



It's quite embarrassing coming up on an occasion like this, because I sort of do the decorative bit, but the people who really do the work are the ones that we're hearing about. I look around and see people like Pastor Agu Irukwu there, and many many others in this room, who have led and built great churches, who've transformed communities, who serve God in the most extraordinary way.

Then I hear that presentation just then, and read this report, and I'm reminded that the work of the church is emphatically not done by archbishops. It's done by every local church community – and they do it in the most extraordinary way. That the work of faith groups is not done by the folk who appear on TV. It's done by the local people – and they do it in the most extraordinary way.

I'm only talking principally about the church because it would be presumptuous of me to talk about other people who I have no right to speak for, except to say that it springs out of the work of the presence of God pushing, compelling, constraining people to love.

Einstein said many years ago, "It is extraordinary what can be achieved by people who don't care whether they get the credit for it or not." The thing about local faith communities and local church communities is that at their best they couldn't give a hang who gets the credit. They just want to make sure that their community has been blessed. And I get to stand up here and say things and it's overwhelming, it's embarrassing, because it's them that do the extraordinary work.

I also want to say thank you to Matt [Bird]... in the brief ten minutes that I was Bishop of Durham, I did just have time to be installed in Durham Cathedral, and in my sermon there - this was 2011 - I talked about the fact that the idols that we had built our society on, the idols of materialism, of wealth, had toppled, had been toppled, by the recession after the great crisis of 2008, and that as the idols were toppled the only thing that was left were the eternal values.



I was talking in a cathedral; I said all we find left is a cross on the horizon. It's the only thing that's not toppled. I talked about the need for – in that context, the church, but here, faith groups – meeting that huge gap which we could see opening around us and which opened from 2008 onwards. I'm not trying to ascribe blame. It's simply a fact that, as we all know, that gap opened up.

I remember going back to my seat after the sermon, and waking up the people next to me...[laughter] and saying thinking to myself, well, there was some good purple prose in there but it won't have any effect. I could not have been more wrong. As usual.

The faith communities in this country have risen to the challenge in the last seven or eight years in the most extraordinary way, as they had done before, and will continue to do whatever happens in the future with the economy – because there will always be people in need, there will always be people who need not just provision but need provision wrapped up in love. And it's when they get that that human dignity is preserved and humanity is lifted.

That is why faith is a force for good in our society.

First of all, Matt, thank you. You have demonstrated through Cinnamon Network the most extraordinary commitment to this country, and the most extraordinary ability to mobilise effort. That is a gift without which this country would be more than 3 billion pounds poorer instantly. So thank you very much indeed.

Secondly, thank you for the report, because it's when we see what has been happening that our hearts lift with hope. And hope brings us back to the point where we believe that all can change and that there is a future of a society that is mutually flourishing, which is our dream – and the dream, I want to add here just after an election, of almost everyone I have ever met in politics.

So thank you. This is a wonderful report and it's a wonderful thing to have.

The public view of religion among young people, according to a YouGov poll - well, alright it's a poll, but ... [laughter] the reputation of religion among young people is actually more negative than neutral: 41% – this was a poll in 2013, when they still got them right – 41% of 18-24 year olds agreed that “religion is more often the cause of evil in the world” and only 14% say it is a cause for good.

The Faith Action Audit reveals something different. It shows the breadth of commitment across the country, the depth of commitment, and above all the strength of experience and good practice. Thanks to Cinnamon [Network] and other bodies like it, this is not mere do-goodery. It is

seeking to find best practice and put it into action in the most professional way that can be imagined.

We've heard some of the figures, but just a reminder: the faith sector collectively is delivering, according to the audit – I'll round it – 220,000 social action projects, from which 47 million people benefit.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand people are paid by faith organisations to run these projects – that makes it a pretty significant industrial sector in its own right – and just under two million volunteers give their time, energy and commitment.

We've heard those figures twice already this evening. They bear hearing a third time. Incredibly good news should be repeated.

While no one runs a project in order to make the headlines – taking us back to Einstein – the fact that so much effort is made to serve people in the community should be a headline in itself. It says something to the wealth and depth of social capital in this country, that many people have decried quite falsely.

However, it goes further than that. A very remarkable man that many of you will have heard of called Shane Claiborne – I can see some heads nodding... he's someone who works with the poor in some of the most challenging areas in the United States. He recently said this: "The poor always have names." It's equivalent to what Napoleon said after one battle: "The loss of a division is a statistic; the loss of an individual is a tragedy."

And Shane Claiborne asked the people to whom he was speaking the names of people they knew – and many were unable to name them. The figures are essential, but what is even deeper is in the same way as one of the Christian titles for Jesus is 'Emmanuel' – which is not God *for* us, God *to* us, but God *with* us. The best thing about the project about which we're hearing is that they are with people. They know their names. Dignity is restored.

But we all know that, don't we. When someone remembers our name it is a transforming thing. It says that we matter to them, not just that we're an object of their compassion.

As a Christian my faith is the driver for all I do. It is because of who God is and what God has done for all that we Christians are motivated to do what we do.

It's because God knows every person by name that it is important to know names, and embarrassing and shameful when we forget them. It is because God shows his love for us by coming to be with us, that we go to be with people. It is because God's love was shown in action by the compassion, kindness, healing, transformation, commitment and sacrifice of the life and death of Jesus Christ - and that hope, we believe as Christians, was raised because Jesus was raised from the dead - that we are inspired to lay our lives down for others.

This insight is a real gift that faith groups bring to a society that so easily gets obsessed with itself.

The call is clear: we are to make choices and commitments that are to be with other people. We are to join the two million people who regularly experience life to be better when they are with those in need – who were strangers, were in prison, were hungry, naked, sick. In the words of Jesus's great parable in Matthew 25: and we went to visit them, not knowing that we were visiting him.

Change in our society isn't primarily brought by structures, policies or legislation – although they are essential. But they are ineffective unless people are part of that – in fact people are at the core of it. I'm very, very grateful that I'm here, because I find hope renewed in me by what we are seeing and hearing.

I hope that as the next few years come through, that in the grace and power of God, the faith communities of this land will demonstrate that faith is a power for good in our society. Thank you.

[Read more about the Faith Action Audits](#)

8 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/archbishop-faith-force-social-good>