

How Are Faith Groups Supporting Local Authorities During The Pandemic?

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While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect our day-to-day lives as we move into 2021, this article takes a look at how faith communities are working to support their local authorities.

The cancellation of worship services, in addition to the cancellation of religious pilgrimages, festivals and ceremonies remains commonplace as the world continues to grapple with the on-going pandemic.

However, faith communities across the globe have played their part in providing relief to those in need. Religious communities have dispatched face shields, gloves, disinfection supplies, ventilators, patient monitors and good to those in need. Some communities have even offered their buildings to be used as free COVID-19 testing centres.

Our own FFWPU International has donated over \$250,000 to the Korean Red Cross in order to curb the spread of the virus and aid with recovery.



Volunteers working in community charity centre

In addition to providing tangible relief, followers of many religious groups have come together to pray for an end to this pandemic, to protect those affected by it, as well as pray for knowledge and wisdom for the scientists working to combat the virus.

Within the United Kingdom, faith organisations have been praised for their willingness to help and support their wider communities.

Local authorities across the UK are working together with Christian, Catholic, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu food banks to provide for those in

dire need. Faith groups have also worked to collect food and financial donations, to cook and deliver meals and recruit volunteers for council programmes.

Professor Chris Baker, Professor of Religion and Public Life at Goldsmiths University, said in his recent Keeping the Faith report: "The Pandemic has clearly created a new-found appreciation and endorsement of faith-based engagement; a recurring motif from local authorities...[was] how impressed they were by the professionalism and flexibility of the faith-based response and the resources that faith groups were able to draw upon."

Prof. Baker believes the pandemic has allowed for the government and faith organisation to start anew and "reset" their relationship. He said: [There is] clear evidence of a commitment [on behalf of local councils] to deepening relationships, a willingness to share resources and innovations...we're moving away from the functionality of delivering care and social welfare, to discussing what are the shared values

that we need to bring in order to make this partnership more effective."

The Keeping the Faith report found a 67% increase in councils reporting an increase in partnerships with faith groups, alongside 91% of councils reporting either a very or mostly positive experience.



In the report's foreword, Stephan Timms MP (Labour, East Ham) said: "We need our institutions to be able to work respectfully with people whose starting point is religious faith and to tap into the moral perspectives, and the experience of running practical initiatives, which faith communities offer."

Faith communities have been forced to adapt to the unprecedented circumstances, with many churches, mosques, synagogues and temples offering worship services through livestream or pre-recorded services.

One council worker told a researcher: "My personal admiration for faith groups has gone through the roof, just in terms of their commitment there. We as a local authority didn't know what we were getting into. And they have got involved with smiles on their faces and they've done it professionally."

This recent report demonstrates the importance of faith groups, such as our own, and the positive influence we can have on our wider communities and government organisations.

Read the full Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic report here: www.faihandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf

Some information and quotes have been sourced from the following article from The Tablet: www.thetablet.co.uk/news/13786/work-of-faith-communities-during-covid-19-praised