



KEEPING THE FAITH

**A SHORT GUIDE FOR
FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS**

INTRO

Does your faith group offer a service to the general public? If so – this guide is for you. We know that churches (along with mosques, synagogues, temples and many other places of worship and communities of faith) offer a vast array of services to the general public.

With around 10 million¹ people every year coming into contact with community services provided by Christian groups and churches alone, you are part of a major movement.

But despite the huge amount of good work being done, there is sometimes nervousness from local councils, secular charities and even from among faith groups themselves about what you are allowed to do when it comes to sharing your faith.

This may mean that some faith groups are holding themselves back from providing all the services they can. It may mean there is a reluctance to fund them on the part of local councils and other funding bodies. It could also mean that clients who are keen to talk about their spiritual lives are denied that opportunity – because we're being too cautious.

The aim of this brief guide is to clear up some of these issues, to help you identify what your core mission is, and how that affects the way you share your faith.

We will look at what the problem actually is, before examining some of the concerns from the point of view of funders, local councils and faith groups. Once we've looked at these, we'll help you think through what kind of organisation it is that you run – from three options that we have developed. Finally, we'll

help you think through what this means for the way you do your work.

It's our hope that this guide will enable there to be more confidence in the work done by churches and Christian groups (as well as those of other faiths) without worries that they're 'breaking the rules.' We also hope this guide will give confidence to people who work alongside religious charities that faith-based organisations are behaving responsibly and appropriately, without diminishing the very thing that inspires their work in the first place – their faith.

This debate is often driven by questions around who gets public funding, or whether public funding is inappropriately spent when it is given to faith-based organisations.

Public funding does raise some important issues. But all religious social action needs to be approached ethically, regardless of whether it is publicly funded or not. All agencies – faith-based and secular – need to think carefully about the appropriate boundaries for their work, client group and context.

Below we identify some of the relevant principles for faith-based organisations. These could, and should, be shared by groups of all faiths and none. If you want to explore the issues in this booklet in more depth, the Theos report *The Problem of Proselytism* is available now (see further resources at the end).

¹ Church Urban Fund/Theos research carried out by ComRes in February 2014. Tables available here <http://bit.ly/1H6yxjE>.

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THE PROBLEM

So, what's the problem that we're trying to address here? Well, simply put, we've noticed a fear from churches and Christian organisations on the one hand and funders and regulators on the other hand that there may be something 'suspicious' going on when providing a service to the general public.

To combat this fear, when awarding public contracts to faith-based groups, often they are told that they mustn't 'proselytise.' This sounds reasonable at first – but then we realise that there isn't actually a proper definition of 'proselytising' that we can all agree on.

We think this word is unhelpful and because it means different things to different people. The word doesn't really help anyone get to the bottom of what is and isn't allowed, when dealing with members of the public and when providing any kind of public service.

But the problem is more than just the terminology. We think there are three potential risks associated with faith-based projects which we'll look at now. These need to be acknowledged, but they shouldn't present people of faith from trying to serve the wider community.

1 **‘In a society where fewer people claim to be Christians, to share our faith in any way is seen as inappropriate – maybe even rude.’**

This criticism boils down to the assumption that faith groups prioritise their desire to evangelise over the wider public good – and that people of no faith may be put off from accessing services provided by faith groups. It is certainly true that there are inappropriate ways and times to share our faith – it can be irritating and in some circumstances divisive.

So the instinct of some secular agencies and funders is to say that Christian organisations shouldn’t be allowed to share their faith or even to exclude faith-based groups from providing any services.

However, the answer to this isn’t to ban Christian organisations from being able to share their faith altogether.

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HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND?

It’s important to recognise that when you’re providing a public service, the priority should be doing good and achieving great service. However, this doesn’t mean you need to be silent about your beliefs, but express them openly and respectfully, while encouraging others to do the same. There’s absolutely no reason for you to be excluded from providing a service just because your group is faith-based. You should be confident about this, but you must also be explicit about your aims. In other words, if you are offering a social or welfare service that is what should be delivered. Clients mustn’t feel like they’ve been ‘conned’ into receiving one thing with the offer of another.

‘We shouldn’t share our faith because it is a threat to minorities.’

This criticism is based on the idea that Christianity (and Islam) always damage local religious groups and cultures. Even in a very mixed society like ours, it’s often implied that to show overt Christian faith automatically means that those from minority groups (either other faiths, or different kinds of minorities) will feel threatened or discriminated against.

This criticism suggests that there are some parts of our beliefs that may not be shared or supported by some minority groups and therefore we shouldn’t be allowed to share our faith.

2

HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND?

Of course minority groups sometimes need protection, but this doesn’t mean that Christian faith should be hidden away. In fact, being open about your own faith, provided you are respectful and kind, can help others be more open about their faith and culture. The European Convention on Human Rights says each individual has the right to choose her or his own religion. Of course we must be especially careful when dealing with minority groups and aware of particular sensitivities which will present themselves. Even when people are invited to speak about their faith, they should stick to speaking about their own beliefs and experiences, rather than expressing opinions about other peoples’. Discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in many circumstances is already illegal, so extra measures banning expressions of faith isn’t an answer here.

‘Sharing our faith while providing a service takes advantage of vulnerable people.’

This criticism is based on the power we have in our relationship with those we serve. According to some who make this argument, faith-based groups are on the look-out for easy targets – those that are gullible, or those that are in particular need. Others just think it’s wrong to share with people who are in need and distress – they might not make clear-headed decisions.

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This is deemed to be inappropriate because of the imbalance of power. When a faith-based group delivers services to the public, the accusation is that they use their position to force their religious beliefs on a captive audience.

3

HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND?

There have been times when religious agencies have taken advantage of people in a vulnerable position. Sadly, there are still instances of this happening in parts of the world and we mustn’t be naïve – a small number of faith-based groups may still seek to use a client’s difficulties as an opportunity to manipulate them. However, the vast majority of faith-based groups don’t make services conditional on clients believing. In fact, faith-based agencies are often commended by their users for a ‘no-strings’ approach. Of course vulnerable clients must be given care and consideration and some services will be more likely to need to mention spiritual matters than others. But we mustn’t ‘vulnerabalise’ people – by ignoring their spiritual side altogether.



SO ————— WHAT SHOULD ————— WE DO ————— ?

Faith-based charities should be open and explicit about who they are and how they work, and take a balanced and sensible approach to the problems set out above. Now we need to look at what is appropriate for different organisations. Although in general we think Christian and other faith organisations should be actively encouraged to run services for the public and in some instances to be given public funding, there will be different ways in which they behave – depending on their purpose, intended outcomes and the type of clients they are dealing with.

In this section we'll discuss the three different types of organisations. We'll then suggest what is and isn't appropriate for each of these types

of organisations. Finally, we'll help you think through which category your organisation or service fits into and therefore how you can become better at what you do and offer a confident, professional service, without fear of acting inappropriately.

Three types of organisation:

We call the three different kinds of organisation full-fat, half-fat and low-fat. This doesn't indicate that we think one is better, more appropriate or even more 'faith-full' than the others. It's simply a way of distinguishing the different ways in which various faith-based groups operate.

FULL FAT

These services are provided in close partnership with a faith community. This means that for someone to access the service of one of these groups, they will be openly offered the chance to investigate that faith for themselves. Faith will certainly be an integral part of the service offered, and beneficiaries might be asked to participate in Bible-study or prayer. These groups are often those which try to help individuals make major changes to their lifestyle – for example to recover from drug addiction or alcoholism. These organisations usually offer their services to a small number of people at any one time. A successful outcome looks like the ‘restoration’ of the individual so they can sustain their life, with the support of a wider community. These groups have rules and regulations around when and where they share their faith, but it is a key part of their service – and no-one is obliged to use it. Such groups tend not to apply for or receive public funding.



HALF FAT

These groups offer services which take place either within or in close partnership with a church or other worshipping community. They want to be open to everyone, and have a ‘whole person mission.’ This means they seek to address

the various causes of their clients’ problems. This may include economic, psychological and relational causes, but they also seek to address spiritual issues – they may, for instance, offer to pray with and for clients. A successful outcome looks like a resolution to the material, social and spiritual needs of the individual. These groups are open about how vulnerable some of their clients are but seek to share their faith in a sensitive way and offer an introduction to the church they partner with. Although these groups are open about their faith, clients aren’t required to change their beliefs in order to benefit, and these groups seek to offer a service which is unconditional and non-discriminatory.



LOW FAT

For these groups, the most important aspect of their service is that it’s open to everyone, regardless of their background or beliefs. This focus on inclusion means they don’t actively share their faith with people who are using their services. However, that doesn’t mean they avoid all conversations about faith. In

fact they often see their work as part of a person’s wider ‘life experience’ in which spirituality plays an important part – indeed they sometimes offer services like chaplaincy.



These groups are the most likely of our three categories to be receiving public money, and as a result are also most likely to need to comply with rules and regulations laid down by funders, and local councils etc. A successful outcome for these groups means meeting their targets as agreed by their funders, but these targets are achieved in ways which are dependent on their faith basis.

WHICH CATEGORY ARE WE IN?

Reading through the options above, it may be obvious to you which category your organisation falls into. But it may be that you're not quite sure. Many organisations grow and change in ways that mean it's always helpful to look at your mission and purpose and decide which of these categories fits you best. So, here are three exercises to help you think it through. They can be used if you're starting a new project, working with a new group of volunteers, on a trustees' away day and so forth.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...

It's important to think through your approach to sharing your faith within your work. Remember, there are no 'correct answers' here. We're trying to work out which of our categories your organisation fits in to. Answer these questions, if possible with some help from others in your organisation. Discuss any difficult issues that come up. We don't expect you to be able to answer each question in a word. They're here to help you think through your mission and purpose.

1. WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE AIM OF YOUR PROJECT?

2. WHO IS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?

3. ARE THERE ANY PREREQUISITES FOR ACCESSING YOUR SERVICES?

4. DO YOU BELIEVE IT'S VITAL TO ALWAYS BE UPFRONT AND EXPLICIT ABOUT YOUR FAITH?

5. DO YOU ACTIVELY SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE YOUR FAITH APPROPRIATELY?

6. DO YOU TRY TO BE OPEN ABOUT YOUR FAITH BUT WORRY ABOUT HOW YOU MAY BE PERCEIVED?

7. DO YOU WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE ASKS BEFORE YOU TELL THEM ABOUT YOUR FAITH, BUT OTHERWISE IT STAYS IN THE BACKGROUND?

8. DO YOU THINK WHAT YOU SAY IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE WORK YOU ACTUALLY DO?

(THANKS TO LIVABILITY FOR HELP WITH THESE QUESTIONS. SEE END FOR FURTHER RESOURCES FROM LIVABILITY).

STICK PERSON EXERCISE...

The first exercise helped you think about your organisation. This one helps you focus on your clients. We'd like you to fill in the gaps we've left around this stick person. This represents one of the people who use your services. Think about the kind of interactions you'd like them to have with your organisation. Then fill in the space around accordingly.

- Do you see them regularly?
- What's their background?
- Do they practice a religion? What are their values?
- Do they spend a lot of time with your group?
- How do you hope to help them?
- Are you seeking to help them change their lives for good?
- What does a successful outcome look like for them?
- Do you want to tell them about your faith?
- What has their experience been of your faith?
- Would you like them to share your faith?
- Would you still be able to help them even if they rejected that offer?

Use these answers as a discussion guide. Think carefully about the answers you've given and where that might place you in our three categories.





FULL, HALF AND LOW-FAT...

Here's a final exercise to help you think through the purpose and mission of your organisation. Look back at the definitions of full, half and low-fat organisations we gave above. We realise these are quite blunt, and each individual organisation may not fit perfectly into each box. First we'd like you to indicate where you feel your organisation fits best now.

Here are three bottles representing the three options. Just fill in the level to which each

option feels right for you. (So, for example your group may feel 70% low fat with 30% half-fat.)

When you've filled this in, have a think about whether you're happy with the definition you've given. Which category are you aspiring to be in and how can you be 100% in that category?

SO WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Now you should have a better idea of which of our three categories you fall into. Don't worry – you're not making any momentous decisions here – but it is a helpful guide for you to think through how you should act.

Remember, we don't think any of these three categories are 'better' than the others. There are organisations which do fantastic work in all three. However, it's good that now you have an idea of which bracket you fall into. It's also helpful if others in the organisation (staff, volunteers, trustees etc.) are aware of this. It will help you to sharpen up how you work. But also, we have some specific recommendations for each

kind of organisation which will help you to be the best in your particular field of work, without having to deal with the worries or problems that are often associated with faith-based groups carrying out work with the public.

WHAT NOW?

We hope those exercises were useful. Now it's time to think about how to be the best you can be. All organisations need to think very carefully about those they serve. Think back to the problems we outlined earlier. How can you remain civil, respect diversity and recognise clients' vulnerability, while also keeping your ethos?



IF YOU'RE A FULL FAT ORGANISATION

You might not be able to access public funds, but are there other ways you could improve the way you work with statutory bodies to the benefit of your clients? As long as you are clear about how you relate to funders, local councils and others, there won't be disappointment. A lack of willingness to give you public funding is not an indication that your service does not do good. Clearly, if the desired outcomes are being met and you are helping service users' lives to be transformed that is both in their good and the public good.

IF YOU'RE A HALF FAT ORGANISATION

Your work may or may not qualify for public funding. We encourage openness and a frank appraisal of your work to be given to all potential funders. Clearly, again, your work has intrinsic public good if it is benefiting your clients and allowing them to make positive change in their lives – you should always be thinking how this impact can be demonstrated. Your offer of spiritual as well as material assistance is valid and your embedding of work alongside a worshipping community is a key part of the mix. Awareness and training around where and when it is not appropriate to share your faith within your context is vital.

IF YOU'RE A LOW-FAT ORGANISATION

The faith basis of your organisation doesn't in itself make you any less qualified than a totally secular group (in fact in many cases the faith basis is one of your strengths). The resources you are able to draw upon in terms of volunteers, donors etc. from your faith community will be a great help. Remember – low fat doesn't mean worse – you're just doing things in a different way. Your primary motivation as a group is to ensure your service is available to everyone, but this doesn't mean that you can't have an impact on someone's 'faith journey.' It's worth thinking about how this can remain part of your offer, within the agreed boundaries of serving everyone.



FOR ALL ORGANISATIONS

- Sometimes your aims and ethos won't marry up with the aims of a public body, and sometimes they will. Remember – you aren't especially deserving of suspicion just because you have a faith basis – but also you won't always be able to access public funds.
- It's vital to be the best you can be and to provide a service that delivers what it promises. This means you need to be transparent in your aims and stick to them. When providing services to the public, the priority must be the public good – both in general and the individuals you deal with.
- It's essential that you operate your service based on consent – in other words, the client is able to remove themselves from the process at any time and if you are sharing faith with them, it must be on an appropriate basis.
- You must be honest, explicit and consistent in your approach. Clarity is the basis for relationships of trust between you, your funders, other organisations and service users.
- Going through this resource is a good exercise in gaining a clear sense of your purpose. You should always have at the front of your mind how your ethos is practically expressed. We suggest this guide is only the start. It would be a very good idea to involve as many staff, volunteers, trustees and even clients in discussions to get the widest possible input. There are further resources for carrying out this kind of exercise in more depth below.
- People are spiritual beings, we must acknowledge that. Of course many clients are vulnerable and it's essential that their fragility is not taken advantage of. But even while it's vital to understand vulnerability, we also mustn't 'vulnerable-ise' people – in other words ignore the very real spiritual aspect of people's life and experience.

FINALLY – BE CONFIDENT!

Here are some tips from Livability about how you can be a confident faith-based provider.

1. Remember the power of personal testimony - ***The best way to integrate faith is being prepared to share our own stories***
2. Deepen your theology of social action – ***Through regular discussions, Bible study, prayer time etc.***
3. Clarify what you are trying to do - ***Motivations:*** why are you doing it? ***Inputs:*** what do you need to make it happen? ***Methods:*** How do you actually do it? ***Outputs:*** what are the countable results? ***Outcomes:*** what are the long term changes?
4. Articulate & advocate your Christian ethos: **Do you have a statement of your mission/ethos? Do you communicate it clearly to staff, volunteers and funders?**
5. Remember the importance of recruitment: **Does the job have a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) for the person to share your faith? Are you clear about your expectations of faith – in job adverts, the job description, the person specification and at the interview?**
6. ‘It has to be more than words’: integrating faith in your day to day work: There are two ways to think about this - ***Explicit*** (light) - ‘We are very open with everyone. People know we are Christians and we integrate our faith openly into the practical service we give.’ ***Implicit*** (salt) ‘Our Christian ethos informs and infuses all our work. It is not immediately apparent but it underpins and sustains all we do.’



FURTHER RESOURCES

Theos has produced a report (on which this guide was based) called The Problem Of Proselytism. It is available here: <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Problem%20of%20Proselytism%20web%20version.pdf>

Livability has a number of helpful resources and projects. Find out more here: <http://www.livability.org.uk/church/church-community/>

The Centre for Theology & Community has a lot of resources to help. Start with Just Church: <http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/CTC-2013-report-cover-v51.pdf>

Church Urban Fund has a guide called Keeping The Faith: Retaining Christian Distinctiveness in your Community Project: <https://www.cuf.org.uk/sites/default/files/users/Bethany%20Eckley/Keeping%20the%20Faith%20report.pdf>

Faith Action does a lot of helpful work in this area. You can find out more here: <http://www.faithaction.net>

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has published the Ethical Standards for Providers of Public Services. This is a useful document, particularly for those who want their services to be publicly funded: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethical-standards-for-providers-of-public-services>





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For further information and subscription details please contact:

Theos

Licence Department 77 Great Peter Street London
SW1P 2EZ

T 020 7828 7777

E hello@theosthinktank.co.uk theosthinktank.co.uk