

Faith and Black Lives Matter

In the name of the churches it serves, Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales has placed caring for migrant peoples, advocating for those who claim asylum in Wales, encouraging ethnic minority congregations and furthering the equalities and human rights alongside key partners and Welsh Government as a high priority. Aled Edwards, Chief Executive Officer of Cytûn, reports on organisations committed to promoting equality for all



The work began in earnest when asylum detainees were placed in Cardiff Prison in 2001. Following the 9:11 terrorist attack in New York the late Rhodri Morgan called faith leaders together. That dynamic led to the creation of the current Faith Communities Forum. Over the years, conversations have eased possible tensions between communities and have furthered distinctive church inspired initiatives such as establishing Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary.

These solid relationships were engaged fully at the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown as key leaders and officials sought to ensure that places of worship observed the restrictions. Above all, we were all mindful of the need to save lives. Efforts were made to ensure that faith customs were honoured concerning burials. Plans were put in place if the number of excess deaths became acute across Wales' diverse communities. Thankfully, Wales never reached those worst-case scenarios, but it would become apparent during the lockdown period that black, Asian and ethnic minority communities would suffer a disproportionate number of deaths.

Working with key stakeholders, including Christian leaders, the Welsh Government initiated a number of crucial processes. They included exploring both the medical and socio-economic reasons behind the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) deaths. I was privileged to serve as a member of Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna's subgroup. The group will continue to monitor progress made by Welsh Government alongside statutory bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission headed in Wales by the Reverend Ruth Coombs. Ruth is a member of the Cytûn Racial Justice Network which oversees the organisation's racial justice work. Marking George Floyd's death, good links have grown with partners in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and particularly with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe.

Cytûn has worked with Displaced People in Action (DPIA) during the lockdown seeking to ensure that asylum-seeking families receive data for phones and laptops. DPIA has pioneered the Welsh Refugee Doctors Training Scheme since 2002. The scheme may have enabled around 80 retrained refugee doctors to work in the NHS as GMC registered doctors.