



Good Faith  
Partnership

# **Stepping Up and Stepping Out**

**Towards a future social covenant between faith communities  
and Government in Covid-19 recovery and beyond**

# Contents

**Foreword:**  
 Bishop of London, Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE ..... 3

**Executive summary** ..... 4

**Introduction** ..... 5

**Methodology**..... 6

**Survey Findings** ..... 6

**Executive Interview Findings** ..... 8

**Recommendations** ..... 13

**Appendix: Survey Findings** ..... 15

**Acknowledgements** ..... 16

**About GFP** ..... 17

# Foreword

**Bishop Sarah Mullally**



The journey through the Covid pandemic has been a complex challenge for faith communities. The situation now is notably different to the early stages of the pandemic and will undoubtedly continue to evolve, develop, and change as we move into the future. In this time, faith communities have stepped up to the challenges which the pandemic has created by carefully adapting the way they already operate and by developing innovative new skills to support their own communities. However, as always faith communities have also stepped out beyond their own communities, both locally and nationally, reaching the needs of the most vulnerable in society with practical support and care. Creative partnerships and coalitions have formed across faith communities and with other organisations and government agencies, bringing people together to tackle social issues.

The presence of places of worship in every community has resulted in focused responses to local need, with all the expertise and knowledge that is attached to an informed local response. For faith communities, this work has been underpinned by an understanding of who God is and a spiritual faith that motivates service towards one's neighbour.

The pandemic has shown us the immense power and generosity of faith communities to respond to social needs and collaborate with

others. This should not cease as we recover from Covid-19. Rather, building on this extraordinary service and collaboration, as communities we now have the opportunity to learn from these experiences, to hear from people working on the ground at a local level and, importantly, to forge lasting collaborations which will be beneficial for tackling a whole host of societal issues into the future. Now is the time to listen to one another and to reinforce and continue to build strong bridges between communities and government for the common good.

In order to build these relationships, it is important that we create positive connectivity between the government, local authorities and faith communities. If the experience of collaboration is built upon, if trust continues to be developed and strengthened, then the opportunities for future collaboration could have a profound impact. The future holds many uncertainties for faith communities and for the government. Building relationships and creating covenants of trust and mutual respect will help us all to move forward together, giving space to our differences and diversity, whilst uniting as a nation to serve the most vulnerable in our societies. This report opens up the discussion for this next stage of our journey together and suggests ways in which we can foster positive, effective collaboration to serve our local communities.

## Executive Summary

The Stepping Up and Stepping Out report, conducted by the Good Faith Partnership, makes recommendations towards an exciting social covenant between faith communities and the government in the Covid-19 recovery phase. The report highlights the social impact of faith communities in their assistance to vulnerable communities during the pandemic, explores the current state of collaboration between faith communities and government, and makes recommendations on how the government can aid and accelerate the positive impact of faith communities on society going forward. The research comprised a quantitative survey of all faith communities, followed by executive interviews with senior leaders from across faith traditions. Our findings highlight the broad and deep social impact of faith communities over the last months, underlining the high levels of collaboration between these communities and other institutions throughout the pandemic.

A series of executive interviews with senior faith leaders, grassroots activists and inter-faith professionals further demonstrate both the complex nature of faith communities and the broad range of skills and services that faith groups have deployed through the crisis. Furthermore, it is clear that these same faith communities are gearing themselves up to play a decisive role in a nationwide Covid-19 recovery.

The report sheds light on the powerful religious motivations that drive faith groups to deliver transformative social action and utilise their creativity, connectivity and credibility as a force for social good within their communities. In particular, faith leaders are almost unanimous in their concerns as to diminishing levels of mental health and wellbeing in their communities and equally determined

that their organisations provide support for those affected, thus reducing pressure on public services.

As the country emerges from the pandemic, the government will require the active support and investment of our faith communities if it is to accelerate the process of recovery for disadvantaged communities and vulnerable groups. Over the past year, the challenge to respond to unprecedented levels of need within their communities has enabled many faith groups to significantly build their capacity. As a result, our faith communities stand ready to serve our nationwide recovery in the days, months and years ahead.

This report makes a series of recommendations to maximise the role of our faith communities in the Covid-19 recovery stage. The report recommends that the government and faith communities forge a social covenant to better serve the nation through Covid-19 recovery and beyond. Key to this are the creation of more integrated ways of working through the appointment of a Faiths Commissioner and an Expert Panel of Faith Leaders to further strategic collaboration; the development of a culture of co-creation where the government and faith communities combine to address key social issues; an increased commitment to invest in the work of faith groups; harnessing the power of public funding, philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, and the undertaking of further research in the light of the national census, to further map the potential of faith communities beyond Covid-19 recovery.

Above all, this report articulates a unified offer of support from faith leaders across the country, who are ready, willing and able to step up and step out at this critical time in our history.

## Introduction

Throughout the pandemic, faith communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience, providing innovative solutions to complex problems and making a valuable contribution to all parts of society. Across the nation new initiatives have started and in some instances new leaders have emerged as communities respond and adapt to social need. Younger generations, in some areas, have risen to the challenge and stepped up to lead in their communities. Similarly, lay people who are inspired by their religious traditions, have found themselves in positions of leadership. For example, in Bradford young Muslim leaders have mobilised local businesses and volunteers to provide for those most in need. Similarly, the Bradford Hindu Council has coordinated an extensive volunteering effort. This is a trend which can be seen throughout many faith communities across the nation. This report uses the learning from similar responses of faith communities during Covid-19 to address how the government and other agencies might harness, aid and accelerate the positive impact of faith communities in the Covid-19 recovery period and beyond.

A significant amount of research has already been done in relation to the social impact of faith groups during the pandemic. Several of these reports underline the positive impact of faith communities on society, including the report by YourNeighbour entitled, 'The Church in Lockdown: Celebrating Church Action'<sup>1</sup>, and the Evangelical Alliance's, 'Changing Church: Responding to the Coronavirus Crisis'<sup>2</sup>. Both of these publications shine a spotlight on new community engagement initiatives by churches, while also highlighting the increased levels of collaboration between churches, local authorities, and civil society. Similarly, a report 'Rising to the Challenge: A Community's

Response to Covid-19'<sup>3</sup>, from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims covers the contribution of Muslim groups and makes a clear set of recommendations for the future of this work. In addition to this, various surveys have been conducted in the past year to collect data on issues relating to faith communities and the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

This report adds to the existing body of research through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. It provides suggestions and responses from all faith communities to recent research, and importantly looks forward to the recovery stage of the pandemic, asking how the government can most effectively collaborate with faith communities, building on lessons learned during various stages of the pandemic.

*We are stronger when we are united, when we all have the same concern in mind - that we need to get people through this.*

**Dr Deesha Chadha**

This research also furthers discussions following the 'Levelling up Communities'<sup>5</sup> report, written by Danny Kruger MP at the request of the Prime Minister, and the research by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society entitled, 'Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic.' It seeks to look forward towards the 'new normal' that will follow the Covid-19 crisis and explores the potential for increased

<sup>1</sup> <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7a6a79e029974a695f7ee5/t/5f8ecb16fba7b24864978e1f/1603193627156/the-church-in-lockdown.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/Changing-church-Responding-to-the-coronavirus-crisis.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/6024f9393494f933784903f7/1613035848097/>

APPG+Rising+to+the+challenge+final+%281%29.pdf

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Catholic Voices: 'Coronavirus, Church & You' survey, Catholics in the UK. September 2020; Faiths United, Covid-19 and Volunteering Survey; Christian Aid – Good Neighbours Poll.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/sites/www.dannykruger.org.uk/files/2020-09/Kruger%202.0%20Levelling%20Up%20Our%20Communities.pdf>

collaboration between faith groups and local authorities. Our findings indicate that, by strengthening partnerships between faith communities and government agencies, we can create a powerful social covenant between the state and faiths that will, in turn, positively impact the lives of millions throughout society. We believe that this report will make a valuable contribution to these vital discussions and subsequent government consideration.

## Methodology

Throughout the report, reference is made to 'faith communities'. This report understands faith communities as groups and networks which are united around common religious belief and action. This naturally includes faith leaders, whose insights we have sought. However, as this report focuses on the social impact of faith communities, it has also taken into consideration organisations that are either motivated by faith (such as faith-based grassroots projects), alongside those that unite people from different faiths (such as interfaith organisations and initiatives). Therefore, the respondents to the survey and our executive interviewees, comprised leaders working in multiple sectors but whose response to the pandemic has focused on a local community and been inspired and directed by a community of faith.

The research was carried out from January to April 2021. It was divided into two parts:

**1** A survey conducted with faith communities, exploring areas in which faith groups are assisting the most vulnerable, both within their own communities and in wider society. The survey also establishes some of their concerns for the future and sustainability of this work in the Covid recovery period, and gauges the potential levels of future collaboration between these communities and government agencies. Two hundred and fifty leaders responded to the initial survey. Respondents comprised a diverse range of faiths, denominations, gender, geography, background and age groups. The sur-

vey covered a wide array of Covid responses from within these different communities.

**2** The survey informed and directed the second stage of the research which comprised a series of executive interviews with senior faith leaders. Among the interviewees were religious leaders, grass-roots activists, interfaith experts and charity organisers from across the faith traditions. Each interviewee was invited to contribute and add qualitative insights into the questions raised and responses received from the initial survey.

## Survey Findings

The responses to this survey came from two hundred and fifty individuals from across different faith communities in the UK.<sup>1</sup> The majority of respondents were over the age of forty-five, however a broad age range was represented. When asked about the areas in which they

have been involved as a response to Covid-19, the majority of respondents answered that they had been involved with a charity or organisation (55% of responses), or in faith leadership (48% of responses).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The responses included: Christian (30.89%), Jewish (25.61%), Muslim (15.85%), Hindu (15.04%), Buddhist (5.69%), Sikh (2.03%), Jain (0.81%), Baha'i (0.41%) and Other (3.66%).

<sup>2</sup> Other areas include: Voluntary support group (28.45%), Interfaith Group (27.62%), Government/Local Authority Collaboration (17.57%) and a new initiative (6.28%).

When asked about the areas of Covid-19 response their community or organisation is currently involved with, responses covered a wide range of services. The most common response concerned the provision of worship, spirituality and faith-related services (72%), closely followed by emergency food provision (59%) and mental health and wellbeing support (59%). However, respondents were involved in many areas beyond these examples. Some examples of further pandemic response areas include: volunteer coordination, support for vulnerable groups, homeless relief, and integration and community cohesion services.<sup>3</sup> The wide-ranging involvement of faith communities in numerous areas of response to Covid-19, suggested by these findings, supports the existing literature in this area which highlights the broad impact of faith communities on society throughout the pandemic.

Looking forward, the survey asked respondents about concerns for the future of society in the recovery stage of the pandemic. There were three areas which stand out. These areas are: mental health and wellbeing (78%), unemployment (58%) and poverty (52%).<sup>4</sup>

In light of the future concerns for society in general, this survey asked the respondents which areas their community or organisation could help with going forward. There is a very close correlation here between what the respondents say could be done in the future and work that is currently being undertaken. Similar to the earlier question, the answers highlight a broad range of services and activities. The provision of public worship, spirituality and faith services received the greatest response (68.5%), closely followed by mental health and wellbeing support (53.5%) and emergency food provision (51%). Furthermore, the survey asked which assets the respondents' faith community had to offer in the Covid-19

recovery phase. The leading responses were recruiting and managing volunteers (73%) and buildings and centres (55%). Leaders identified additional assets, including services ranging from programmes for children, teenagers and young adults, to debt advice and employment training.

The survey also asked about collaboration between faith communities or their organisations and other groups. The majority of respondents to this question (84%), suggested that their community or organisation had collaborated with other organisations during the pandemic, while 16% of respondents indicated that no collaboration between their community or organisation and another group had occurred. Most respondents stated that they had collaborated with another organisation from within their own faith community. However, many respondents also pointed towards significant collaboration with local authorities, groups from different faith communities, secular charities, government agencies, businesses and civil society. When asked in which areas collaboration was most helpful, respondents pointed towards emergency food provision, mental health services and volunteer coordination.

From this survey, it is clear that faith communities have had a wide social impact through the Covid-19 crisis. The findings indicate that faith communities are able to respond quickly and provide a diverse array of services, building strategic partnerships and deploying key assets to meet a range of community needs, with little direction or resource required from a governmental perspective. It also suggests a strategic alignment between those issues felt to be of greatest need in the community (e.g. mental health and wellbeing), and the areas where faith communities are willing and able to act.

<sup>3</sup> For the full list please see the Appendix, image 1.

<sup>4</sup> These three areas received the majority of the responses, although many areas were highlighted as a concern for the future.

## Executive Interviews

Over the last months, we have conducted a number of executive interviews with senior faith leaders and grass-roots activists. Understanding who faith communities are, how they are distinct, and how they operate is vitally important if we are to harness their impact and foster greater collaboration between communities and the government to aid in Covid-19 recovery. This qualitative research has enabled a deeper assessment of the nature and extent of services which faith communities have provided in the course of the pandemic. The executive interviews also provided an opportunity to assess the claims of high levels of collaboration between faith communities and other agencies, and to provide an assessment of this collaboration and its impact.

The questions focused on several key services in order to understand the distinct contribution which faith communities bring. The discussion around collaboration was placed in the context of the work of Danny Kruger MP and the idea of establishing a social covenant.

### Whole and Holy: Understanding Faith Communities

Respondents were quick to emphasise the importance of understanding how faith communities operate, what inspires and motivates them, the challenges they face, and who they can reach. Without this understanding, collaboration between the government and faith communities is limited. All interviewees agreed that their social action, during the pandemic and beyond, is motivated and directed by their desire to put faith into action. For Sikh and Hindu leaders, the notion of 'sewa' (service) is central. Jewish leaders cited their tradition's commitment to the poor, the widow and the orphan. Muslim leaders emphasise charity as an essential pillar of Islam and Christians invoke the command to love our neighbour. In all cases, faith leaders

made it clear that their efforts are not exclusively directed towards their own community but rather seek to serve all humanity.

*There is no societal challenge in which we should not be involved in providing solutions and support.*  
Iqbal Nasim, MBE

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the interviews supported the survey findings, affirming that faith communities have been involved in a wide range of services in response to the pandemic. The interviews highlighted the ways in which groups have stepped up as a community and stepped out to help others beyond their community. The extensive networks which run throughout faith communities means that, through internal work, assistance has reached those who may not have benefitted from external bodies and assistance. In the interviews, we heard repeatedly how faith communities have been able to connect with people at the margins; reaching people who do not speak English, the elderly and isolated and those who are considered hard-to-reach by other service providers. These people would have remained hidden from help if it was not for the outreach of a faith community and the specialised services which they provide.

The pandemic has also had a profound impact on the way in which faith communities deliver their core services and activities. The regular practices and rituals which unite, inspire and sustain these communities have been greatly impacted and, in most cases, diminished, postponed, or cancelled completely as a result of Covid-19. Faith communities and faith-based organisations have lost volunteers who have been shielding throughout the pandemic and

were no longer able to volunteer. They have also lost members who have sadly died from Covid-19. Like all communities and organisations, there have been extreme financial difficulties and a strained working environment given the fast-changing needs in the community and the services required to respond to them.

### The Centrality and Role of Places of Worship

At the heart of faith communities are religious beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices gather people together, facilitate worship, form community and inspire commitment to the service of others. The locus of these practices is often the place of worship, whether that is a temple, mosque, church, synagogue, or other venue. The interviewees all noted the important place of communal gathering in these venues for their religious traditions, not only for worship but also as a centre for the delivery of community services.

*A place of worship is not just a silo or an island in a community, it is very much part of the local area.*  
Jasvir Singh, OBE

The majority of the interviewees referred to the closure of public worship and its significant impact on faith communities, not only in separating them from their religious rituals and practice, but also reducing the capacity for their community to connect with its members (including volunteers who were engaged in social action); their ability to financially support themselves after losing financial donations, and the mental health and wellbeing of their members. Nevertheless, all the interviewees understood the decision to close places of worship for public



health reasons, and many observed instances where places of worship preemptively closed before it was mandatory, for the safety of their community. Furthermore, several interviewees appreciated the government's willingness to review its policies around places of worship and the increasing opportunity for individual agency regarding decision making in this area. In this area, the government has built a platform for greater understanding and engagement moving forward.

The pandemic has also highlighted the variety of belief and practice across faith communities. Faith communities in the UK are diverse and complex. Our interviewees highlighted this diversity, an example of which was the responses to death and bereavement in their communities. For some faith groups, burials are an extremely important part of the death ritual, whereas for others cremations are essential. Similarly, some religious denominations place a great emphasis on singing and large communal gatherings, whilst for others this is less important. Behind each of these differences lies a deep, meaningful combination of theological, cultural and traditional values or beliefs which define that community. Therefore, navigating the complexity of what is 'essential' for a community needs to be considered in future planning between faith communities and the government in



the context of guidelines for faith leaders and faith-based organisations, in this and other areas of provision.

These reflections and insights highlight the need for listening, ongoing dialogue and learning between the government and faith communities. If a new social covenant is to be effective, it must be based on the firm foundation of a commitment from both sides to invest in deeper relationships.

### Challenges to Mental Health Provision

A major issue which most interviewees commented upon concerns mental health and wellbeing. Whilst mental health and wellbeing has been a long-standing concern for society, the Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated the issue, both in terms of increased anxiety and depression and the pressure to fund and deliver mental health services. In response to this, leaders pointed to the role that faith communities can play. From the perspective of a faith community, the community structures and support that faith groups provide often improve community members' health and wellbeing and can offer 'softer' forms of support through counseling, prayer, meditation, etc. However, there are particular characteristics of faith communities which can

prevent members accessing this support. Several interviewees noted hesitation or reluctance in their own communities to come forward and access mental health support. Occasionally mental health issues carry stigma in these communities, which would need to be challenged to allow the individuals to access help and support. In order to achieve this, several interviewees noted the importance of service providers being able to 'speak the language' of faith communities in relation to mental health. This does not simply manifest itself in 'cultural awareness', but in a recognition of the centrality of faith in that person's life. A service response which is able to recognise this through communicating in a way that resonates with this lived experience could prove extremely beneficial.

Since mental health will be a key challenge to all communities in Covid-19 recovery, the ways in which faith communities and their leaders can support recovery in this area will be important. This suggests that mental health would make an ideal topic around which to focus attention in fleshing out what a new social covenant between the government and faith communities might look like in practice. This is an area where the government may wish to consider building the capacity of faith-based organisations. While faith-based organisations already provide a range of services and support for those suffering from diminished mental health and wellbeing, increased investment would both enable trusted organisations with a track record to grow their services, allow greater quality assurance for the government and reduce the burden and cost on other public services.

### Concerns around Social Cohesion

Another issue which has arisen for faith communities during the pandemic, and which may continue in the future, is the issue of social cohesion. Whilst the majority of communities



have rallied together during the pandemic, a lack of cross-community interaction as a result of social distancing, no communal gatherings and self-isolating, has sometimes resulted in animosity between community groups. This has occasionally been exacerbated by communities moving online and not engaging with people in person from a different faith or cultural perspective as they would have done prior to the pandemic. Faith communities have a key part to play in helping individuals and communities to 'reconnect' as the country recovers from the Covid pandemic, and this role could form another focal point of efforts to establish a new social covenant.

### The Future of Funding and Philanthropy

Many of the interviewees foresee future challenges with funding for social action and engagement emerging from faith communities. In times of economic crisis, the charity sector is often one to suffer significant financial loss. Yet during the Covid-19 recovery stage, the charity sector, and in this case faith-based charities, will be needed to provide a significant part of the response and services to tackle societal issues. A further issue noted by several interviewees is

the difficulties for faith-based organisations in accessing funding for their philanthropic activities. In some cases this is because they do not have the resources or time to make the applications themselves (which are often lengthy, complex processes); or their applications are not accepted because the funders do not wish to support a faith-based organisation, even where the activity is not directly related to religious observance (such as a food bank being run by a Church, for example). Coupled with a projected decrease in revenues, the financial future of the institutions that support faith communities themselves was a concern for interviewees. This suggests that questions of funding and resources for social action will need to remain high on the agenda in future dialogue between the government and faith communities.

*Everything leads from communication, and effective communication only happens when there is conversation...as people who are helping the community, having a seat at the table would make all the difference.*

**Saiqa Ali**

### The Time for Change: Building a Covenant

Danny Kruger MP in his report 'Levelling Up Communities' proposes the implementation of a covenant between the government and faith communities in order to foster mutually beneficial collaboration. Fostering a strong working relationship between the government and faith communities would result in collaboration that could aid and accelerate the positive impact of

the work of faith groups in society. We asked the interviewees what an effective social covenant would look like, both nationally and locally.

The interviewees noted the positive significance of the word 'covenant', commenting that there is great power in the desire to give respect and acknowledgement to faith communities. Ideologically, an effective covenant would have to be based on true collaboration. It is important that faith communities 'have a seat at the table,' that they are listened to and that any action is rooted in co-creation. Trust based on openness, and honesty are needed for a social covenant to be effective.

*It's not money first, it's vision*  
Rev Les Isaac OBE

The interviewees identified several potential obstacles to the effectiveness of a covenant. Some religious groups are cautious of 'the establishment' either because of their heritage and tradition (perhaps their identity as nonconformist denominations) or a pervading, general lack of trust. Secondly, some of the interviewees expressed caution over the potential for faith communities' freedom being limited by a prescriptive covenant. There was a concern that a covenant might homogenise the charity sector (including faith-based organisations within it) and also be subject to political vacillations. Concerns were raised over faith communities being co-opted by the government and changing the freedoms of religious organisations, the work they do and how they function. A concern was also expressed over token gestures within the context of a social covenant.

The development of a new social covenant therefore needs to be handled with care and

sensitivity. However, respondents raised practical suggestions to begin overcoming these issues. Listening well to faith communities, understanding their identities better and the discrimination they face is a key factor. When faith communities feel that they are not understood, that they are misrepresented, or discriminated against, they may feel the need to invest resources on advocacy for their own community (e.g. battling antisemitism or islamophobia). These resources could be used for a wider social impact, beyond their own communities, when they are understood better.

A need was recognised for input from a diverse range of people and organisations that accurately reflect respective faith communities. If the government appoints spokespeople who are not actually reflective of the community, then the task is counterproductive. Similarly, a social covenant would need to recognise the unique qualities and characteristics of each community in order to be effective. Faith communities differ, and even within each faith there are many different communities with diverse beliefs. Most faith groups divide into denominations and often places of worship are self-governing. Therefore, listening to people on the ground such as local religious leaders and grass-roots organisations, would be vitally important to build accurate and specific pictures of these communities.

In order to avoid being tokenistic, lasting, working relationships need to be forged and upheld. Within these relationships, there needs to be space for faith communities to constructively critique government policies. Collaboration should respect difference, but find common ground. It should not co-opt or silence critique. Finally, in order for this to be effective there needs to be a strong partnership and good communication between national and local government to ensure there is consistency in a 'joined up', unified approach towards faith communities.

## Recommendations

In the process of carrying out this research, faith leaders across the country have joined in support for a social covenant between the state and faith communities in Covid recovery and beyond. The Covid pandemic has made life difficult for every citizen, and for some, the challenges have been almost too hard to bear. However, in responding to this crisis, faith communities have both underlined the vital role that they play in local life and demonstrated their capacity to work across sectors, supporting our most vulnerable communities in the most challenging of times. The recommendations below outline a number of ways in which the government and faith communities can work together to build upon what has been achieved over the last year, in such a way as to boost community regeneration and transformation for years to come.

**1** This report recommends that Her Majesty's Government create a social covenant with faith communities, to be overseen by a newly appointed Faiths Commissioner, with the support of an Expert Panel of Faith Leaders. Together we can build on the powerful partnerships built during the Covid-19 crisis, increase the social impact of faith-based organisations and transform local communities. This includes:

- Appointing a Faiths Commissioner to work between the government and faith communities; identifying areas where policy design and delivery can be enhanced through active engagement with faith communities and ensuring that faith leaders are able to advocate effectively on behalf of their communities. This role could follow the model of the Children's Commissioner, as developed by the Department for Education.
- Forming an Expert Panel of Faith Leaders to advise the Faiths Commissioner, Ministers and officials to strengthen collaboration between government agencies and faith groups and foster a longer term working relationship to unite faith communities and the government around common causes.<sup>1</sup> This group could be formed out of the existing Places of Worship Taskforce and/or follow

a model similar to the President's Advisory Council of Faith-based and Neighbourhood Partnerships in the USA.

**2** This report recommends that the government and faith communities develop more integrated ways of working to accelerate Covid-19 recovery in our more disadvantaged communities. This includes:

- Calling upon government departments, Local Authorities and public service providers to develop more effective partnerships with faith communities, so as to maximise the role of faith-based organisations in Covid-19 recovery.
- Co-creating policies and programmes that enable faith communities to play a greater role in community life, reduce pressure on public services and improve quality of life among disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
- Committing to support, signpost and scale successful initiatives and interventions provided by faith communities such as social prescribing services that support mental health and wellbeing, relational support for those accessing welfare and other effective forms of provision.

<sup>1</sup> This recommendation has already been made in the report 'Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic' by the All-Party Parliamentary group on Faith and Society. We echo this recommendation based on our research in this report.

# Appendix: Survey Findings

**3** This report recommends that the government and faith leaders foster a culture of co-creation that enables faith groups, government agencies and other sectors to work together in serving the most vulnerable members of our communities, that seek to solve seemingly intractable problems within society. This includes:

- Identifying social challenges that faith communities have a unique capacity to respond to and utilising the creativity, credibility and connectivity of faith groups to co-create programmes which deliver sustainable change through targeted task forces and/or working groups. These could include racial equality, integration, housing, citizenship, youth violence, food poverty, health inequalities and wellbeing, to name but a few.
- Ensuring that the government and policy makers communicate effectively and frequently with faith groups in its efforts to design and deliver policies and programmes that may impact, or be enhanced, by meaningful consultation and partnership with different faith communities.

**4** This report recommends that the government commit further funding and continues to develop procurement strategies that can harness the contribution of faith groups, build capacity in our faith communities and deliver greater impact across communities. This includes:

- Implementing ‘smarter funding’ schemes to scale proven interventions and programmes, boosting investment through a combination of public funding and faith-based philanthropy and utilising the social entrepreneurship within our faith communities to deliver more innovative and sustainable programmes.

- Building the capacity of faith communities to deliver and grow high-impact programmes across their communities through the provision of training, development and infrastructure support.

- Ensuring that access to government funding is clear and fair; does not exclude organisations or groups on the grounds of faith and is awarded on the basis of an organisation’s ability to deliver and report on impact.

**5** This report recommends that faith communities and the government conduct further research together, and on their own behalf, to identify areas where active collaboration between faiths and the state can deliver the most positive outcomes in our communities and country. This includes:

- Learning from the most recent census data using the subsequent mapping of faith communities in the UK to identify new challenges and opportunities.
- Undertaking further qualitative and quantitative research to better understand the impact that faith groups are having in our most disadvantaged communities and identifying opportunities and barriers to extending this work in the future.

Over the last twelve months our faith communities have stepped up and stepped out together to meet the needs of local communities at unprecedented levels. The time has come to build on collaborations that this crisis has afforded, foster a new social covenant between the government and faith communities and radically increase the impact of faith for the longer term regeneration and success of our country and communities. As the authors of ‘Stepping Up and Stepping Out’, the Good Faith Partnership looks forward to working with faith leaders and policy makers towards this end.

## Which area(s) of Covid-19 response are your organisation/community currently involved in?

Answer Choices	Responses %	Responses
Provision of worship, spirituality and faith services	71.77	150
Emergency food provision	59.33	124
Mental health/wellbeing support	59.33	124
Support for older people	53.11	111
Support for vulnerable groups	48.8	102
Volunteer coordination	46.89	98
Education	39.71	83
Integration and community cohesion	35.41	74
Work with teenagers and young adults	34.93	73
Coordination with/for Local Authority	27.75	58
Work with vulnerable children and families	22.97	48
Debt/financial assistance	22.49	47
Housing/homeless relief	19.62	41
Assistance accessing prescription drugs for people shielding	16.27	34
Domestic violence services	14.35	30
Employment search assistance	12.44	26
Other	9.57	20
Benefits access support	7.18	15
Addiction services	5.26	11

Total respondents: 209

## Which 3 areas are likely to present the biggest challenge in Covid-19 recovery (please select 3 areas)?

Answer Choices	Responses %	Responses
Mental health and wellbeing	77.72	157
Unemployment	58.42	118
Poverty	52.48	106
Vulnerable families	27.23	55
Education	21.29	43
Food poverty	17.33	35
Integration and community cohesion	17.33	35
Young people	16.83	34
Domestic violence	14.85	30
Child poverty	9.9	20
Volunteer numbers	7.43	15
Other	5.45	11
Addiction (including alcohol, drugs, gambling, and other)	3.47	7

Total respondents: 202

## Which area(s) are your community/organisation most able to support through these challenges?

Answer Choices	Responses %	Responses
Provision of worship, spirituality and faith services	68.5	137
Mental health/wellbeing support	53.5	107
Emergency food provision	51	102
Support for older people	43	86
Integration and community cohesion	38.5	77
Volunteer coordination	36	72
Education	34	68
Work with teenagers and young adults	27.5	55
Coordination with/for local authority	27.5	55
Work with vulnerable children and families	24	48
Assistance accessing prescription drugs for people shielding	17	34
Employment search assistance	12.5	25
Domestic violence services	12.5	25
Debt/financial assistance	12.5	25
Housing/homeless relief	12	24
Benefits access support	7	14
Addiction services	6.5	13
Other	6.5	13

Total respondents: 200

## In which area(s) is collaboration most helpful?

Answer Choices	Responses %	Responses
Emergency food provision	62.09	95
Mental health/wellbeing support	47.71	73
Volunteer coordination	45.75	70
Provision of worship, spirituality and faith services	42.48	65
Support for older people	36.6	56
Integration and community cohesion	36.6	56
Coordination with/for local authority	28.1	43
Work with vulnerable children and families	21.57	33
Housing/homeless relief	19.61	30
Education	19.61	30
Domestic violence services	18.3	28
Work with teenagers and young adults	17.65	27
Debt/financial assistance	15.69	24
Assistance accessing prescriptions for people shielding	15.69	24
Employment search assistance	13.07	20
Benefits access support	9.15	14
Other	5.88	9
Addiction services	3.92	6

Total respondents: 153



## Acknowledgements

### Advisory Panel

**Azim Kidwai**, CEO, Mercy Mission UK

**Maurice Ostro OBE** KFO, Chairman, Ostro Fayre Share Foundation

**Krish Raval OBE**, Founder, Faith in Leadership

**Marie Southall**, Director of Partnership and Public Affairs, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

**Alfred Burton**, Fayre Share Foundation

### Executive Interviewees

**Bishop Sarah Mullally**, Bishop of London

**Jude Levermore**, Head of Mission, The Methodist Church

**Rev Les Isaac OBE**, Founder and CEO, Ascension Trust

**Dr Philip McCarthy**, CEO, Caritas Social Action Network<sup>1</sup>

**Jasvir Singh OBE**, Chair, City Sikhs

**Iqbal Nasim MBE**, CEO, National Zakat Foundation

**Imam Qari Asim MBE**, Senior Imam, Makkah Masjid, Leeds

**Saiqa Ali**, CEO, Southern Women's Aid Network (SWAN)

**Georgina Bye**, CEO, Mitzvah Day

**Nila Madhava Das**, Chair of Senior Management, Bhaktivedanta Manor

**Dr Deesha Chadha OBE**, Co-chair, the Faiths Forum for London and a member of the National Executive Committee of the Hindu Forum for Britain

**Elizabeth Carnelley**, Programme Director, Near Neighbours

**Nicky Goldman**, Chief Executive, Jewish Volunteering Network

'With grateful thanks to the following organisations for supplying photos in this report: Bhaktivedanta Manor, Mitzvah Day, Bradford Foundation Trust, My Foster Family, YourNeighbour and Near Neighbours.'



<sup>1</sup> At the time of the interview, Dr McCarthy was CEO but he has since retired from this post.

## Good Faith Partnership

The Good Faith Partnership (GFP) believes the world should be different and that it should not be so hard to bring about positive change.

The Good Faith Partnership helps to create solutions to society's most difficult problems by connecting businesses, governments, charities, philanthropists, and communities. GFP helps leaders to harness their organisation's energy and expertise. GFP unites different passions, skills and expertise around a common vision: the power of people working together to bring about lasting change.

The Good Faith Partnership connects across boundaries of politics, business, civil society, and faith, to tackle systematic issues and is all about building relationships.



### Russell Rook

Russell Rook is a founding partner of the Good Faith Partnership. Having previously served The Salvation Army and numerous social enterprises and charities, Russell now works with politicians, governments, faith communities, NGOs and civil society groups on a range of issues including, migration, social justice and religious freedom.

### Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko

Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko is a Director at the Good Faith Partnership. She is the former Director of the Council of Christians and Jews and a trustee of the Abraham Initiatives UK. Elizabeth is a recent recipient of the Hubert Walter Award for Reconciliation and Interfaith, awarded by the Archbishop of Canterbury. She is also a Kaiciid Fellow.

### James Roberts

James Roberts is an Associate at the Good Faith Partnership. He is in the process of completing a DPhil in modern theology at the University of Oxford and is the Christian Programme Manager at the Council of Christians and Jews.