

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND CLIMATE ACTION

LSE RELIGION AND GLOBAL SOCIETY AND BRENT COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM: WORKSHOP SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brent Council and the London School of Economics Religion and Global Society research unit (LSE RGS) co-hosted a symposium at Brent Civic Centre on 22 October 2024. Faith communities, local government representatives, climate engagement specialists, and policy officers were invited to discuss the role faith plays in fostering sustainable practices and responding to climate change. The event included remarks from the LSE RGS team on their international research into faith and climate

action, reflections from Brent Council representatives on their grassroots engagement within the borough, insights from faith leaders on how their faith communities are pursuing sustainability, and group discussions among participants. It was designed to explore two central discussion questions: **(a) how can councils and public sector organisations employ faith-inclusive policies to tackle climate inequality?** and **(b) how do we begin to meaningfully engage faith communities on climate action?**



Key insights and recommendations from participants included:

1. Promoting faith literacy for councils and public sector staff

Councils and public sector entities should invest in faith literacy training to help their staff better engage diverse faith communities when designing policy, foster inclusive environments, and improve service effectiveness.

2. Integrate faith inclusion and climate inequality into DEI(1) policies and strategies

DEI strategies should proactively include faith communities and perspectives to ensure faith-sensitive policies are embedded at all levels of leadership and align with recommendations on reducing climate inequality. Efforts should be made especially to ensure communities impacted by global conflict and displacement feel heard, valued, and equipped to contribute to collective action on climate and social issues.

3. Involve faith leaders in co-producing policies

Faith leaders should be actively engaged in the co-production of public policies to reflect the diverse needs and values of faith communities.

4. Incorporate faith communities in climate adaptation strategies

Faith communities and leaders need to be involved in the development and implementation of climate adaptation strategies.

5. Engage with and across secular and faith spaces when appraising policies

Councils should prioritise outreach to both secular and faith spaces when designing climate policies, ensuring inclusive engagement in climate and DEI efforts.

6. Implement faith monitoring for inclusion

The public sector should establish a framework for monitoring the inclusion of faith communities in delivering public services. This will allow for ongoing assessment of the extent to which faith-based perspectives are integrated into public sector work, ensuring that barriers to participation are identified and addressed.

Throughout the symposium, participants underscored the importance of recognising faith as a fundamental part of community identity, and emphasised the value of integrating faith communities more centrally into the process of co-producing climate action strategies.

(1) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

THE CONTEXT: FAITH COMMUNITIES AND POLICYMAKING

Despite the high proportion of Londoners professing to belong to a faith(2), historic barriers persist in understanding and including faith at the institutional level of policymaking. In 2023, the Government's independent review into faith engagement (the Bloom Review) found that **"the terms 'faith', 'belief', 'religion', and other basic tenets and principles of the range of faiths and beliefs in the UK are often poorly understood in government and public services."**(3) This lack of understanding hampers the ability of governments to deliver services that meet the needs of their constituencies, particularly as faith plays a significant role in shaping these needs.

The influence of faith is evident both on the individual and communal level. Individually, faith shapes cultural practices and provides a moral and ethical framework for living: **"For many people, religion, faith and belief inform what they do and how they interact with their communities, inspiring them to engage in both the civil and civic activities which build social capital and strengthen the ties that bind our country together."**(4)

Communally, **"for many people in the UK, their place of worship is their 'marketplace' – the place they go to for pastoral support,**

for spiritual nourishment and for practical guidance. If we are to truly improve equality of opportunity across our communities, we must find the spaces where those messages will be heard."(5)

Insofar as places of worship often are these safe spaces, faith leaders are valuable partners for supporting exchanges between councils and those who are often unheard or neglected.

Partnerships between faith communities and local authorities have proven effective in past crises. A 2020 report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society for instance, explores the invaluable role that faith communities played in supporting government during the Covid pandemic. As per the report:(6)

"The often hidden or unnoticed contributions that faith groups make to the resilience of local communities have become much more visible. Local authorities say they have discovered a new appreciation of the agility, flexibility and professionalism of faith groups and faith-based organisations in their responses to the pandemic."

(2). According to the [Office of National Statistics](#), 66% of Londoners identify with a faith or religious tradition.

(3). Bloom Review, <https://shorturl.at/xKXje>; pg.11

(4). Bloom Review, pg. 9

(5). Bloom Review, pg. 9

(6). 'Keeping the Faith', www.faihandociety.org/keeping-the-faith/ pg.3

A particularly notable intervention was that **“faith groups [pioneered] inclusive digitally based outreach to communities that could help local authorities address wider issues of inclusion, participation and belonging for the most isolated, vulnerable and socially marginalised.”**(7)

More broadly, faith communities contribute significantly to UK society and economy, both through charitable donations and economic engagement.(8)

In the context of discussions on the climate crisis, LSE RGS

research indicates that centring faith can prove instrumental in enabling dialogue on climate change to occur, in part due to the way faith provides a moral and ethical lens through which to consider stewardship and responsibility for protecting the planet.(9) We therefore hold that policymakers would be well-advised to include faith communities in any engagement and communications on key political topics, including the climate crisis. This symposium demonstrated how this contact can occur.



(7). 'Keeping the Faith', pg. 5

(8). <https://shorturl.at/n6phQ> and <https://shorturl.at/XRZcg>

(9). <https://shorturl.at/EmDAX>

SYMPOSIUM BACKGROUND

In late 2024, a partnership was formed between Brent Council and LSE RGS to bridge the gap between robust empirical research into faith-based climate action and grassroots community action within London boroughs. The aim of this partnership is to convene council officials, climate engagement specialists, policy officers, and faith communities to share best practices, identify needs, and scope opportunities for joint initiatives addressing the climate crisis. The symposium hosted on 22 October was a critical first step in delivering a framework and methodology for cross-sector engagement between faith communities and policy practitioners within London.

The structure of the evening drew on the expertise of both organisations. Since launching its Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy in 2021, Brent Council has been collaborating with voluntary and community groups, faith leaders, and academic institutions to advance climate action. Broad stakeholder engagement has enabled the Borough to take a lead on raising awareness about

the climate emergency among local constituents, supporting the embedding of sustainable behaviours in community practice, and making progress on tackling climate inequality. Brent's engagement with faith communities is notable, most evident by its Faith Climate Action Group and the Faith Climate Action Plan. Through these initiatives, Brent Council has been actively supporting faith leaders and faith communities across Brent who are passionate about taking climate action to reduce carbon emissions.

LSE RGS has been conducting groundbreaking research into the intersections between faith and the climate since 2019. Through its Global Religious Pluralities research project, LSE has brought evidence to policymakers that faith inclusion and religious literacy can facilitate solutions to some of the greatest contemporary challenges. LSE RGS' research insights have been presented at the highest levels of climate policymaking, including at the UNFCCC COP29 summit in Azerbaijan. The unit now seeks to engage more locally.

FAITH CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

How green is your place of worship?

Taking climate action:
Helps protect the planet
Saves money
Good for your health

1

Sustainable buildings

- Install solar panels
- Use LED light bulbs
- Improved insulation and draught proofing
- Switch off lights and plug sockets
- Call an energy expert for an audit

2

Sustainable food

- Use local suppliers
- Use sustainable caterers
- Cut use of single-use plastic
- Grow food on site
- Reduce meat
- Create compost from your food waste

3

Education

- Run education workshops on climate action
- Intergenerational learning events
- Skill swap events

4

Faith teachings and wisdom

- Repeat messages on climate change
- Share faith stories on protecting the planet
- Revive sustainable traditional practices
- Embed green behaviours into religious practices like fasting

5

Community action

- Organise litter picking events
- Community bike rides
- Grow some plants in your green spaces
- Create climate resources to share with your congregations
- Creative workshops on climate action

6

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

- Reuse decorations for festivals
- Reduce food waste
- Implement effective waste and recycling facilities
- Clothes swaps and collections for charity
- Organise repair cafes

7

Sustainable travel

- Encourage worshippers to walk, cycle and use public transport
- Install EV charging points and bike racks
- Appoint cycle champions to teach others
- Set up walking groups

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SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY

The symposium opened with remarks from the Founding Director of LSE RGS, Professor James Walters, who reflected on the unit's research into the intersections between faith and climate change in Egypt, Jordan, and Indonesia. Drawing on insights from the unit's Global Religious Pluralities research project, Professor Walters argued that centring religious imaginaries and convening interfaith spaces can help facilitate productive conversations on the climate crisis.

Subsequently, Climate Action Partnerships Manager at Brent Council, Nadia Khan reflected on the council's grassroots work with faith communities in the borough and key projects launched by the Faith Action Climate Group.

Following the keynote addresses, attendees were invited to participate in two interactive workshops exploring the following questions in group discussions:

- How can councils and public sector organisations employ faith inclusive policies to reach and involve faith communities on important matters such as tackling climate inequality?
- How do we begin to meaningfully engage faith communities on climate action?

The tables outline key comments and suggested actions shared by the symposium participants during each discussion



WORKSHOP 1

How can councils and public sector organisations employ faith inclusive policies to reach and involve faith communities on important matters such as tackling climate inequality?

Participant Comments	Suggested Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to scale the interfaith climate conversation to a regional level, recognising that faith communities extend beyond local boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategies and frameworks to engage faith communities across regional lines, addressing issues like climate action and social inclusion • Initiate regional conversations on faith inclusion involving multiple local authorities and faith-based groups. • Form a joint working group with partners from local authorities and faith groups in different regions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A faith-inclusive system for co-producing policy is necessary for political progress on these goals • Involving senior leadership of councils and businesses in building faith-inclusive policies is important • Good collaboration can be enabled by fostering networks across communities for collective action on climate issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively involve faith leaders and community representatives in policy-making processes. • Shift from traditional consultation to action-oriented approaches that involve youth and other communities in planning and implementation • Ensure diverse religious representation in organisational materials and events • Provide ongoing resources for religious understanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust before policy engagement is a critical step for advancing inclusive policy frameworks • Faith communities should be involved in climate resilience planning and initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish channels to listen to concerns and suggestions • Incorporate faith-based perspectives and religious literacy into DEI policies and training programmes • Develop tailored cultural and faith-relevant messaging that resonates with different community groups, in collaboration with these groups • Launch public communications campaigns focused on the role of faith communities in facilitating climate adaptation and resilience

WORKSHOP 2

How do we begin to meaningfully engage faith communities on climate action?

Participant Comments	Suggested Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raise awareness within faith communities and between policymakers about the ways faith traditions speak into the climate discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage faith leaders to embed religious teachings related to nature protection in their local congregational engagement ● Identify action-based initiatives and contribute to resources on the core beliefs and practices of various religions in relation to climate change and environmental stewardship ● Develop faith literacy training for schools and faith-based youth groups to educate young people about climate change and sustainability through the lens of their religious beliefs ● Partner with universities to establish research groups on faith and climate change and to highlight the research already being done into this intersection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage faith communities through multi-faith forums and cross-sectoral partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish forums and networks for faith leaders to promote shared activities and celebrations that highlight sustainability and stewardship ● Organise community events (such as shared lunches) to facilitate interfaith dialogue and provides spaces for sharing teachings and best practices related to the environment ● Incorporate ethical frameworks and values into climate charters, paying attention to the role of faith communities in inspiring climate action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empower communities to take action within their local spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish recognition programs or awards for individuals and organisations demonstrating leadership in climate action ● Make faith-based organisations aware of energy efficiency grants and providing support with the application process, ensuring clear communication about support is offered

CONCLUSION

The symposium was convened with the understanding that many faith communities view care for the planet as a matter of moral and ethical importance. Moreover, as faith leaders are trusted voices embedded within their community and faith networks have significant reach and influence in localities, working in partnership with them on the core issue of the climate crisis can be a significant step on the journey towards net zero.

Over the course of the symposium, participants reflected on the historical barriers to adopting faith-centred approaches within secular institutions and the detrimental impacts of this exclusion, particularly for those communities disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Affirming the importance of faith in shaping perceptions of and responses to political challenges, workshop

participants identified inclusive policies, faith literacy and enhanced religious understanding as necessary steps to make councils and the public sector more inclusive.

In addition to articulating that working closely with faith communities to tackle the climate emergency is essential, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring this engagement is conducted in an inclusive and respectful way. When working with religious communities, using the appropriate language (including religious terminology and faith narratives) and facilitating inclusive groups discussions can achieve wider reach and lasting impact.

We hope that the workshop model and recommendations presented above will prove a helpful framework for future encounters between faith communities and policymakers, especially on matters related to the climate crisis.



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