

BULLETIN NO. 14, Oct 2003

WFDD is primarily a network and we appreciate hearing from you either in response to the bulletin or about other issues you may wish to raise.

At the end of December Wendy Tyndale will formally retire as Researcher for WFDD. I say 'formally' because she has kindly agreed to continue her work on the Case Studies on an informal, part-time basis.

Wendy has been a brilliant contributor to WFDD's work from the outset. She has travelled, networked, produced articles, books and reports, looked and listened carefully and recorded faithfully, and ceaselessly exercised her gift for friendly but productive conversation.

Above all perhaps she has understood that arising out of their spirituality, faith communities must play a critical (sometimes highly critical) but also a creative role in the dialogue about development, challenging a great deal of received 'wisdom' as to what it is all about but also offering visions of more attractive and life-enhancing alternatives.

All of us who have worked with Wendy will want to say how much we have enjoyed her company and thank her for being the mainspring of WFDD's work over the last 6 years. We wish her more than well.

Michael Taylor

**The Future of WFDD
see page 4**

Information gathering – A Pilot Project

Faith Communities contribute to poverty reduction and human development in many ways. Information about their work however is in short supply or incomplete. If more could be made known about it within and between countries it could

- encourage co-operation
- help to exchange experiences especially of 'good practice'
- attract the interest and support of donors

and so strengthen the contributions that faith communities make at a time when Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals represent renewed efforts to eliminate the worst of poverty.

WFDD in co-operation with AiDA (Accessible Information on Development Activities) and the Development Gateway has committed itself to a small pilot project of information gathering, initially in Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi, to which a field worker will make initial visits in October and November 2003 (Ghana 26 Oct - 1 Nov; Uganda 2 – 8 Nov, Tanzania 8 - 14 Nov; Malawi 14 – 23 Nov).

Following the visits, and with the permission of the faith communities, WFDD will collate the information gathered in each country and make it available to all the faith communities

interviewed. It will also add the information to the database of AiDA where it can be seen by potential collaborators, supporters and donors alongside the programmes and projects of governments and NGOs.

Faith in the Global Economic System

After some preliminary research, I have started consultations with religious thinkers and grass root faith communities. I recently attended a workshop on Buddhist economics in India. The workshop covered three themes. The first focused on the global economic system which Buddhism sees as being the cause of the current crisis in the world. This crisis is reflected in the growing poverty and inequality among and within nations in a world where enormous increases in wealth are taking place. Buddhists see the current economic system being propelled by the ever-increasing greed of transnational corporations to control larger and larger markets. Moreover, international cooperation to deregulate international trade is seen as a bid to facilitate these corporations.

Localization is the Buddhist answer to the crisis of globalization. Taking inspiration from E.F. Schumacher's critique of the capitalist economic system in "Small is Beautiful" they advocate localized patterns of production and consumption. Such a process would put human beings back at the center of economic concerns and re-establish the connection between people and nature.

The second theme examined the advice of Buddha to householders on the creation and sharing of wealth such that the responsibility of each individual to the family, to society and to nature is fulfilled.

The third session was devoted to the various local level initiatives undertaken by engaged Buddhists to put into practice alternative business, education and livelihood structures based on Buddhist teachings.

I also met some disciples of a Hindu religious leader. Two views were commonly reiterated. First, the most obvious and morally repugnant development in recent years was the emergence of greed as the driving force behind all actions and relationships. The consumer culture was attributed to the luxurious lifestyles depicted on television and imported from the West in the name of development. Second, multinationals were ruining the national economy. They were just another form of colonization and were there to help the developed nations only.

Vineeta Shanker
Project Co-ordinator

IIN

WFDD is one of 14 members of an International Interfaith Network which meets annually to avoid parallel actions or duplication of effort and encourage co-operation between the member organisations wherever possible. All 14 of the participating organisations were represented at this year's meeting, which was held in Oxford, UK, on 17-20 September.

Plenary sessions addressed the themes of interfaith education and youth, the United Nations, conflict transformation and peace building, encounter and spirituality, and poverty and development. Workshops focused on religious freedom, an e-learning project and youth. Most discussions also included reflections on possibilities for co-operation, for example at the UN and at the next Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona 2004.

The network is part of an incipient interfaith movement whose aim is to return to the original spirit and vision of our different religious traditions and to promote an agenda for peace and justice in the world. The movement faces challenges both from the materialism of global capitalism and from the use of religion as a divisive and oppressive force.

The suggestion was made that perhaps its main task over the next decade is to show that the crises the world is facing, of violence, environmental destruction, social injustice and a growing sense of emptiness arising from the delusions created by consumerism are above all spiritual crises. It is vital, then, that people and communities from different religious and spiritual traditions all over the world join together to lead people forward according to values to which all can subscribe, such as compassion, restraint, generosity and integrity.

Case studies

The painstaking work of people from different parts of the world on WFDD's collection of case studies is bearing fruit. We have eight already on our web site and three more will be published shortly. In all, we are hoping for about 16 studies by the end of the year from a range of religious traditions and countries.

Our next step will be to hold a workshop in India in February 2004 to gather together the writers of as many studies as our funds will allow, in order to see what lessons can be drawn from their work. The expected outcomes will include greater insight into how people from different faith traditions understand development and how this compares and contrasts with other views; greater knowledge about their ways of working with materially impoverished communities; a clearer view of how faith traditions contribute to development in terms of the values and visions, motivation, support and encouragement they bring.

Workshops

In the last Bulletin (May 2003) we wrote about 3 workshops on faith and development planned for the next 3 months. The first will be in Ghana (28-29 October), the second in Tanzania (11-13 November) and the third in Thailand (5-7 December). They are being co-hosted by

the Religious Bodies Forum of Ghana, the Tanzania Interfaith Forum and Spirit in Education Movement. Between them they have helped us issue invitations and done most of the preparatory work. We will report on the workshops in our next issue.

Geneva

WFDD took part in a two-day meeting in Geneva in September described as an 'internal encounter' between WCC-related churches, agencies and other partners, to prepare for further meetings with the World Bank and the IMF. The participants showed themselves strongly critical of the policies pursued by the Bank and the Fund and their political masters, and determined to enter into dialogue on the basis of Gospel convictions and values. They were prepared however to take up specific issues such as privatisation, governance and accountability and, in recognition of the integrity of many with whom they disagreed and inconsistencies within the churches' own practices, refused to claim all the moral high ground for themselves. Their main conclusions can be studied on our website.

NOTICES:

'If not Global Capitalism then What?'
A series of seminars arranged by WFDD and the University of Birmingham -
October 2003 – March 2004
(see website)

WFDD Trustees' Meeting
12 December 2004, Washington, USA

WFDD – The Future

Some questions for you.

In December the Trustees of WFDD will need to take decisions about its future, including what sort of Director they want to appoint as from August 2004. This is an edited version of a paper sent to Trustees to stimulate discussion. (The full text can be found on our website.) As a member of WFDD's network, you are invited to send in your own comments.

1. The aim of WFDD.

In 2002 this was restated as 'to enhance the contributions of faith communities (especially at the grassroots and among the poorest) to poverty eradication and improved development policies and practice

individually
in co-operation with each other
and with multi-lateral agencies
especially as those contributions are inspired and informed by their faith and spirituality'.

Do you agree with it or want to change it?

2. Relations with the World Bank.

Despite being formally separate, WFDD remains close to the World Bank. This has many advantages but can jeopardise WFDD's independence.

Would closer links with the UN be helpful?

3. Biased to the local.

The dialogue between faiths on development takes place at different levels including international leaders' meetings, institutional encounters and the level of local, grassroot faith communities. WFDD has tended to focus on the local.

Is this bias the right one?

4. Funding.

WFDD has received funds from individuals, governments, trusts and foundations. Its financial basis is not all that adequate.

Where else might it turn for financial support eg to the network of which you are a part; to national and international faith communities?

5. Existing and Future Work.

WFDD's work has been reported in this Bulletin and its current Workplan is available on the website.

What work would you like it to do in the future?

6. Interfaith Networks.

A report of the annual meeting of the International Interfaith Network appears in this Bulletin. The Network has 14 members eg Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions, United Religions Initiative and World Conference on Religion and Peace

Should WFDD be more clearly linked with any other interfaith organisations?

7. Ownership.

Do you think WFDD's relations with faith communities would be strengthened by the creation of a broad-based interfaith council of reference?

8. Staff.

What gifts and experience do you look for in the staff of WFDD?

Please send comments on these questions and any other ideas you would like to contribute to Michael Taylor (see contact details at head of Bulletin) by 31 October 2003 at the latest.