

## **The feasibility of a regional faith forum for Yorkshire and the Humber (funded by the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly in association with the Churches Regional Commission)**

In 2003 Kim Knott, Sean McLoughlin and Mel Prideaux, on behalf of the Community Religions Project, researched the feasibility of a regional faith forum for the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (managed by the Churches Regional Commission). The project aims were:

- to map current inter faith activity;
- to assess the feasibility and way forward for a Regional Faith Forum for Yorkshire and the Humber;
- to produce recommendations and an action plan for work to be done in inter faith working in the region;
- to give a theological rationale for inter faith working.

In the Operational Brief for the project, it was stated that the researchers would meet with and take note of the experiences and views of relevant regional players, and would review the involvement of faith groups in existing local, sub-regional and regional representative bodies. A mapping exercise would be undertaken of the organisational structures within different faiths and inter faith groups across the region. In addition, the range of projects and initiatives delivered by single faith groups – but open to all – or by several faith groups working co-operatively would be presented. Reference would also be made to inter faith structures in operation in other regions.

As part of the management of the research, the Churches Regional Commission initiated a Multi Faith Steering Group which would 'offer ongoing advice and act as a sounding board for the project'. (This group has since gone on to operate as an acting forum pending the formal launch.)

In pursuit of these aims and objectives, the Project Team gathered information and views by means of a review of relevant literature and reports, interviews and discussions with key regional informants, members of faith communities and inter faith groups, and meetings with the Multi Faith Steering Group and project consultants. Following this, regional agency structures, faith structures and inter faith groupings were mapped. An analysis was undertaken of the range of views gathered on the desirability and feasibility of a regional faith forum, its potential strengths and weaknesses, the barriers to its establishment and working, the resources needed for its development, and its potential structure and function. Various options were then drawn up, compared and considered, with a provisional recommendation being made to the Multi Faith Steering Group in July 2002. Following feedback, recommendations and an action plan were drawn up, a final report being presented on 1 September 2003.

In its final report the Project Team were asked to include and consider the following:

- an easy reference guide on current government and faith structures;
- information on the existing faith [and inter faith] bodies;
- a summary of the consultation with a record of feedback and concerns and hopes expressed;
- a record of the findings from the mapping process;
- a list of those consulted;
- a range of options for a regional faith structure or network;
- a preferred option, with practical details of its recommended structure, way of working and necessary infrastructure.

The final report was published on the website of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly in 2004 ([http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk/p\\_contentDocs/266\\_1.pdf](http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk/p_contentDocs/266_1.pdf) ). Following a review of the context and an introduction to the project, in Chapter 2 we discussed how the project was conducted and what issues arose during its course. In association with this, a list of participants and a table of questions asked were provided in the appendices. Chapter 3 contained the results of the mapping exercise, with tables and reference guides to the region's faith structures, inter faith groupings, and secular agencies. Inter faith networks and organisations in other English regions were also mentioned. The findings from the research process, illustrated with the views of many of those interviewed, were presented in Chapter 4. These were organised thematically according to key issues that arose in conversations and meetings with participants.

- (a) What can and do faiths contribute to the regional agenda?
- (b) What would a regional faith forum do?
- (c) Representation and membership
- (d) Locality v. regionality
- (e) Ways of working (including terms of reference)
- (f) Faith-based motivations for multi faith and inter faith work.

In chapter 5, the process of modelling a potential regional faith forum was examined, and various models were presented, along with their advantages and disadvantages. This was followed in chapter 6 by a discussion of two models – the Faith Representative Model and the Faith-based, Locally Rooted Model. The form, function, rationale, strengths and weaknesses, and ways of working of each were stated. The chapter ended with the recommendation of one model by the Project Team on the basis of the evidence collected during the research process. Finally, in chapter 8, an action plan was outlined noting suggestions for future development.