

SPIRITUAL CAPITAL – CARDIFF

A summary report



A report on a year of social enquiry into the relationship between Cardiff's diverse faith communities, the welfare of the city and its local government.

The Spiritual Capital research project was set up by the Cardiff City Centre Churches Together supported by the City Parish Church of St John the Baptist.

It was funded by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund of the Community Development Foundation, and it employed the services of Cardiff University's Regeneration Institute, and the 'Ask Cardiff' market survey teams.

Cardiff, diverse in faith and culture

Wales' Capital City Cardiff is home to a third of a million people, many of whom have settled here from other parts of Wales, the U.K., Europe and other continents of the world, bringing with them their languages, cultures and traditions of religious faith.

Over 35,000 Cardiffians meet to worship and interact socially in any week of every year in over 200 faith communities, great and small, and a much greater number attending occasionally. Spiritual life remains important to a significant proportion of the Capital's citizens, and their local communities of faith.

The oldest of these communities trace their origins back 1,400 years, deep in the roots of Celtic Christianity. The era of Cardiff's industrial expansion and population growth in the nineteenth century saw the establishment of the majority of the city's present places of worship, including its first mosques.

The era of immigration in the second half of the twentieth centuries has seen a new growth in diversity with the influx of new Muslim communities, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist communities, also new Christian communities with origins in Africa, Asia and North America.

In today's highly mobile era, ten percent of Cardiff's faith communities have active international roots and links of markedly different nature from those forged by British missionaries to countries 'overseas' in the colonial era.

Places of worship provide places of welcome for newcomers, help in adjusting and integrating into a new society, and support in maintaining their inheritance of community values and culture. This is as true for North Walian settlers in the

Capital as it is for Bengalis, Poles or Nigerians.

Social capital built upon spiritual resources

In addition to worship and spiritual guidance, religious communities contribute throughout the City. In many ways they contribute to the 'social capital' which unites citizens in pursuit of common goals. Here is a non-exhaustive list of thirty two commonly reported ways in which faith based communities contribute to the building of social capital:

- Social meeting places, offering meals and refreshments
- Tourist attractions
- Community activity centres
- Community development initiatives
- Chaplaincy for those working in Cardiff
- Reading room
- Premises for use by local groups
- Choir, rehearsal and concert spaces
- Speakers and social entertainment for people of all ages
- Programmes for students (including activities for international students)
- Craft groups
- Fitness/health programmes
- Adult personal development, and skills training
- Language learning
- Mountaineering group/sporting activities
- Day centres for the elderly
- Classes in meditation
- Pre-school nursery/mother and toddler groups
- Primary and secondary schooling
- Holiday clubs for young children
- Youth group activities
- First Aid training and service experience
- Support for elderly members of society

- Bereavement support
- Marriage counselling
- Classes in pain relief and stress management
- Support for members of gay/lesbian community
- Legal assistance for asylum seekers
- Dispute resolution
- Special social housing provision
- Support for the homeless
- Help for substance abusers

Valuable contributions

The recent economic survey 'Counting for our Communities' conducted by Gweini - the Evangelical Alliance for Wales' agency for the church Voluntary sector - estimated that the value contributed to the life of the City by voluntary workers through the faith communities they belong to amounts to £10.8 million.

In addition, faith-based educational provision through Aided and Independent schools amounts for nearly 30% of the places in the Local Authority area, and a still to be measured voluntary support contribution from scholar's families and local worshipping communities.

It would be almost impossible for City government to maintain, let alone improve its present levels of public services without the contribution of faith based communities, voluntary and public sector organisations.

In service areas already governed by statutory requirement, like education and child welfare, long standing and effective partnership working between local government and faith communities is evident, except when it becomes subject to political criticism by those seeking support for an agenda of total secularity in the public realm.

Conclusions and recommendations

From its findings the Spiritual Capital research project Steering Group draws attention to the following -

* All citizens regardless of creed or culture should value Cardiff's religious diversity and appreciate the social contribution made by faith communities to the good of all.

* Cardiff should develop an independent arm's length organisation to assist faith groups and other cultural groups to promote citizenship and build social capital.

A. This report calls upon faith communities to:

1. Give greater priority to working with the City, its structures and policies, being more pro-active, caring about social vision, and not merely reacting every time there is a difficulty or a conflict of ideas with the Council.

2. To become more aware of the welfare of their localities / communities recognising that commitment to the wider community does not imply loss of distinctiveness or faith commitment.

B. This Report calls upon Cardiff to do more than applaud contributions of the faith community's voluntary activities to the economy and welfare of the city, but to undertake:

1. A fresh systematic appraisal of the part played by the faith communities' voluntary contribution to the work of all Council service areas, and how they are supported and harmonised within the priorities of Cardiff Vision Board.

2. Effective recognition of existing difficulties in establishing

and sustaining communications with all faith communities and institutions, whose organisation and governance necessarily, by their very nature, do not resemble those of a local authority or government agency.

3. To seek to establish with some urgency an appointment, within its Diversity team, with the specific remit to make City government better informed about its faith communities and enable greater participation from them in shaping the vision of the city's future through improved consultation, and encouragement of new social initiatives.

Research project highlights

In the city borough of Cardiff, web published information reveals -

- 213 religious bodies
- 196 are distinct faith community groups
- 17 are organisations co-ordinating religious groups
- 12 of these are Muslim
- 6 are Buddhist
- 4 are Hindu
- 3 are Sikh
- 2 are Jewish
- 170 are Christian, at least 20 originating outside Britain

The Spiritual Capital research project affirms the value of the community building role played by faith based groups in service of the whole population in every ward of the City, and across the City in relation to citizens with a common language or culture, or social need.

It affirms the role of faith communities as trusted brokers in community development, in articulating the concerns of those who have difficulty in making their voices heard and

understood in public affairs.

It affirms the value to the City of faith based initiatives in advancing high educational standards, quality of life and relationships, social inclusion of those with special educational needs, and affirmation of cultural diversity among students and teachers alike.

Not least because of exceptional commitment shown by staff and voluntary supporters in faith community settings, above and beyond the call of duty.

This report as published in full on the web-site: www.spiritualcapital-cardiff.org.uk also offers up-to-date information, publicly available are the contact details of 200 religious organisations in the City as a point of reference and support for these proposals.

Spiritual Capital Cardiff is indebted to

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