faiths.

Tensions in relationships between different faiths and cultures

Faith can also create challenges for faith-based charities in areas that do have a strong faith. Political context can affect if and how a charity reaches beneficiaries and delivers services. For example, it can be hard for Jewish overseas aid charities to find partners to work with in predominantly Muslim areas—particularly in the Middle East—because of a real or imagined connection to Israel that potential partner charities are not comfortable with. Some faiths also have physical manifestations that cannot be hidden, but can cause unexpected challenges in relationships. For example, in Sikhism it is traditional to wear a turban as a head covering; in certain Islamic countries this practice is also common. This can cause confusion for beneficiaries if they are unfamiliar with Sikh or Islamic practices. Our qualitative research highlighted how this can even lead to mistrust between beneficiaries and a charity developing if beneficiaries hold negative attitudes toward one faith but confuse them with another.

Questions around the legitimacy of faith

The legitimacy of faith-based charities can be challenged by issues affecting the religion itself. For example, the Catholic Church's attitude to homosexuality has impacted on Catholic adoption agencies.⁴⁷ In a society where gay couples can legally marry, the Catholic Church's attitude can be seen by some as outdated, even practising Catholics. Negative representation in the press has caused some Catholic adoption agencies to formally split with the Church and to significantly downplay their connection to Catholicism.⁴⁸ However, the Catholic Church's reputation has changed recently since Pope Francis became the Church's leader, creating what has been called 'the Pope Francis effect'.⁴⁹ The Pope's liberal reputation and practical, less academic, background has been said to have positively affected the perception of the Catholic Church globally. It is situations like this that offer a glimpse into the changing and multifaceted attitudes to faith in our society and the complex interaction between faith values and culture within faith-based charities.

Lack of trust

The current narrative on Islam often focuses on terrorism and fears around the radicalisation of Muslims in Britain. Our qualitative research highlighted how this can lead to an atmosphere of mistrust between many different groups and cause serious problems for Muslim charities. The bank accounts of some Muslim charities have been shut down because many of them work in high-risk areas, and there are fears that they are linked to extremist and terrorist groups. Evidence supporting these fears is limited in most cases.⁵⁰ This can result in funding problems, affect the delivery of services and potentially have a negative impact on beneficiaries.

Issues around trust can also affect who a charity works with and how it works. Faith can lead to self-censorship of some charities in certain situations, restricting their reach. For example, more Muslim charities are becoming increasingly risk-averse, fearful of working in certain areas, such as Syria, in case they are accused of helping or supporting terrorism.⁵¹ Although their faith could actually help them reach vulnerable people in Syria, the wider perception of Muslim charities and Islam, as well as the ambiguity around counter-terrorism legislation, is making it more challenging for these charities to fulfil their mission.⁵² It is here once again that we can see the complex relationship between faith, charity and our wider society playing out.

At a local level, the establishment of faith forums by local councillors or local commissioners is seen very positively by faith communities. In Nottinghamshire, former Police and Crime Commissioner Adam Simmonds established a network to support local faith-based charities, helping them with governance issues and supporting them to better understand their impact. Initiatives like these are great at engaging faith-based charities and faith communities, helping them to feel included and building trust between groups.⁵³

Trust between faith communities and wider society is increasingly important as our society changes. Faith-based charities could play a crucial role in increasing levels of trust if different parties are willing to work together.

Faith in interventions

The previous sections have dealt with the attributes that faith can bring to a charity. Here we look at how faith can be used directly in an intervention and how it can create impact.

Strengths and opportunities

Delivering services

As mentioned earlier, some beneficiaries may prefer to receive services from a faith-based organisation because they understand their motivations, they trust them and they share the same faith values. For some people, faith is an important part of their identity and they want the services that are offered to them to acknowledge that. This can be the case with services for elderly people, such as visits in the home, where the beneficiary can no longer attend a church service but wants to talk about their faith. This also occurs in many marriage or family counselling services offered by Christian charities. Such charities see the institution of marriage as Christian and generally the beneficiaries do too, which is part of the reason they selected the charity. Faith forms the basis of service delivery and the counselling and other activities couples take part in all have Christian ethos and values woven into them.

For faith-based charities that think about a whole-person approach, this means addressing a person's spiritual needs as well as their physical and emotional needs. However, this does not mean that beneficiaries are forced to pray or participate in religious activities in order to receive services. It means that options to discuss faith, morality, values and spiritual aspects of life are there if beneficiaries want to take advantage of them—often being incorporated into wider work around well-being. These services can also be provided by secular charities or agencies but they may not be best placed to provide them.

Box 18: The West London Mission

The West London Mission (WLM) is a circuit of the Methodist Church with two congregations in London. As well as its churches it runs eight social work services focused on homelessness and related issues such as alcohol dependency. It has no faith restrictions on who accesses its services but it advocates an approach that includes 'promoting wholeness'—offering creative, responsive and holistic services to address people's physical, emotional and spiritual needs. To do this it integrates spirituality into its services through helping beneficiaries have lives focused on more than just the challenges they face, taking opportunities for apt liturgy and convening a safe space for faith discussion.

Faith-based charities are able to provide beneficiaries with services that not only acknowledge the importance of the beneficiaries' faith but also incorporate it into service delivery. There is a growing body of research and thinkers that believe addressing spirituality when working is as important as meeting need and that this can have very positive impacts for beneficiaries.⁵⁴ Faith-based charities are well placed to ensure spiritual needs are met.

Building understanding

Faith-based charities can play an important role in building understanding in communities, between different faiths and also between those of faith and those of none. This part of faith and faith-based charities plays out within the idea of social capital. Social capital is the idea that individuals are enriched by their relationships and the networks they have around them. These relationships and networks are a resource in the same way as we have material resources (such as money) and individual resources (such as qualifications).⁵⁵ Bonding social capital refers to the networks and relationships that are formed within a community, creating a common identity. Faith and religion are particularly strong in creating bonding social capital as shared beliefs, values and practices that bring people together, giving them something in common with their neighbours. This reinforces the group experience and can strengthen the community. Faith and religion can help people form a group identity alongside their individual identity and increase feelings of belonging in a community, aiding social cohesion within communities.⁵⁶

As well as 'bonding social capital', faith can also create 'bridging' social capital. Bridging social capital refers to the networks and relationships that are formed between different communities, helping groups that do not share a common identity understand each other. Faith-based organisations can help create bridging social capital in a variety of ways.⁵⁷ Sharing physical space—for example allowing a non faith-based project to work from a religious building for the benefit of the whole community—opens up a community that some may see as inward to include those outside its boundaries. Participating in local forums and governance mechanisms also aids bridging social capital as communities mix and dialogue is opened. Much inter-faith and multi-faith work aims to create bridging social capital. The creation of shared multi-faith space helps bridge differences between communities as different groups have to come together to manage a space for the benefit of all.

Box 19: The Nishkam Centre

The Nishkam Centre in Birmingham is a Sikh-based organisation working for the well-being of the entire community. It has a strong agenda of civic engagement and runs a wide variety of programmes to support this, including youth groups, training and education courses, and a local arts and heritage programme. The Centre also has an active inter-faith programme that involves them holding services open to all, working with other faiths locally on a programme of events and participating in local governance.

Inter-faith work is also important for raising awareness of faith, increasing religious literacy and community cohesion. The Feast, a Christian charity in Birmingham, works to promote community cohesion by providing a space for young people to have 'un-politically correct' conversations about faith. The Feast places youth work in the context of living in a multi-faith world with a focus on sharing and understanding different values.

Strongly bridging social capital can help create successful collaborations between different faiths, something that is clearly evident in the humanitarian aid sector. UK-based overseas aid charities often form partnerships with local organisations of different faiths because it enables them to carry out work in the field faster and more effectively. Large UK-based charities that work in overseas aid also form partnerships with each other across faiths. Islamic Relief, Christian Aid and World Vision have formed a successful collaboration in the Congo helping them reach the most vulnerable. World Jewish Relief has also had successful collaborations with local Muslim charities in Kashmir. These inter-faith collaborations not only allow crucial resources to reach vulnerable beneficiaries, they also have the added effect of demonstrating the power of inter-faith work and promoting good inter-faith relations. In areas of conflict where the reasons behind the conflict may have arisen from, or be grounded in, religious issues, seeing people of different faiths working together first hand could have a powerful effect on beneficiaries.

Faith-based charities have a valuable role to play in building an understanding of faith. Although the place of religion may be changing in our society, faith is still an important part of many people's lives and in our multi-faith society it is crucial that this is recognised.

Challenges and concerns

Rising secularism

There is much debate about the place of religion in our society and the rise of secularism. Our research does not cover these issues in depth, but the desire for secularisation does affect faith-based charities, so we have explored this briefly below.

A common narrative is that our society is becoming less religious. Fewer people attend church, for example, and fewer identify themselves as practising Christians.⁵⁸ However, this only tells one side of a story. Although some churches may be witnessing a decline in attendance, others, particularly in London, are experiencing growth. Our society is increasingly plural, multicultural and/or multi-faith, so the narrative of a less religious society is too simplistic. However, the changing place of faith and religion in our society has certainly impacted upon faith-based charities.

Arguments for a secular society generally take the view that faith has no place in public services and that acknowledgement or expressions of faith in places like hospitals and schools are unwelcome, irritating and divisive.⁵⁹ There is also the belief that all faith-based organisations want to spread their religious message through whatever means possible and will use public money and public services to do that.⁶⁰ As a reaction to this narrative, we have seen the self-censorship of faith in some charities, particularly those that engage in public service delivery and receive local authority funding. Research by Theos in 2015 revealed that faith-based charities may choose to downplay the role of faith in certain situations, such as seeking statutory funding, and then bring it to the fore when fundraising at a religious building.⁶¹ This fluidity in the role of faith in some charities can bring challenges. It can disconnect them from some core funders, cause tensions between staff and volunteers, who feel the charity no longer identifies with the faith's core values, and cause problems with beneficiaries if they believe a charity is not being honest about its motivations.

For some beneficiaries, their faith is a core part of their identity and they want to receive a service that acknowledges and respects this. As a service user, they may feel that a faith-based charity is better able to meet their needs. As discussed earlier, fears around proselytism are generally unfounded and in a multi-faith society, faith-based charities may be best placed to deliver culturally appropriate services to vulnerable groups within faith communities.

Insular faith communities

Although faith communities and faith-based charities can help foster trust by creating social capital, it is important to note that bonding social capital can make communities insular and introverted. It has been linked to the segregation of communities, including self segregation, and the rise of fundamentalist and extreme views within faith groups.⁶² Faith groups and communities are not homogenous and extreme views can exist alongside moderate views.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings

Faith-based charities make up more than a quarter of the voluntary sector in Great Britain and faith-based charities in England and Wales have a combined income of £16bn. The current number of faith-based charities in Britain is partly a reflection of the strong historical links between faith and charity in our society, but it is also a reflection of our current multicultural and multi-faith society. Faith is deeply embedded in the charity sector.

Despite making up a significant part of the sector in terms of numbers and size, relatively little is known about faith-based charities as a group. During our research, we realised that most faith-based charities do not think of themselves as a group or a sub-sector of the voluntary sector. Instead they tend to define themselves by the services they provide, as a non faith-based charity would. In many ways, faith-based and non faith-based charities are very similar: size, location and area of work are as likely to influence a charity's circumstances as faith is. Yet, faith can still have a strong influence on an organisation and its work. Our research has identified distinctive attributes that faith can bring to a charity, meaning they have the potential to make a greater impact.

Faith-based charities are resilient

We found that faith-based charities have distinct assets—such as volunteers, physical spaces and networks—combined with their ability to fundraise from within their faith. This can make them particularly resilient to change, be that in funding or service delivery.

Faith-based charities have unique reach

Many faith-based organisations have been a part of their local community for a long time and are trusted by members of the wider community as well as those they directly help. This trusted position in a community can make faith-based charities uniquely placed to reach groups that are considered 'hard to reach'.

Faith-based charities have the knowledge to offer culturally appropriate services that reflect and incorporate faith values and spiritual needs. This can mean that certain groups are more comfortable with accessing their services. As our society becomes increasingly multicultural, and there is a wider range of needs to understand and address, the ability to deliver appropriate services is more important than ever.

Faith-based charities persevere

We also found that faith-based charities can be particularly motivated to help the most vulnerable in our society, for example sex workers with drug dependencies and mental health problems. Many faith-based charities feel they persevere and continue to help the most vulnerable, even when others have given up.

These distinctive characteristics can make faith-based charities more effective but they do face challenges. Some of these challenges are the same as those that non faith-based charities face, such as funding. But some are particular to faith-based charities and to specific faiths.

Faith-based charities face unique challenges

Concerns around proselytising can cause problems for faith-based charities, with beneficiaries and funders. Although some faith-based charities may want to share their faith, they do not see this as a means to convert.

Instead it is often seen as a way to increase understanding and grow faith in those who already belong to that faith. However, proselytising is still a concern. Faith-based charities should be aware of this and, if necessary, should spend time considering and clarifying their position on this issue.

Our research also found sometimes there is a perception that faith-based charities are only there to help those of their own faith. This can cause problems for faith-based charities as beneficiaries may not seek them out and funders may not want to fund them. We found that this perception is generally unfounded. Although some faith-based charities may work with just those of their faith, the majority work with everyone, regardless of religion.

Faith is poorly understood

A challenge for all faith-based charities is the lack of understanding of faith. Among the wider public, the public and private sectors, and the voluntary sector, misunderstanding around faith values and a lack of awareness of different beliefs can cause problems. Low religious literacy can exacerbate the challenges highlighted above.

Recommendations

As a result of our research, we have developed some recommendations for both faith-based and non faith-based charities, as well as for the public sectors. In order to truly harness the unique contribution that faith-based charities can make to our communities and our society, the following is needed:

More collaboration for greater impact

Faith-based charities have a lot to offer and more collaboration between faith-based and non faith-based charities could lead to a greater impact for beneficiaries. Non faith-based charities should think about how the assets of faith-based charities could help them achieve their mission and faith-based charities could think about how to leverage these assets for greater impact. The public sector also needs to consider the potential of faith-based charities and recognise the unique characteristics and resources they can bring, instead of focusing on perceived challenges.

Greater awareness of the changing role of faith in our society

Faith-based charities need to be aware of how the role of faith in our society is changing. Some areas are becoming more multicultural and multi-faith, while in other areas there may still be one predominant faith but numbers ascribing to this faith are dropping. This can have an effect on faith-based charities that rely on their congregations for funding and volunteers. The role of spirituality in our society is also changing. There is evidence that fewer people are identifying with one particular faith, but people are continuing to consider themselves spiritual. The role of faith in our society is complex and faith-based charities should consider this changing landscape.

Better understanding of faith and its impact

Faith-based charities need to be better at understanding and articulating the impact of their work to both faith- and non faith-based audiences. They should consider how their association with faith supports effective operations and delivery of services, for instance in access to buildings or volunteers, or reach into communities. Where relevant they could consider the value that integrating spirituality into their services brings to their beneficiaries. We would like to see more discussion around the value of faith in delivering interventions.

Higher levels of religious literacy may help combat some of the challenges facing faith-based charities. A deeper understanding of the work of faith groups could also bring benefits to non faith-based charities and the public sector. Organisations that interact with different faith groups should consider raising levels of religious literacy in their workforce.

Further research on faith-based charities

Finally, we think more research is needed in this area, particularly around the nature and role of non-Christian faith-based charities. We found it especially hard to engage with enough faith-based charities from minority faiths, yet through our qualitative work we heard a lot about the impact these charities are having in their communities. Understanding more about these charities is critical if we want to understand the wider voluntary sector and ensure we are addressing and meeting the needs of different people in our society.

Final thoughts

We believe that faith-based charities are an important part of the voluntary sector and wider society. They can reach groups other charities cannot; they are resilient to changes in funding and policy; and their values motivate them to help those who are most in need. Ultimately though, it is not about whether a charity is faith-based or non faith-based, what matters is the impact they are having on the lives of those they seek to help.

For any questions or comments on the contents of this report, contact Rachel Wharton via info@thinkNPC.org.

Visit www.thinknpc.org/our-work/projects/faith-based-charities for more reports and commentary on this research.

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TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

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