

Press release: 9.00am 10 December 2007 For Immediate Use
Issued by West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council.
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WEST YORKSHIRE CHURCH LEADERS' STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR ISLAMIC SCHOLARS' REPORT

Fourteen leaders of the principal Christian Churches in West Yorkshire have signed an agreed statement welcoming 'the eirenic tone' of the recent Islamic report, *A Common Word Between Us and You*.

The West Yorkshire Church Leaders' statement:

- welcomes the **eirenic, peacemaking tone** of *A Common Word* (not necessarily the specific content)
- notes that the Muslim scholars **quote Jesus from the Christian scriptures** and not, as is usually the case, from the Koran; this is acknowledged as a bridge-building gesture
- acknowledges that Christianity and Islam have shared values of **Love of God** and **Love of Neighbour**
- finds **encouragement for local** Churches and Churches Together groups engaging in **dialogue** with Muslim neighbours; *A Common Word* may assist dialogue, or in some cases provide a basis for dialogue and improved community relations across West Yorkshire and beyond.

This initiative of the West Yorkshire Church Leaders' statement, issued by the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council, is believed to be the **first statement** on *A Common Word* made by regional church leaders anywhere in the UK.

For further information and comment, please contact either:

The Right Revd. John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds,
Bishop Mount, Hutton Bank,
Ripon, HG4 5DP.
Tel: 01765 602045; Fax: 01765 600758;
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or

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WEST YORKSHIRE CHURCH LEADERS
WELCOME 'A COMMON WORD'

As Church Leaders in West Yorkshire, we welcome the open letter to Christian leaders, 'A Common Word between Us and You'.

Its call to active collaboration, based on our shared imperatives of love of God and love of neighbour, resonates with many initiatives locally in West Yorkshire. Here, Christians and Muslims, along with members of the other great world faiths, seek together to build a shared future marked by justice, respect and compassion.

This milestone document should help to reassure any Muslims who might be sceptical that building relations of trust with Christians is an Islamic imperative. Christians will be encouraged by the eirenic tone of the letter and the fact that an Islamic document draws extensively on the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

It will be especially welcomed by Christian minorities in Muslim majority societies and Muslim minorities where there is a Christian majority.

'A Common Word between Us and You' could become a benchmark in the relations of two world religions.

We welcome the open letter.

Signed:

The Rt. Revd. John Packer,
Bishop of Ripon and Leeds

The Rt. Revd. Arthur Roche,
Bishop of Leeds, Chair of WYEC

The Revd. Ernie Whalley,
Regional Minister, the Baptist Church, Chair Elect of WYEC

The Revd. Kenneth Evans,
Chairman of the Yorkshire District of the Moravian Church

Pastor Gloria Hanley,
Chairperson, West Yorkshire African Caribbean Council of Churches

The Revd. Arnold Harrison,
Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod of the United Reformed Church

Major Bill Heeley,
Divisional Commander, Yorkshire Division of the Salvation Army

The Rt. Revd. Walter Jagucki,
Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Great Britain

The Rt. Revd. David James,
Bishop of Bradford

Eva Pinthus,
Representative of the Society of Friends

The Rt. Revd. Stephen Platten,
Bishop of Wakefield

The Rt. Revd. Tony Robinson,
Bishop of Pontefract and Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths' Forum

The Revd. Dr. Elizabeth A. Smith,
Chair of the Methodist District of Leeds

The Revd. Peter Whittaker,
Chair of the Methodist District of West Yorkshire

Background to the West Yorkshire Church Leaders' Statement

A Common Word Between Us and You brought together, unanimously, 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals for the first time, in October 2007. The signatories came from every denomination and school of thought in Islam. Every major Islamic country or region in the world was represented in this message, which was addressed to the leaders of all the world's churches, and indeed to all Christians everywhere. The report emphasised that the two themes of 'Love of God' and 'Love of Neighbour' were central to both Islam and Christianity. It was suggested that these principles might be a foundation for building a better relationship between Christians and Muslims. What is more, in drawing up the document, the scholars made extensive use of Christian scriptures. This recognition of the Bible was itself a generous act. It gives rise to hope for a more peaceful and less confrontational relationship between followers of the two faiths.

For more information see www.acommonword.com

There are around 150,000 Muslims in West Yorkshire.

Other responses to *A Common Word*:

The **Archbishop of Canterbury** has responded by saying that, 'The call to respect, peace and goodwill should now be taken up by Christians and Muslims at all levels and in all countries'

The Vatican has announced that **Pope Benedict** 'wishes to express his deep appreciation for the gesture, for the positive spirit which inspired the text and for a call for the common commitment to promoting peace in the world'

West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council (WYEC) is the collective voice of a million Christians across West Yorkshire. WYEC exists to draw churches in West Yorkshire together into greater understanding and unity and enable them to bear a more united witness in the community. It encourages churches to do things ecumenically, at every level, from local churches to Church Leaders. The backbone is the personal covenant by which the Church Leaders have committed themselves to work closely together, to the greater glory of God. For more information see <http://wyec.co.uk>

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