



“Big society” or big con

In May the new Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition unveiled a "big society" programme intended to "take power away from politicians and give it to the people".

The plans included introducing a national citizen service programme for 16-year-olds, reforms to the planning system to give communities more control over developments, letting public sector workers form cooperatives and giving the public access to government data.

To encourage volunteering, the government will launch a national "big society day". Some civil servants will also be expected to get involved in community work, with community involvement becoming "a key element of key civil service staff appraisals". Other policies in the programme include:

- Creating a new generation of community organisers.
- Funding neighbourhood groups through a Big Society Bank, using money from dormant bank accounts.
- Forcing the police to publish detailed local crime data statistics.
- Reviewing local government finance, and giving councils a general power of competence.

Commentators have been questioning whether the ‘Big Society’ is a concept or simply a con. Others note that this is what church members already do

In the Church in Wales:

- Many local churches contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities through crèches and after school clubs, disability groups and arts projects to senior citizens luncheon clubs, I.T. and parenting classes.
- Thousands of volunteers from our congregations lead and support community groups as carers, listeners, reconcilers, advocates, mentors, coaches, friends, supporters, funders and helpful pairs of hands.

- Social Responsibility projects, organised by each diocese in the disadvantaged areas of Wales, work with vulnerable people and provide new skills and confidence.

In the Church of England:

- A quarter of regular churchgoers are involved in voluntary community service outside the church.
- Churchgoers contribute 23.2 million hours voluntary service



each month in their local communities outside the church.

- Churches provide activities outside church worship in the local community for 407,000 children and young people aged under 16 years.
- Congregations give more than £51.7 million each year to other charities – that’s even more than the BBC’s annual Children in Need appeal.

Perhaps the ‘Big Society’ is already here, but unappreciated.

Time will tell whether or not:

- the concept is really a cover for getting things done on the cheap by volunteers.
- churches and other groups have the capacity or competence to do some of what is likely to fall into their collective lap.
- some communities are replete with the resources and skills to make differences that cannot be made in other communities.

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY



Racial Justice Sunday this year will take place on 12th September. The theme for the resources from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland will be Migration 2010, keying into the Migration 2010 initiative of the Conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe.

This initiative aims to increase the visibility of the churches' commitment to strangers responding to the message of the Bible and the promotion of an

inclusive policy at European and national level for migrants, refugees and ethnic minority groups. Objectives include:

- * strengthening the rights of migrants
- * combating exclusion and unemployment
- * setting up programmes to welcome migrants and refugees
- * monitoring and improving detention centres

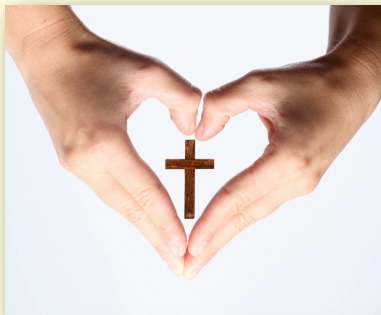
Fuller details and resources can be found on <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/>



THE LORD'S PRAYER

from Central America

Our Lord,
who is in us here on earth,
holy is your name
in the hungry
who share their bread and their song.
Your Kingdom come,
which is a generous land
that flows with milk and honey.
Let us do your will,
standing up when all are sitting
down,
and raising our voice when all are
silent.
You are giving us our daily bread
in the song of the bird
and the miracle of the corn.
Forgive us
for keeping silent in the face of
injustice,
and for burying our dreams,
for not sharing bread and wine,
love and the land,
among us now.
Don't let us fall into the temptation
of shutting the door through fear;
of resigning ourselves to hunger
and injustice;
of taking up the same arms as the
enemy.
But deliver us from evil.
Give us the perseverance and the
solidarity to look for love,
even if the path has not yet been
trodden,
even if we fall;
so we shall have known your
kingdom
which is being built for ever and ever.
Amen.



Mums Matter Maternal Health Campaign

It's hard to believe that only 60 years ago in the UK, 1 in every 1,000 women didn't survive pregnancy. In fact the Women's Institute has campaigned hard on this issue from as early as 1925, and as recently as 1980. Oxfam understands that poverty disproportionately affects women, and that women's access to their rights – including the right to free basic health care – is vital. And this is why the WI and Oxfam are working together on this issue. Mums Matter, is a joint campaign between the WI and Oxfam calling for more action to improve maternal healthcare in poorer countries.



Today approximately 1000 mothers will die needlessly in pregnancy and childbirth around the world. The WI and Oxfam believe that it's a global scandal and world leaders have failed to tackle the problem.

In 2000 world leaders signed up to the Millennium Development Goals, promising to reduce the number of mothers dying in poor countries by three quarters by 2015. In too many countries there has been virtually no progress towards this goal and in some countries the situation is getting even worse.

The WI believes that to tackle maternal mortality, women's rights must be at the heart of the issue. Funding for maternal health initiatives must ensure not only that pregnant women have access to health services, but also that all women and girls have access to an education and family planning information. With the support of the British government this could become a reality.

As part of the campaign, the WI and Oxfam will present a petition to the UK Government in March 2011 calling on them to keep their promises to reduce the number of women dying in childbirth by:

- Ensuring that its aid spending on maternal health projects strongly and demonstrably promotes women's rights.
- Providing long-term support to poor country governments to help them increase access to free public health care.
- Increasing funding to train midwives and other health workers, and ensure they are supported with well-equipped facilities and medicines for emergency care.

The WI and Oxfam would welcome your support of the campaign and in collecting signatures for the petition. For further information regarding the campaign and to download a copy of the petition, please visit the WI website at www.thewi.org.uk/mumsmatter The Welsh version of the petition can be downloaded from www.thewi.org.uk/cyrumawreddmam

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