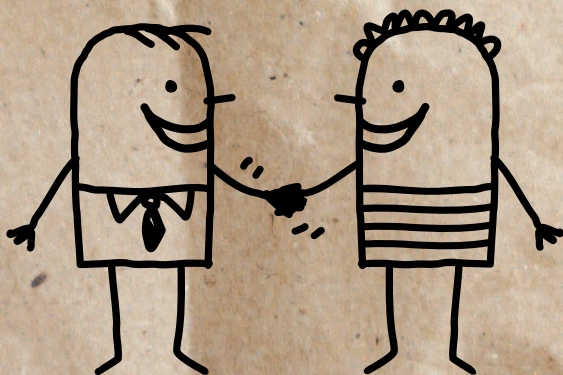


What does it mean to be a Good Society?

The Good Society – an exploration of different people, places and projects across the UK, and the values and faith they share



www.agoodsociety.org



Clients at St Austell Community Kitchen, Cornwall

Why hold your own Good Society Conversation?

It's a fundamental question for all of us.

But what are the values which underpin a Good Society – and what can we do as individuals, churches and wider communities to put these values into practice?

At one level Good Society conversations happen all the time.

This is an invitation to set aside some time to explore these questions together as part of a national conversation – not least in the run up to the 2015 General Election.

What is our vision of a Good Society in 2020? What kind of society do we want to live in in the year 2020 – or in other words, by the end of the next Parliament?

What are the values which underpin this vision – and what steps do we need to take over the next five years that will get us closer to achieving this vision?

We will be gathering the stories and views of all those who take part in the Good Society Conversation together. These will help to inform what the Churches say together nationally in the run up to the UK General Election.

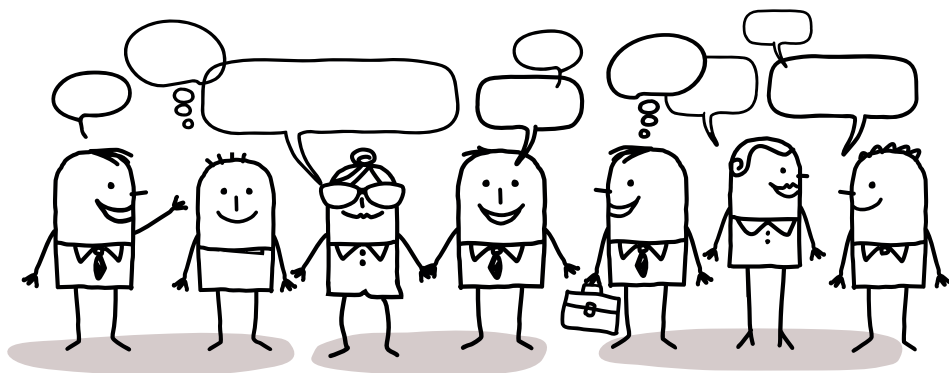
But, just as importantly, the Good Society is also something that all of us have a stake in in our own neighbourhoods, villages, towns and

"A good society is one where you reach out and find out what other people's needs might be without expecting anything back in return."

Jean, Glasgow

cities across Britain and Ireland.

The Good Society project has explored what these questions mean to ordinary people in seven communities across the UK – now is the time for you to take part.





What is the Good Society project?

Much has been discussed about the Big Society; this project set out to discover more about the Good Society.

What are the foundations of a Good Society?

Where does it exist? And in a time of austerity and cuts to crucial services, how important is the Good Society?

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and Church Action on Poverty travelled to church-based, faith and community groups in seven areas across the UK to ask these questions.

They encouraged people to tell their own story, in their own words.

The research focused on areas of major social challenge, where people rely on the imagination and energy of small numbers of paid workers and larger numbers of volunteers.

The project aims to make a contribution to the wider debate concerning the role of the Church, and faith more generally, in seeking the common good.

The project does not intend to offer sociopolitical analysis, and does not offer any recommendations to the Churches or to Government.

The voices must speak for themselves.



Pupils from Kingsley Primary School, Toxteth, interview residents at a local care home for their Good Society newspaper

Who should be part of the Good Society?

At one level everyone should be involved. Everyone has – or should have – a stake in the Good Society. Everyone's opinions matter equally.

But on a more practical level, it's up to you to work out who you want – and have the capacity to – involve in the conversation locally. We've simply set out three different ways of holding a conversation below – but we're not telling you who to include.



"It is all about empowering people to feel and know that they can make a difference."

Workshop participant,
Newcastle

It could be a conversation between a few people round a coffee table, over lunch, in someone's home, or in a community centre.

Equally, it could be an opportunity to invite people from the wider community to take part – local councillors, community groups, business leaders – even your local MP. It's up to you.



Rev Jill Clancy and a member of the Discovery discussion group at Tron St Mary's Church in Glasgow

Where could a Good Society Conversation take place?

There are no hard and fast rules, but here are three specific examples of ways you could have a local Good Society conversation.

- Small group Conversations
- Inter-generational Conversations
- Public Conversations

"A good community usually depends on the people who live there, and how they act to other people."
Hassan, Liverpool

Holding a Good Society

Small group Conversation

The simplest form of conversation.

Why not hold a series of one-to-one conversations with friends, neighbours, people in your church or wider community?

What does the 'Good Society' mean to people in their ordinary everyday lives?

You could explore one or more of the Good Society themes – hope and aspiration; community; health and well-being; and spirit.

You could do this on your own – but it might be better to do it with two or three other people from your own church or Churches Together group.

People love a good conversation. There are likely to be many settings where you could have a Good Society conversation with a small group of people.

Why not hold an event over coffee after church, over a cup of tea or lunch in a local community centre, or with a group of friends or neighbours in your own front room.

Capturing the Conversation

There are a variety of ways of recording the conversation – from literally recording it (with the person's permission), to making notes, to asking people if they want to write something themselves – it can be as little as a couple of sentences.



You might also want to take photos of the people you have spoken with, if you are confident with a camera (or cameraphone) and they are willing to be photographed. A picture speaks a thousand words.

**"Faith is not what I say,
but we do."**

Padraig, Swansea

Sharing the Conversation

Why not make a display, a short presentation, or write a newsletter article for your church or Churches Together group, to share some of what you have found – with quotes and photos if you've managed to capture them?

You can also send or email what you've found to CTBI for uploading to the Good Society website (see back page for how to do this).

You can also set up your own blog or website recording your conversations, and share via social media.





Inter-generational learning at the ARC centre, Swansea

Holding a Good Society Conversation with an inter-generational group

Why not have a conversation involving different age groups about the collective values that create a Good Society?

Both young and old can work together to build a Good Society where they live, work and go to school – but this action has to start with an understanding of what all groups have in common.

It's an exercise that could go a long way to breaking down barriers, and changing assumptions about how different groups think a Good Society could work.

A great place to start is your local school. Why not suggest that teachers help their students explore what is already good about where they live?

As well as yielding some surprising results, such a project could benefit their education by enhancing the teaching of citizenship and personal and social development. It would also encourage young people to become more aware of local issues, engage them with new groups of people, and motivate them to get involved with their community.

"A good society is a place where children grow up with a sense of community and feel valued. A place where the church still plays a part in the life of the community."
Ruth, Cornwall

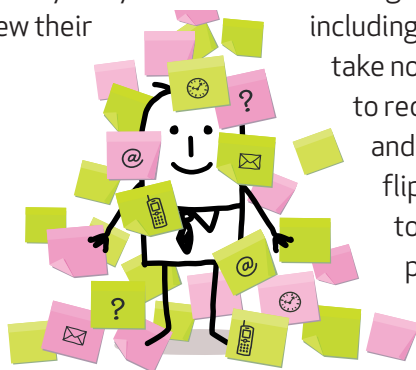
The project could take various forms. Young people could invite people doing 'good' things – whether they are community volunteers, librarians, youth workers, or sports coaches – into their school, and quiz them about what they think makes a Good Society.

If you volunteer or work with young people, how about setting up a conversation with them? Informal settings work best – in a local youth club, or at a sports club.

The pupils could visit a local care home or allotment and learn more about what they do, and how it fits into a Good Society. They could even interview their parents and other teachers.

Capturing the Conversation

There are a variety of ways of recording the conversation – including asking someone to take notes and write them up, to recording the feedback and discussion on a flipchart. Use post-it notes to gather thoughts, and photograph them to make a collage.



Social media could be used to share the conversation as it happens. Participants could be encouraged to post the event on Facebook or Twitter, and also share it afterwards.



The Good Society website is a great resource – if any of those taking part are budding writers, posting a blog on the site is a great way to develop their talents and share skills with a wider audience (see back page for how to do this).

A Good Society conversation could be used as the basis for an art, literacy or multi-media project. Pupils could share their investigations in a newspaper, which is then distributed throughout the wider community.

"It's nice to meet people from older generations who live in the area. It's lovely. And when you give to them, you receive from them."
Kate, Swansea

They could set up their own blog or website, complete with their own video or photography. Or they could hold an assembly and create presentation boards for public display.

The possibilities are endless. But creativity is key.

For more inspiration, go to **www.agoodsociety.org/locations/liverpool/** to see how the Good Society project set up a newspaper with schoolchildren in Toxteth, Liverpool.





Two participants at a Good Society conversation in Newcastle

Holding a Good Society Conversation public event

Why not have a larger, organised conversation about the role of the local council, schools, businesses, and civic groups – as well as churches and other faith communities – in building the Good Society where you are?

Could you bring together a wider group of people for a more ‘public’ conversation about how different

people and groups in your village, town or neighbourhood (or even city or county) understand the ‘Good Society’? It’s a slightly more ambitious idea that requires a bit more planning and preparation.

You could invite anything from five to 50 people to take part in a roundtable conversation, for anything from an hour to an

afternoon. There are many people you could invite – local councillors, school teachers and governors, youth or older people's groups, GPs or health visitors, business leaders, your local MP, other churches and faith communities.

Why not hold it in a public building, for example your village or town hall, library, church hall or local school, to make it a really 'public' conversation?

Ask two or three people to make short inputs to kick off the conversation, then carry it on with people sat in groups of five to six round tables.

You could hold a conversation on one or more of the Good Society themes (hope and aspiration; community; health and well-being; spirit) – and use two or three of the questions from the topic guides (see pages 15-19) to help steer the conversations.

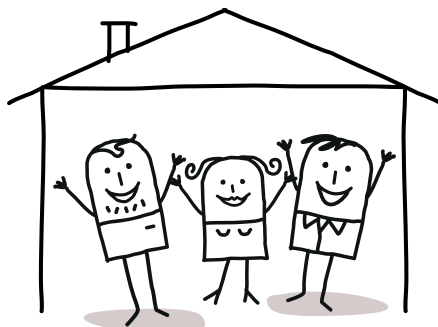
To round off the event, you could ask someone from each table to feedback the key points from their conversation – and, if appropriate, invite other people, perhaps those

"Faith is the counter-culture, the thing that says to be the best that you can be as a human being you need to care for the other."

Susan, Newcastle

with responsibilities for decision-making in that area, to respond to specific questions or issues raised.

You will probably need a small planning group of three to four people to make this happen – and plan it at least six to eight weeks in advance, to give you enough time to get the people you want to take part.

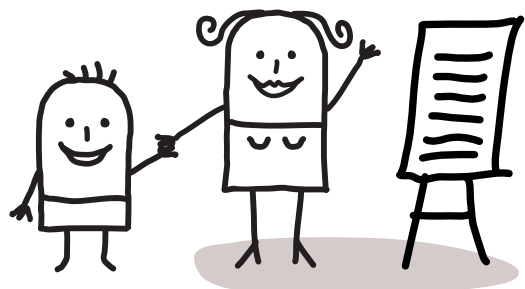


Capturing the Conversation

There are a variety of ways of recording the conversation – including asking someone at each roundtable to take notes and write them up, to recording the feedback and discussion on a flipchart.

You might also want to ask people if they want to write something themselves – give people pens and paper on the tables to do so as they go along. You might also ask someone to take photos of the event and the people taking part (remember to ask peoples' permission).

You could even ask people to draw a picture of what the Good Society means to them. Use the image of a tree's roots and branches to enable people to express their hopes for a good society, and how it can be made possible, in a more visual way.



Sharing the Conversation

Why not invite your local newspaper to attend – or offer to write an article and send them some photos (though you will have to do it immediately – remember, old news is not news).

Alternatively, you could write up a short report to send to everyone who took part, and make a short presentation, or write a newsletter article for your church or Churches Together group, to share some of what you have found – with quotes and photos if you've managed to capture them.

You can also send or email what you've found to CTBI for uploading to the Good Society website – to share with other people across the country (see back page for how to do this).



Tutor and learner at Remnants sewing group, Saltley Methodist Church, Birmingham

What might a Good Society Conversation cover?

Again – that’s up to you.

We’re not here to tell you what a Good Society is – but to offer you some suggestions to help you hold your own conversation.

Below are some suggestions based around the four themes identified in the Good Society report, but you’re very welcome to come up with themes that work better for where you are.

General Good Society conversation themes

- What is your vision of a Good Society in 2020?
- What are the risks that undermine a Good Society?
- What are the key things that help create a Good Society where you live?
- How can we put these into practice in our life together as a church or wider community?

Hope and Aspiration

Discuss one or more of the following statements:

"A good society is a place where children grow up with a sense of community and feel valued. A place where the church still plays a part in the life of the community."

Ruth, Cornwall

"To create a good society you need to get people engaged – and get them to aspire to move on and change."

Anthony, Swansea

"It is all about empowering people to feel and know that they can make a difference."

Workshop participant,
Newcastle

"I think it's what Gandhi said – be the change that you want to see. You can try as hard as you can to change others but you've got to try and change yourself first."

Workshop participant, Newcastle

What hopes and aspirations do our young people have for 2020?

Where are the sources of hope and aspiration in our community?

What does 'success' look like in a Good Society?

How do we resolve competing hopes and aspirations that people may have for themselves and the wider community?

Community

Discuss one or more of the following statements or questions, and the extent to which they reflect your own experiences of community:

"It's nice to have Muslims in the church. Even though it is not their religion, they want to be here. Because it's a church people feel safe. They think there must be something good happening."
Marge, Birmingham

"It's lovely to meet people from older generations who live in the area. And when you give to them, you receive from them." Kate, Swansea

"A good society is one where you reach out and find out what other people's needs might be without expecting anything back in return."
Jean, Glasgow

"A good community usually depends on the people who live there, and how they act to other people."
Hassan, Liverpool

What is our vision for our local community in 2020?

What can we do to help bring this vision about – and who do we need to work with to make it happen?

How do we ensure that everybody in our community feels welcomed and able to participate in community life?

What responsibility do those with wealth and power have for building a Good Society?

Health and Well-being

Discuss one or more of the following statements or questions, and the extent to which they reflect your own experiences of community:

"It is important to challenge the fact it is 'normal' for people in the north east to have a shorter life expectancy than those in the south east. Or that in deprived areas, one in four households have to use food banks."

Workshop participant, Newcastle

"The Church has a responsibility. We are part of civil society. And we should be there with our voices. So that's why I think it isn't wrong for us to take sides."

Chris, Belfast

"I have a belief that people can change because I've seen it. When you see potential in people, within a relationship which is based on trust, that allows for that to happen."

Anne, Newcastle

"It's a human need to be together, to get on together, and grow together. It's got to be reawakened, and I think it is possible."

Sybil, Swansea

What value do we place on our own health and well-being and that of the wider community?

What can we do to promote health and well-being, in the face of the challenges that people are facing locally?

What place do wealth, work, money and debt have in a Good Society?

What place do foodbanks have in our vision of a Good Society?

Spirit

Discuss one or more of the following statements or questions, and the extent to which they reflect your own experiences of community:

"Because we have quite an eclectic mix here, we use the term that we are a beloved community. We disagree with each other with loving kindness."

Chris, Belfast

"From the crooked timbers of humanity nothing straight can ever be made. Christianity should be more about humanity, and less about dogma."

Gerry, Belfast

"Faith is not what I say, but we do."

Padraig, Swansea

"Faith at its best – has at its heart a care for the other. Faith is the counter-culture, the thing that says to be the best that you can be as a human being you need to care for the other."

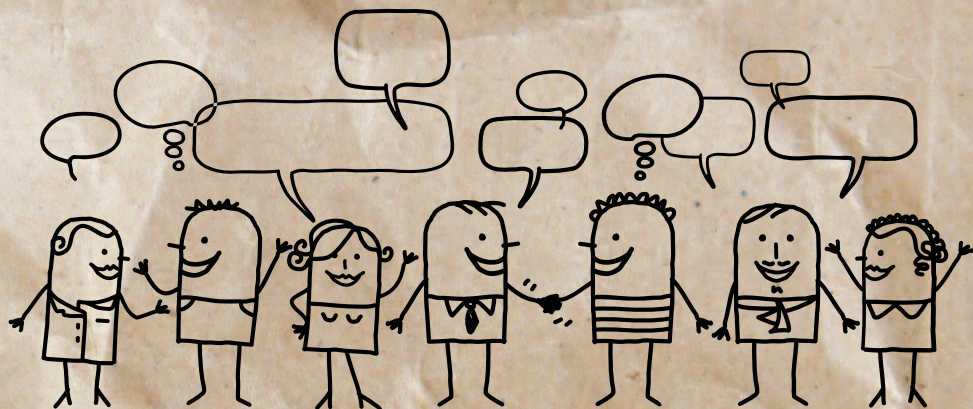
Susan, Newcastle

Are faith and religion the same?

Do you need faith for a Good Society? Faith in what?

Does true faith need to be expressed in action?

What is the relationship between morality and spirituality in a Good Society?



Want to share your story?

Our website, www.agoodsociety.org, is packed full of stories of inspirational people and projects who are committed to building a good society where they live.

We welcome contributions from those who want to join the conversation and share their story.

To get in touch, send us your story and conversation, or for any other questions, email: info@agoodsociety.org, call 0845 680 6851, or write to:

CTBI, 39 Eccleston Square,
London, SW1V 1BX



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Written by Niall Cooper and Helen Clifton
Photographs by Helen Clifton (www.helencifton.com)
Graphic Design by www.heliographic.co.uk