

Transform Work UK National Conference

Diversity Workshop

This workshop was presented by Dr Adrian Miles.

The aim of the workshop was to explore how Christian workplace fellowships might be able to establish themselves within the framework of a company's equality diversity policy, examine the benefits of diversity and recognise how God might use diversity. Approximately 150 Christian Workplace Groups and more than 50 national Professional Associations are currently affiliated to Transform Work UK.

Four stages of development in the formation of a Christian Workplace Group were posited:

Early Formation
Organisational Recognition
Organisational Integration
Organisational Celebration

Two questions were posed for discussion:

1. At what stage of development in the Christian Group in your workplace?
2. Has the diversity framework within your workplace been helpful in your journey?

The groups represented included Warwickshire Police, the Probation Office, and the Health & Safety Executive of Merseyside (Bootle).

Of these, one fellowship was considered to be at stage 3, one at stage 1 and the other at stage 2. Diversity structures had been useful to two of the groups, resulting in help with funding and gaining representation in policy making; but communication can be an issue, particularly if there is no history, or the history of such involvement is negative.

The next question concerned how Christian groups can fit into diversity frameworks in a positive way, after all, diversity is at the heart of the Christian faith. There is a perception that Christians do not experience discrimination and that diversity frameworks exist to ensure the equal treatment of other faiths and minorities. This is not so; Christians do experience discrimination in many forms.

Moreover, diversity and equality are not the same; equality is about fairness, while diversity is about added value and celebration. Diversity is not possible without equality. If we look at how Jesus operated we see the perfect example of both. Jesus treated women with respect; mixed with those who were society's outcasts; healed the disabled and sick; and willingly reached out to many who were of different nationalities, religious faiths and different moral codes.

Diversity frameworks are important to employers, to one another, to the company or organisation, to the community and to God's kingdom. The hierarchy is not absolute, but a tool which can be of immense help.

Adrian then presented two case examples, namely Christians in the Audit Commission and British Telecom Christian Fellowship, both of which have made use of the diversity frameworks within their organisation to gain recognition and integration for their groups.

However, there are certain criteria which must be looked at before attempting to engage with the diversity framework.

The following questions need to be discussed:

1. What benefits can your group bring to the organisation?
2. What will your attitude be to other diversity groups?
3. How will you work with other network groups?
4. Why should the organisation support a single faith group – is a multi-faith group not likely to be better?

It is vital to be clear about the objectives of the group, and equally vital to ensure that prejudice of any kind will not be tolerated within it. Unity among the group members is also important – there will be different traditions represented, maybe different interpretations of Scripture. The value of having or not having an agreed statement of faith might have to be assessed. Jesus provides the focus for this unity. The practicalities of a multi-faith group are likely to be awkward – anything that seeks to water down the Christian faith will be unacceptable.

Ensure that it has been agreed how the group will be run on a practical level, and that you know precisely what you need from the diversity team. Also make sure you have some form of review and reporting mechanism in place.

Above all, establish good communication.

The benefits are likely to include increased commitment to the organisation and to colleagues within it ; positive relationships with other networks; high ethical standards; the release of potential; mutual support and encouragement and improved morale all round.

Conclusion

It takes time to grow anything, and Christian groups are no exception. Be prepared to move at God's pace, but don't be afraid to be bold!