

The human face of Amicus

Because of their work-situation, and sometimes the lack of clear lines of responsibility and accountability, faith workers can feel isolated when trouble strikes. That is when we really need someone to affirm us and stand by us. Amicus seeks to provide that "friend in need" in the form of the Local Area Representative (LAR). While the position is unpaid (apart from expenses) it is a way in which you can provide crucial help and support to a fellow faith worker, and feel the satisfaction that flows from that.

Obviously this is a responsible position, but then faith workers are already used to that. Full training is provided and there is support from regional and national officers as well. If you are concerned for your colleagues the why not become an LAR? More details faithworkers@amicustheunion.org

Your new Executive of the Faith Workers Branch

Chair	Gerry Barlow	Communications	Roger Stokes
Deputy Chair (office holders)	Malcolm Liles	Chaplain	Ray Owen
Deputy Chair (lay members)	Neil Bradley	Ordinary Member	Mike Bossingham
Secretary	Gill Ambrose	Ordinary Member	Tom Ambrose
Treasurer	Ray Billington	Ordinary Member	vacant

Contact the Executive at faithworkers@amicustheunion.org or 0845 108 2575.

A vacancy has arisen on the Executive. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Branch Executive, please e-mail Rachael.Maskell@amicustheunion.org for more information or to express an interest by 15 August 2006, and we will arrange an election to fill this place.

Amicus Faith Workers Annual Conference

Wortley Hall, Yorkshire, 6th-8th February 2006

It was a bright day, for February, as I arrived at a former stately home, Wortley Hall. It's a former holiday home for workers and their families, now run as a conference centre, and attracts many international groups.

We got right down to work on Monday afternoon with some great sessions on Workers' Rights, facilitated by EAD solicitors. We looked at the meaning of terms such as 'office holder' and their relevance to Clergy employment rights, and then considered the McClean proposals. This was followed by a session on how to organise as a Branch, before retiring to the bar for a well-earned drink.

Tuesday started with a session on Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures and moved onto looking at case studies and Data Protection. We enjoyed a late afternoon session of workshops before the AGM and more time in the bar; the things you have to do for this Union!

Wednesday wrapped up at lunchtime, following discussions on Health & Safety and on Bullying. And so, to our various parts of the UK, refreshed, but filled with new information to be digested and put into practice.

Neil Bradley – Amicus Faith Workers Branch Vice Chair

Branch website

It is important to have an attractive and up-to-date website for the Branch. We are in the process of reviewing our current site. What would you like to see on it? Would you be willing to help provide it? All we want are people who will help keep our page interesting. Please contact Mike Bossingham for more about this opportunity to strengthen our voice.

A happy retirement?

Pension funds are in trouble, and Church pension funds are no exception. The reasons may seem technical, changes in government regulations, increases in life expectancy and changes in assumptions when valuing schemes, but the effects are real and significant. As a new Fund the Church of England Pension Fund has been particularly vulnerable. An initial report from the Archbishops' Task Group looks at what has happened and issues that need to be considered. There are no easy solutions but it is a problem that needs urgent action and is reflected in a developing situation.

To find out more about this go to www.amicustheunion.org/nonprofit and go to the branch pages.

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FAITHWORKERS NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2006

Mandate for the future

Branch Chair, Gerry Barlow, outlines his vision for the next stage of the Branch's development. He calls for action and involvement so that we can all benefit from a greater presence. This will not only provide direct encouragement but also strengthen our call for proper conditions and professional standards of treatment.

Faith is a curious thing – we have all seen deeply held beliefs express themselves very powerfully indeed and it is quite scary when such attitudes lead to serious conflict. It should hardly be surprising therefore, that we who deal with faith leaders on behalf of our members often find ourselves facing a range of attitudes. As a result, we have been viewed as an unwelcome intruder to some, whilst to others, they are more than grateful for the insight that we, as Amicus, can bring to help resolve difficult situations.

We often hear people say, 'unions are inappropriate', and thus not wanted or are not really necessary. However since faith workers are usually office holders, they often have no structured means of dealing with issues. In fact, in reality those that suggest the law or unions are not the way to go, themselves are using the law to hide behind it so the faith worker cannot mount any sort of challenge, legal or otherwise when they feel they have been wronged. That is where Amicus can help.

I hardly need to say that as faith workers we should have systems in place for our workers, that set the standard for general worker relations, that should present a flag ship for all such relationships. However we want to set out our stall to change these things fundamentally.

The DTI initiated and consulted with Faith Working Groups as to how they can treat their workers fairly. This has at least raised the issues as such. It is an ongoing discussion. The Church of England has decided to set up an equivalent canonically enforced system which enshrines most employment rights and builds in proper appeals systems. The first fruits are the Clergy Discipline Measure and current discussions on the McClean proposals to bring in a law code for CofE ministers. Other denominations have made some indications they want to take the issues seriously but none have yet built in the appropriate systems or even indicated they will do so. Giving out some of the Section 23 rights (included in the Employment Relations Act 1999) is one thing, but they all stop short of any sort of independent appeal system. Finally there have been some major rulings in the law courts that have definitely challenged understanding of the relationships of responsibility between different status of Office Holders. As an aside, some Law Lords have commented the whole distinction of office holder and employee status needs to be looked at.

It is in this context, that Amicus wants to become the helpful body for all parties in any faith worker disputes. Hence our Local Area Representatives want to be people who are about the work of the Almighty in the world.



We want to be seen as people who are in the business of reconciliation. This means bringing together people with conflicting views, in positions that are often entrenched, apparently opposed and, on the face of it, irreconcilable.

And because of what we as people of faith really believe, we expect to be welcomed into difficult situations to help bring about the "faith" outcome. We are really looking to sort the issues as best possible, and at the end to try to get both parties reconciled. At the minimum we hope that the parties would be able to shake hands and wish each other well, to forgive each other as need be, bringing reconciliation (even if they part) so both parties can really get on with their lives with the past structurally dealt with. We are agents of the Almighty desiring to bring honour to His name in a disappointing situation of conflict.

From our experience such action is desperately needed and thus we hope we will be welcomed into situations by all Faith leaders who find themselves dealing with these difficult matters.

Our LAR's are not just negotiators, they should also be agents of reconciliation in broken situations. That is a huge challenge and a huge opportunity. Something I hope we will all be able to dedicate ourselves to over the next few years.

Faith Workers Helpline: 0845 108 2575 Email: faithworkers@amicustheunion.org

Not a member? Join Amicus online – www.amicustheunion.org
or call the recruitment hotline free 0800 587 1222

The Vision for the Faith Workers Branch

We also intend to pursue several goals as a Branch over these next 2 years:

Our basic aim is to grow numerically so more Office Holders can call on effective and expert help in times of need, whether it be for a dispute or for legal/expert help on a current issue facing the group/person. Increased numbers will also give us a stronger voice in any discussions as well.

We want to build good and open relationships with Faith Group/Denominational leaders. Our desire is to build trust and discuss the worker relationships, the ways the leaders are implementing the DTI imperatives, and offer support and help in any ways we can.

Ultimately we would like to aim to be a Branch that sets standards for other Branches of Amicus to aspire to. We want to be a flagship branch rather than simply representing a few members, who happen to have Faith. To that end we want to set standards so that a Faith Workers Trade Union Branch will be seen in a positive light to both the Faith Community and to the Trade Union Movement.

Are these big Challenges? Yes, indeed, but for us they are opportunities we intend as an executive to grasp firmly. Thus we want to invite all members to participate with us in this process. We believe the recent increase of members joining is the beginning of a momentum - we want to nurture and encourage this.

To achieve these things we need all members to help. Hence please expect to be contacted in the near future to assist in this vision, and in the interim do not hold back, contact your LAR or the help line. We want to train more LAR's – you could volunteer!

We also want to involve members in recruitment activity that spreads our vision wider and wider. This is not just an inspirational message - it is a call to action.

Gerry Barlow – Amicus Faith Workers Branch Chair Faithworkers@amicustheunion.org



Safe at work?

Health and Safety is becoming increasingly seen as an important consideration in working conditions. Mike Bossingham writes of what he has witnessed and calls for effective systems to protect faith workers from the insidious effects of bullying.

When I became a representative for the Faith Workers section of Amicus the Union, I was deeply saddened to discover that a high percentage of my case load consisted of situations where bullying was being alleged.

Amicus defines bullying as “Persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions, which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress.”

A disturbing element is the damage that is done to the target of bullying. I have seen a number of members who have lost their self-esteem and self-confidence and come to accept what is being said to them and even believe that they deserve what has happened to them. In this work I have been made aware of both physical effects – headaches, inability to sleep – and psychological effects – anxiety, depression, tearfulness, poor concentration and a feeling of dread.

It is clear to see that violence and the threat of violence is bullying, but it can take many other forms, like repeated shouting at a target, belittling, humiliation and ridicule - even in front of others. The setting of impossible targets, constant questioning or overriding of authority can also be bullying, as can spreading rumours, starting whispering campaigns or excluding and ignoring someone.

It takes great courage to stand up and fight against bullying and the overall cumulative effect of these symptoms is to make it very difficult for someone to do this.

There will be many cases where a quick and quiet word from a superior to the culprit is enough to stop the bullying. This is one of the most effective ways of dealing with it. However not all superiors deal with bullying in this simple but effective manner. There also will be many other cases that Amicus will never see simply because the target does not have the protection of union membership.

The shocking fact is that once cases have got this far the mainstream Churches do not handle them at all well. Many churches still have no 'Grievance Procedures' nor 'Bullying and Harassment Policies'. This forces a target of bullying to use procedures which are not suitable for the situation they face.

The main option is often to raise a formal complaint. However, this is not easy for a couple of reasons. The first is that it takes a great deal of courage for someone already harmed by bullying to enter into an adversarial process against someone who has already done them great harm. They feel that complaining will only make the bullying worse.

The second is that most complaints and disciplinary procedures are geared up to deal with someone who has committed at least one major misdemeanour. As explored earlier, however, bullying tends to consist of a host of minor actions and the misdemeanour is in the effect of the sum of these actions rather than any one individual action.

For these reasons, cases are often rejected. They need to be handled in a different way, but most churches offer no other way.

The usual way for the church to deal with someone who is a bully is to move the target, the recipient of bullying. This has the unfortunate effect of convincing the target further that they are to blame for their own bullying and furthermore fails to challenge the conduct of the bully who is then free to practice their skills on the next target. Add to this the upheaval that there may well be for the target and it can be seen that way of dealing with it is far from the ideal.

I believe that the failure of the churches to challenge the bullying behaviour of some of its members and clergy is damaging people's ministries and consequently the work of the Kingdom of God.

In response to this, churches should:-

- 1) Recognise and accept that bullying is happening in their organisation.
- 2) Encourage and equip those in authority in their organisation to listen carefully and sympathetically to targets of bullying and then act quickly and decisively in each case.
- 3) Respond to bullying in a way that challenges the conduct of the bully rather than simply moving on the target.
- 4) Produce a 'Bullying and Harassment' Policy and Procedure.
- 5) Sign up to the DTI's 'Dignity at Work' scheme.

Due to a recent House of Lords' decision, bullying cases, where discrimination is a factor, can be brought to an employment tribunal. However this is a complex procedure and anyone embarking on such a case will need expert assistance. This is yet another good reason for members of the clergy to belong to a member of a union.

What to do if you are being bullied

What to do if you believe you are being bullied

These suggestions come from the Dignity at Work project run by the DTI and Amicus:

- 1) **Respect yourself.** As soon as you encounter behaviour which is not acceptable to you, put an immediate end to it. If you allow anyone to make inappropriate comments on more than one occasion you set a dangerous precedent and it becomes more difficult to stop.
- 2) **Confront the bully.** The office bully thrives off the fact that you are too scared to confront them. Perhaps a small word in a public place may actually put an end to your workplace nightmare?
- 3) **Keep a diary.** As soon as you are on the receiving end of intimidating behaviour, make a diary to record all of the details - they could become evidence in the long run. You can also keep e-mails and letters, and note who else is present - they could act as a witness.
- 4) **Don't miss out.** Just because one person in the office is being unpleasant make sure it does not jeopardise your relationship with other colleagues by refusing to go out for lunch or after work drinks. Failing to do so will isolate you.
- 5) **Speak to your manager or a senior colleague.** It is rare for a bully to pick on just one person in the office. Arrange a meeting with your Manager or another senior colleague if your manager is the problem, to see if the bully has a track record within the company - they may already be on their way out.
- 6) **Get support.** Being a member of a trade union is very important throughout this process. They can provide the support and expertise in this kind of situation. As well as having them onside to deal with the technical legal process their holistic approach can point you in the right direction of getting all the support you need for what is often an emotionally draining process. It is important to note that in most unions you need to be a member for some time before you can get this support. Please do not wait until you have problems before joining – usually you have to be a member for some time before you can receive legal assistance.
- 7) **Don't let the bully drag you down.** Make sure that you have things to look forward to outside work, like evening classes, going to the gym, seeing your friends etc, as your confidence will receive a much needed boost.

About Amicus

Amicus is not only the trade union which is spearheading a project with the DTI to combat bullying, but has a dedicated Branch for Faith Workers, which has developed expertise in representing ministers from all denominations and faiths. As a member of Amicus you can expect to receive professional support from a Local Area Representative, and if necessary from Officers of the union or our legal specialists. We not only support individuals in their times of difficulty, but can make representations on their behalf. You never know when you might find yourself in a difficult situation when you need that additional support to see you through this time, so it is best to join Amicus now. Amicus also uses its experience to campaign nationally to progress policies and practices in the church.

Useful Websites: Dignity at Work - www.dignityatwork.org
BALM (Bullied and Abused Lives in Ministry) - www.balmnet.co.uk
Amicus - www.amicustheunion.org

Mike is currently a Methodist Minister, he runs the Family Friendly Charitable Trust and is a Local Area Representative for Amicus. He has supported a number of ministers who have been targets of bullying.