



Confidence
in the Gospel

As part of the Evangelical Alliance's *Confidence in the Gospel* initiative we are hosting a series of five national consultations to wrestle with significant and timely issues relating to the gospel.

To ensure that as many people as possible can engage with this programme, the talks are being filmed and made available online.

Why not watch some of the videos, and use the questions provided, to explore these vital subjects with your small group or leadership team?

For more information, videos and resources visit eauk.org/confidence

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Synopsis

Faith in the community, a report by the Evangelical Alliance and Christians in Parliament, provides evidence of the extraordinary contribution faith communities make to society. With local authorities facing budget short falls, there is increasing opportunity for faith groups to provide services for the community.

The report includes some high praise from local authorities regarding the work faith groups do. However, more often there was appreciation mixed with suspicion; not least the fear of proselytisation. There are often two responses from churches.

The first is to stay away from public funding and avert support from the statutory authorities. This allows churches to be free to continue to provide the services while being openly Christian in whatever way they choose. This option can result in churches being out of sync with what others are doing and can therefore result in duplication, overlap and gaps.

The second is to strip out all faith aspects; to provide a service as if it wasn't a faith group providing it. But what is a faith aspect?

Statutory authorities are keen to benefit from the contribution church groups make. They want our good works but they don't always want our good news. But the contribution Christians make cannot be disconnected from their faith. Have we opted for favour over faithfulness?

We can have it both ways. There are many examples of churches holding true to their motivations, beliefs and passions, and serving their community. We have to be the same people whether we are preaching from the pulpit or sweeping the streets. We do not have a Christian button that we switch on and off. But this doesn't mean that we act the same in every context; the words we use will be different.

We don't just do good to get people through the doors of the church. We do good because the gospel that changes our lives will one day banish pain and suffering. We do good because one day good will triumph. We do good because we can be partners in bringing hope into the world today. We do good because we care for our neighbours and the good news requires no less. We are called to be good news and to be carriers of the gospel. When we step into the community, when we lead with conviction we are ambassadors of Christ. It's not a choice between good works and good news. It is always about both.

Questions

- 1) What services do your church provide for the local community? Do you work with your local council? If so, what challenges / opportunities have you faced as a result?
- 2) Have you found that working with local authorities provided you with gospel opportunities, or restricted your opportunities to share the gospel?
- 3) Do you think that churches should be providing public services? Why (not)?
- 4) What do we need to do differently as a church? (For example, are there contributions we should be making to our community that we are not at the moment. Or, do we need to be open about our faith within our existing opportunities?)