



now called One East Midlands has been a key ally over many years.

It is good therefore to be able to welcome Hannah Luck to address us on 12th November.

EMCF and our Steering Group Members have been actively involved with the Voluntary and Community Sector at regional, sub-regional and local level, forming partnerships, and acting as both mentors and critical friends at various stages. We have full membership of One East Midlands and also of its specialist Infrastructure groups for policy sectors and for sub-regions.

These sub-regional consortia are also an ideal place for County Ecumenical Bodies to claim a seat, relate to the Local area Agreements and to other governmental and funding structures. We have common cause with many community groups as indicated by our work on Faith & Culture, Green issues, Poverty, Housing and Planning, Youth, Health, immigration and Criminal Justice. Together we can improve our lobbying, and often obtain key information in specialist areas for our churches including funding related matters.

We are actively involved in two significant initiatives to influence regional policy on economics targets and poverty, and on community/town expansion. We would welcome additional interest and involvement of Christian church activists on these issues both locally and regionally.

RTP Launch*
East Midlands Churches Forum congratulated the Regional Training Partnership on its formation and launch in June 2009.

An inspiring seminar on led by Professor Clemens Sedmak of London University – A Regional Theology for the East Midlands provided and excellent base from which to build. As we see out own core work as “doing Local Theology”

this also set the context for much of our world facing mission activity. The enthusiasm of those present added further to our conviction that the work each of our ecumenical task groups do is vital. The shared struggle to justify ourselves to the churches could be simplified if a single body could obtain unanimous support for the range of activities which we can do better together than separately. We will continue to seek opportunity to minimise administrative duplication and focus our energies on the work each group does in the name of the churches.

Our Multi-faith context

The enthusiasm of Andrew Wingate and colleagues at St Philip’s is helping us adapt to the challenge of an increasingly multi-faith context. They have identified a strand of work for the centre around engagement with wider society and government and aligned several of their courses to that end. This development works well with our approaches to Government where we have highlighted the need for local and regional government officers to understand faith, faith motivated organisations and service providers. Every local authority now has to identify a faith sector officer and they are charged with ensuring removal of barriers to service delivery by faith led groups. This is set to overturn the assumption of many that public funding and contracts are not accessible to faith led groups. But education is needed on both sides if the reality is to reflect the changes. We would commend the work of St Philip’s, drawing on the Leicester’s complex faith mix and city links including police and other authorities to guide those in other parts of the region.

Challenging Ignorance and prejudice

Two projects with which we continue to interact reveal the less attractive sides of church life where ignorance

and prejudice can fuel division and even hatred in our communities.

We have encouraged support for a Department of Health funded project to reach those at risk of HIV in the African Diaspora Muslim and Christian Communities. Male promiscuity is both denied and common, while homosexuality and incest are not unknown, and at levels which mean heterosexual AIDS transmission is widespread. Ignorance is rife but much has been achieved through education directly assisted by churches and mosques in London. A worker with Terence Higgins Trust has sought support from us in extending this work here and we have helped build contacts.

Meanwhile adverse reaction to racial and religious diversity amongst the white majority is giving succour to white extremists in our midst. A small group of concerned church leaders met in Heanor recently to compare notes and possible responses in the certain knowledge that sympathisers exist within our churches as well as outside. Propaganda suggests extremists are defending Christian values.

Organisations such as the Christian Concern For Our Nation (CCFON) with links to our region who will not come out from under their cover to debate should put us all on our guard and encourage careful self-examination and thoughtful teaching. The government has made it clear to us that funds can be identified and channelled via churches to support projects for the alleviation of inequity in sensitive areas.

East Midlands Churches Forum Annual Report 2009

Chairman’s review of the year

We are grateful for the contribution of our previous Director the Revd Tim Clarke who completed his time with us last November. One of his significant pieces of work was the researching and engaging with the Black Churches in the region. The contacts he made continue to be useful but they represent independent Churches. This has effects on capacity and motivation to engage with the regional issues. Derek Markie took up the reigns in November 2008 and has focussed on relationships with Government policies and structures in the region and the inter-faith scene.

We have been pursuing the goal of creating an effective structure for our work through the creation of EMBARC as a limited Charitable company. This continues to be a struggle, given many changes in regional Church Leadership. We note the move into other service of Steve Mantle, the retirement of Bishop George and the sad early death of Bishop Ian. We have welcomed Diane Tidball, a new Baptist Regional minister and Peter Hancock as the new Methodist Chair of Northampton District. The wider ecumenical scene is also seeing significant changes with some signs of renewed hope alongside frustrations with institutional machinery.

Our particular contribution is to enable and encourage the Churches to be world-facing and to interact with regional issues There are many examples of local partnerships which seek to make a difference to community life. Some good stories of involvement in Local and Sub-regional strategic partnerships, but the regional scene remains uncertain with the ending of the Regional Assembly and the changes to Third Sector bodies. One important piece of work where progress is being made is in the area of Faiths engaging with each other and with the regional issues. Good relationships are developing between Faiths Forum for the East Midlands and the East Midlands Churches Forum, both of whom are receiving new grants for their work. We are responding to feedback from the churches in re-creating the Forum as a body which can share ideas, offer support, be an arena for debate and a channel for communicating with regional Government on issues that concern the Churches.

Terry Oakley

Faith Culture Project acclaimed

The Video “making the *invisible visible*” – a toolkit for faith groups developing cultural projects – which is entirely the work of EMCF was launched in November 2008 at the Regional Assembly and has had considerable further exposure at events around the region.

The associated web-site <http://www.faith-culture-em.org> continues to feed enquiries to our main web-site while both the full toolkit in pdf is downloadable and the videos can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/user/emcf1>.

The amount of cultural activity across the East Midlands motivated by people of faith, represents an invaluable forum for exchange and enjoyment which is both non-threatening and positively cohesive

in our society, yet it does not inhibit real debate around the essentials of life and faith.

It’s not so Black and White

The Black Majority Churches of the East Midlands were the subject of EMCF sponsored research in 2007-8 leading to a challenging analysis:

- The EMCF has the potential to be a welcome catalyst in assisting the networking and integration of Black Majority churches with one another and the Christian “mainstream”
- Participants from those churches affirmed the need for an approach that will ensure the sharing of resources and more ecclesial collaboration to address the needs of the community.
- Participants were dismayed at the number of good projects that

folded up because of lack of funds and strategic thinking.

- The matter of a territorial tendency and solo operation when it comes to the needs of the community was heavily critiqued.

- There was consensus that the Black-Led Churches also need a better instrument or structure to caucus and to have intra-conversations.

Our own reflections a year later would suggest:

- The mainstream churches are little different but perhaps lack such single-minded recognition of their needs
- There is limited opportunity and resource for us to aid the weaker groupings until the stronger ones fully commit to such a project



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Faith to Engage Project – a national scheme for which EMCF is the East Midland Partner

A major development in our work this year has been our appointment as EM Partner in Faith to Engage. Sponsored by the Lottery and co-ordinated by Faithworks this seeks to encourage engagement of those of all faiths, including minorities and minority groups within faiths, with government and wider society. It is therefore an obvious ally in our work and is now contributing 25% of our income for 3-4 years. Like all such grant funded projects it imposes hurdles and structures as well as providing support and networks and the partnership continues to evolve. In other regions the partners include both Churches Forums or Commissions, Faith Forums and independent consultants. We are currently working

- to form a Board (Council of Reference) of Faith Leaders across the region. It is vital that these leaders be fully recognised by their communities and co-religionists as significant and representative, and not simply those who like to debate with other faiths. The council itself will not however be “fully representative” but a sounding board for government and others and particularly for our Director to guide conversations on key needs, policy concerns and opportunities. It will open the doors that we have been through over the last 10 years with regional infrastructure and government to other faith groups.
- to establish a “baseline” of the extent and effectiveness of direct contacts between faith communities and government or other social infrastructure and also with the Voluntary and Community Sector. We also need to know the extent to which they see community service as part of their mission.

InterFaith Networks Grant award

We continue to work closely with the Forum of Faiths for the East Midlands and were delighted when they were able to appoint Patricia Stoa as their first Executive Director in April 2009. Patricia recently retired as Social Responsibility Officer for the Southwell Diocese, was their representative on our own Steering Committee for most of the last 10 years and a member of the congregation at St Barnabas Cathedral in Nottingham.

The appointment arose following a period of restructuring and capacity building in the Forum under the guidance of Inderjit Bhogal who founded the Faiths Forum linked to Yorkshire and Humber Churches Regional Commission. This work was funded by the Dept of Communities and Local Government (CLG) as part of its work with the InterFaith Network. The Network also co-ordinates a 3 year project across all such regional and sub-regional bodies aimed at Faith inclusion in communities. It is the initiator of the first InterFaith week 15th -21st November in which many of our churches and leaders are participating. They have a parliamentary launch event on 12th November.

Whilst the work of the Faiths Forum and our own remain similar and closely allied we see them as complimentary rather than competing. The FF will work through InterFaith groups which are in many places more concerned with dialogue than societal engagement and have variable engagement by the churches.

Our Agenda:

1. Public sector commitment at all levels to work with faith communities

The key to our effectiveness and influence is engagement in public policy, and with policy makers at the highest level. So it is encouraging when the tide turns and public policy makers seek us out as they are now. Cynics would argue that the political impact of religious conflict is a poor basis for such re-engagement and that the appeasement of extremist sections of non-Christian religions does little to enhance Christian standards and influence. However that is not our experience. The argument that Christianity continues to be the majority religion in our nation is clear. In our region we have demonstrated to all that Christianity is the majority religion in every district, and in every ethnic group at monitoring level. But a majority position is not a licence for domination so we work to create the partnerships and alliances on policy matters described elsewhere in this report. Our role as the experienced and substantial body of faith and ethically motivated opinion is highly valued by both government and those of other faiths as we promote a fairer society and a less materialistic and competitive ethos.

2. A Strategy beyond 2010

The Regional Assembly is to be replaced in April 2010 by a partnership of Unitary and County Authority Leaders (The Leaders Board) and the Regional Development Agency (*emda*). While the churches and many other socially active groups across the 3rd sector have viewed this step as retrograde, it derives largely from the popular view that regional government is an over-expensive layer without democratic accountability or identity. The new structures will replace any shade of

representative or participative democracy with a professional bureaucracy with considerable influence. England is as regionally variable as other UK dominions and identified by Europe as 9 regions, so each will remain the first Civil Service tier in our national planning and co-ordination.

We have been invited as the representative of Faith communities to the “Stakeholder” meetings which are planning continued contact after the Regional assembly shuts down, and these are going well. The Economic Social and Environmental Partners (ESEP) group remains strong and determined to continue as an alliance of active participants in the region’s planning.

3. Strengthening Alliances and Raising the Profile

The Regional Assembly also organised the EXPO2009 event at the Walkers Stadium in October and this provided a great opportunity for the ESEP group, led by ourselves and Environment Link to present a stand and seminar under the heading Flourishing Together. This enabled us to press for an alternative to the “business as usual” and “development means growth” assumptions which threaten our world and its peoples as never before. Canon Andrew Vaughan summed up the event and reflected on the common themes which had echoed down the ages since Isaiah’s day (Isaiah 65) and this drew strong support and a real moment of realisation from the less faith inspired partners. Two key people from EMDA, Adrian Jones (Sustainable Development and Infrastructure Director) and Will Rossiter (Head of Strategy and Regional Affairs) were present.

4. Re-engaging with our churches and Active Christians across the region

Since the restructuring of EMCF in 2006 we have been criticised for forgetting the church representatives an allowing the topically focused Forums to lapse. We are keen to rectify this lapse and are working with our member churches to:

- Identify the most appropriate, active and well connected representatives across the region
- Work with them and with others to arrange and promote Forums which address the key policy and social issues of the next decade

- Inform and support an expanding and complex network which links churches, faith communities, other infrastructure groups, voluntary sector and policy makers
- Please do let us know the topics you would like us to cover and open up links to groups that we may work with in the future

GoEM Builds Faith Relationships

Throughout the last year we have worked to rebuild our relationship with Government Office for the East Midlands which had undergone considerable restructuring and slimming down during the preceding 6 months. The effectiveness of our future relationships depends on both knowing the people and understanding the structure which now aligns as “Sector” and “Place”. “Sector” specialists operate regionally and liaise with the various Whitehall Departments while “Place” specialists link closely to the local governments of the places in our region. The purpose is to interpret and apply government policy in as well thought out, sensitive and effective a way as possible. Our primary contact is with the Leader of the Third Sector and Stronger Communities Team, a sector with strong Communities and Local Government, and Home Office links. Through her we have routes to place and sector specialists including the “prevent” team which relates to Home Office concerns on extremism. This enabled us to be on an inside track in developing specialist funding streams for areas facing significant challenges in Amber Valley, Boston, and Central Lincoln to name but 3.

A vision for County level engagement

The work of political engagement and world facing ministry takes many forms but shares similar needs at every level. Knowledge on current political and policy developments, funding mechanisms and key issues is vital and inter-connected between district and county, unitary, regional and national tiers. In some counties ecumenical bodies already exist specifically for such engagement as with Lincolnshire’s Chaplaincy Services while in others the Ecumenical Body has not developed much beyond sharing church related information and joint church activities.

Our view is that the sub-regional and regional tier are parallel and should be supporting each other in an integrated organisation. We would encourage Ecumenical Officers to link with our work and seek to both economise on and share resources from communications to policy formation. To that end we would welcome the opportunity to work on joint events and projects or to investigate regional angles on local problems.

Equalities & Human Rights Commission (EHRC)*

The much debated Act has already led to expansion of the Commission which is one of several arms length agencies co-located with Government Office in Nottingham. These compliment the work of specialists in the GoEM Team described above. Others will include the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) covering all Adult Offenders from Prisons to Probation, charities and community projects working with offenders. We are delighted that the Faith Strand lead from the EHRC is able to come and address our Annual Meeting on 12th November and help to inform our debate on the purpose of the Act, and the prevailing view of Faith relationships in our society. This is a topic of real concern but also considerable opportunity as Religion & Belief now becomes one of the 6 strands of Identity defended by our secular society alongside disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Whatever our view on the philosophical points, we can engage with our society on issues of mutual respect, exclusion and factors affecting poverty.

It is on this basis that we seek to engage while also seeking to prevent the erosion of key moral axioms which would encourage a purely secular view of humanity.

3rd Sector encompassing faith*

Faith Organisations are increasingly “classified” by government and other policy makers as 3rd Sector (Voluntary & Community) in an analysis of 1st = Government/Public sector and 2nd = Private/Commercial Sector. As in other areas there are points on which we might challenge this analysis but in the *realpolitik* of our age there are lessons for us to learn and the 3rd Sector Infrastructure Body for the Region