

# Faith and cohesive communities

## *The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom*



Report on the  
2016 National  
Meeting

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The Inter Faith Network for the UK  
2 Grosvenor Gardens London SW1W 0DH  
Tel: 020 7730 0410 Fax: 020 7730 0414  
Email: [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)  
[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

 [www.facebook.com/IFNetUK](https://www.facebook.com/IFNetUK)

 [www.twitter.com/IFNetUK](https://www.twitter.com/IFNetUK)

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Report of the 2016 National Meeting

held on Wednesday 19 October 2016  
at the DeafBlind UK Conference Centre, Peterborough

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# Welcome and introduction

The Rt Revd Richard Atkinson OBE

Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network

*The meeting began with a time of silence together to give thanks for the work of those in this country and throughout the world which contributes to better inter faith understanding and cooperation.*

Welcome to our National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network. In the room we have colleagues who have travelled from around the UK and also representing the different types of bodies that are in membership of the Inter Faith Network.

We have an important theme, drawing together different aspects of faith and cohesive communities and exploring what that means in our increasingly diverse society. We have an excellent array of presenters and facilitators, young and old and a very wide collection of experience and insight in the room. It's all about us sharing that and growing together.

We're delighted to have with us this morning Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government, who has responsibility for faith and cohesion issues.

We're glad to be here at the DeafBlind UK Conference Centre. We thank their staff and all those who are making us welcome here. One of the discussion groups later today is about faith and cohesion and the importance of being open and welcoming to people of all abilities and disabilities, and we are delighted that Christine Hardy of DeafBlind UK will be with us through the day.

Just to set the scene, this summer, like many of you, I was celebrating the 90th birthday of Her Majesty The Queen. One of

the events I went to was in Queen's Park in Bedford, one of the most diverse communities just outside the town. It was organised by a local committee representing a range of groups, many of them from the faith communities that are located there. Among these were the mosque, gurdwara and the local church which have a faith trail that is used by many schools and others locally. It was a great celebration and it also spoke powerfully of the contribution that faith and faith communities make to a cohesive society. In particular, it was a come-together, but also an opportunity for people to make contributions that were distinctive of their traditions.

Today, we are exploring one of the most significant contributions that our faith communities – we – can make to the United Kingdom, drawing on our different traditions and what we share: things like a sense of common humanity, a love of neighbour, service to society, justice and other things. This is reflected in this room through our organisations and through the local networks through which action makes a difference. As a Trustee of Near Neighbours I am aware of many such local interactions.

I don't need to remind any of us that we are also here up against some hard questions and facing inter faith challenges, as well as intra faith challenges. There are the ever present issues of extremism, and questions such as those of equality.

Another of the events I went to in Luton recently was FACES, Faiths against Child Sexual Exploitation. What struck me about it was that not only was it the faith communities coming together to respond

to a pressing and urgent concern that affects us all, but also that there was also a real sense of openness, challenge and desire to explore whatever the harder areas are sometimes for us to talk about. It is in that spirit that I certainly approach today and that I hope we all approach today, and I, like you, am looking forward to what is to come.

There is much that we will want to affirm and celebrate, but we will need also to be reflective – to explore, to challenge, and shape that vision together and then go back from this meeting and bring it into our own contexts.

It is a great pleasure to invite up here to welcome us Mr Jaspal Singh, the Chair of Peterborough Inter-Faith Council.

# A Welcome to Peterborough

Jaspal Singh

Chair, Peterborough Inter-Faith Council

Honoured guests, ladies and gentleman, Lord Bourne, may I warmly welcome you all on behalf of Peterborough Inter-Faith Council to this cathedral city of Peterborough.

Peterborough Inter-Faith Council has been established for 35 years and I have been fortunate enough to serve at its Chair for a number of years. We have members from the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities of Peterborough.

We are blessed with a wonderful cathedral in Peterborough, which will be celebrating its 900th anniversary in 2018. We have five mosques, two gurdwaras, a Hindu mandir, a Buddhist temple, a Jewish meeting place and numerous Christian churches.

Peterborough Inter-Faith Council has strong links with local government. Relations between the faith communities in Peterborough are generally good to excellent – partly as a result of the work that Peterborough Inter-Faith Council does, and also because of the work that the faith groups do themselves in Peterborough. Cohesion, ladies and gentlemen, is the name of the game and so I am very pleased to see that this is the topic today. I am really looking forward to the discussions and numerous speakers.

I would like make a small presentation on behalf of the Peterborough Inter-Faith Council to the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

*IFN's Co-Chairs received a plaque from Mr Singh.*

I would like to end by saying that for cohesion to work, there is a catalyst which sometimes we miss, and that catalyst is kindness. In this building here they would agree with me that kindness is a language which the blind can read and the deaf can hear. It needs to be present in all our cohesion efforts.

# What are the signs of a 'cohesive community' and what role do faith communities play in this?

**Bishop Dr Joe Aldred**

Multicultural and Pentecostal Relations, Churches Together in England

**Bishop Atkinson:** We move on to our first contribution which is from Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, Multicultural and Pentecostal Relations, Churches Together in England.

**Bishop Aldred:** Thank you very much, Co-Chairs, brothers and sisters.

To ask someone from a Christian Pentecostal background to speak about 'signs' could be seen a mischievous act since 'signs' are a stock in trade of Pentecostals. Another mischievous act is to ask a Pentecostal to speak for ten minutes or so. A Pentecostal speech could go on for an hour or so.

If I veer towards my African identity, signs become not just signs, but signs and wonders. We might expect to see and hear the miracle of speaking in an unknown tongue, the sick healed, the deaf hear, some say even the dead come back to life. However, I will let you into a little secret from that background, miraculous signs are a hugely contested phenomenon within Pentecostalism. One person's miracle of a wheel chair-bound person walking out of that chair healed, is another person's temporary adrenalin surge that lasts no longer than the highly charged healing service.

I begin here because 'signs and wonders' is a religious expression that I am familiar with, mostly from my point of view as an observer and a critic, but also because any reflection on the signs of a cohesive community needs to ponder whether we are more concerned with aesthetics and make believe change, or with genuine transformation and renewal that helps us discover the best of ourselves as individuals and as a community. The one maintains an appearance of wellness, the other demands a commitment to the long haul of slow, intentional and deep rooted change.

In my main field of work, I speak of Christian unity as the cohering of difference, based on a principle of the *oikoumene*, the one household of God to which we all belong. Not for me then the denying of difference, the "Oh, I don't see colour"; but rather an affirmation of the integrity of individual and group identities as a basis for respect, mutuality and collaboration.

I am not idealistic about unity or cohesion, more practical and functional. However, I do begin from an assumption, which I admit may be idealistic, that although different as human beings – as Christians, or as people of different faiths – we share a foundational identity, a corporate



belonging to one humanity made in the image of one creator, as Christians as a people of one faith in one Jesus Christ, or together as seekers after one God from different perspectives.

So, what are some of the signs of this cohesive community, this cohering of difference? I want to list a few though I do not have time to explore them all. Then I will close my talk with three vignettes drawn from my work to date, and a brief thought about the role of faith in a cohesive community.

First, a list of 10 quick thoughts about signs, contestable though they may be:

- a sense of belonging to something bigger than ourselves, an idea of transcendence;
- a sense of being a stakeholder in a grand schema;
- a recognition that difference is in the DNA of the cosmos, and therefore difference is in the DNA of us – difference is not a threat or something tradable for a greater cause;
- affirmation of the integrity of the self and of the other;
- a commitment to the healthy flourishing of individuals and individual communities enhancing their abilities to be part of and to contribute to the whole;
- care and nurture of the least of these (Jesus, in my tradition said this, “what you do to the least of these you have done unto me”);
- insightful, visionary, courageous leadership – leadership gurus say that everything begins or falls with leadership;
- within a thriving diverse community, ongoing intellectual engagement and challenge;

- dogged determination to make cohesion work, however imperfectly that working may be; and
- an acknowledgement that nothing is ever fixed permanently – a response that was right ten years ago may not be now and we have to revisit some things, a bit like the car needing to be serviced every now and then.

I have tried to employ these and other principles in my various settings of work and ministry. Firstly, in my Christian denomination we were at our most cohesive, I believe, and our most productive in the Church of God of Prophecy, when we embraced unequivocally an exclusive ecclesiology, ie an idea that we alone were ‘the church’. Moving from exclusivity to a more egalitarian and generous worldview seemed to some counter-intuitive and even destructive; and the outcome has been, as they warned it might be, the creation of a messy and less certain ecclesial space. Yet, identifying with and working alongside, enriching and transforming others is what has helped me to be here with you today. So a commitment to embracing ‘the other’ may be messy, but we make more progress when we are less isolationist and self-centred.

My work in what I call ‘intercultural ecumenism’ over the past twenty years has sought to empower those on the fringes to become secure in their own heritage and to make their contributions to the wider community. We have done this through various means. For example: recognising that equal numbers between black and white people on a Trustee Board does not necessarily mean equality in terms of influence and power; supporting literary platforms like a Black Theology Forum to develop writing and speaking skills leading to practitioners being published in the *Journal of Black Theology*, in anthologies, and supporting those who excel such as Professor Beckford, Professor Reddie, and many others; and in recent times working to create a Pentecostal presidency in Churches Together in England to sit

alongside the presidencies of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of Westminster, and other church sector leaders. These have all been signs of cohesion, arduously worked at to make for a richer society.

And finally, in a report published a year ago by the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (CORAB) chaired by Baroness Butler Sloss we challenged, much to the discomfiture of some, assumed hegemonies. From Anglican bishops in the House of Lords to who appears on Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*. I can't argue that every recommendation of CORAB is worthy, but I can argue for legitimate contestations in a constantly changing landscape if we hope to have a cohesive society.

Finally, the role of faith in all of this. From my Christian perspective 'the individual' and 'the community' of faith' are congruent components of the wider community that should be nurtured, supported and affirmed to be the best they can be. Like Gramsci's organic intellectual, or Jesus' salt of the earth and light of the world metaphor, religious individuals and communities should seek to bring understanding, a prophetic voice and action, clarity, and reasoning based on enduring qualities like selfless love that brings healing, restoration, and human flourishing. Selfishness, exclusive chatter and action, unreasonable Tebbit tests that force people to choose between being in or out rather than affirm belonging should be resisted within and beyond religious communities. And religious communities predicated on the truth of humanity made in the image of God should always leave open the door to redemption and transformation for the lost or the alienated.

In the end we are in this together and must commit ourselves to one another's flourishing even when things go belly up, because we pursue a vision of the good society, and we believe in a transcendence that keeps calling us to a greater encounter with the divine other and with each other. 'Signs' are always contestable as they are in the example of differing understandings of

the person leaping out of their wheelchair, healed or not, with which I began, but as a metaphor of the things we have to do they are reminders we must never give up the pursuit of that cohesive society, however imperfect all that we do may seem.

Thank you.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Joe, thanks for that mixture of practical reality, theological insight and vision.

# Inter faith dialogue and understanding and community cohesion

## Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government

**Bishop Atkinson:** It is an honour to invite to speak Lord Bourne who is Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government and whose responsibilities include faith and integration and community cohesion.

**Lord Bourne:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much indeed for the invitation to be here today and to speak to you at your meeting. It is an important opportunity for you to get together and reflect on your work. It is good to see here present a number of friends met at events both in the London area and elsewhere.

Thank you to the people who have come from throughout the country, including the Young Ambassadors from Nottingham who have had time off from their valuable lessons to be here. It's marvellous to see you. Thanks for your continuing engagement. I certainly would encourage the Inter Faith Network to continue to engage with young people as you are doing here.

### Contribution of inter faith

The Prime Minister has made clear her priority is to make sure that Britain is a country that works for everyone. One thing she hates is unfairness in society and I think that's a very good starting point.

Faith communities have shown time and again that they are willing and able to play

their part in making this country the success story that it is. Our country is stronger by far when each of us, whatever our background, has a chance to contribute. Religious belief guides the moral outlook of many, inspires great numbers of people to public service and provides help to those in need.

Across the country, people from different faiths are working hard in countless churches, mosques, temples, gurdwaras, synagogues and elsewhere, and in charities and community groups, to make their communities better places.

In Government we are supporting practical co-operation between faith groups and harnessing their energy to do good. This is integral to what you believe in and we believe in. If we were able to replicate what's happening around the country, what is happening today, we'd have cracked it. It is of course clearly not that simple, but nevertheless that is the challenge.

### Government support for inter faith

It's in this spirit that we provide funding to the Inter Faith Network for the UK. Your work is very important. You are helping to bring together local faith and inter faith groups, reducing isolation and supporting people so they can take part in inter faith activity. This is most tangible through Inter

Faith Week, when people from different backgrounds have an opportunity to meet and begin to build trust.

I have seen examples of inter faith engagement happening around the country from almost my first day in this job when I visited a gurdwara in Southall and found to my astonishment that people of different faiths were there working together at grassroots level. That's the sort of thing that rarely gets into the media, of course. The media are very good at spreading the bad news but there's an awful lot of good news that's happening and we must get that good news out.

Also important is that the meetings and events you facilitate help ensure that issues can be tackled and we have seen this recently through your work on how faith communities can respond to hate crime.

During times of crisis, or challenge, your coordinated joint public responses, illustrate that working together is possible and is positive. Most recently we saw the Network respond to the appalling terrorist attacks in France, and to community relations following the European Union referendum result, and to the tragic death of Asad Shah in Glasgow.

No matter what our theological and other differences are, we need to remember that we are all human beings and that, as such, we need to deal with disagreements, no matter how firmly felt, with respect and courtesy, understanding and good humour. The Inter Faith Network helps us to do just that.

Faith is also at the heart of a number of other integration projects which my Department has funded and helped to develop.

- The Near Neighbours programme, bringing together people from all faiths and backgrounds in some of our most diverse and deprived communities. Since its launch in 2011, more than 1,100 projects have been set up, involving over a million people.

- The Board of Deputies of British Jews partnering with Twitter on projects that have brought together young women from three faith sixth-forms (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) to learn computer coding together.
- Muslim, Jewish and Christian organisations in Leeds working together to set up a pop-up café, 'Toast Love Coffee', to enable people from the diverse Harehills community to come together and meet.
- The Sikh Heritage Centre in Leicester (a city I know well) that brought together Muslim, Hindu and Sikh residents who are living with long term poor health and supporting each other through discussion about health and well-being and sharing cultural and religious beliefs and much more.
- Mitzvah Day, led by the Jewish community, and Sadaqa Day, led by the Muslim community, which are days of social action that are designed to inspire social action throughout the year.
- The Big Iftar which sees mosques across the country open their doors to everyone at the end of Ramadan, to break the fast and to bring communities together. And other places of worship and community centres are joining in. Indeed, one of the biggest Iftar events this year took place at the West London Synagogue.

The projects we support may seem small and local but that is their strength. They build friendships across communities, creating the networks of trust that give communities the strength to work to resolve difficult local issues, overcoming misunderstandings, suspicion and intolerance.

We want people to be proud of their faith and to use their faith to create positive change across the country.

## Inter faith dialogue

Inter faith dialogue is important for developing common ground, bringing people together and increasing tolerance. But it needs to be more than the Chief Rabbi talking to the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the imam of a mosque sitting on a forum with the pandit of a nearby temple – although of course that is important. It needs to be people, like the members of the local synagogue, the local church congregation or the people who attend the local mosque, temple and gurdwara, coming together around common interests at grassroots level, doing things together, helping to improve their neighbourhood.

The Inter Faith Network is central to this effort. With your large network of local inter faith groups and national faith groups you are in a perfect position to get people of all faiths talking and working together for the benefit of their local area and wider society. You can encourage communities to get involved in local inter faith projects and initiatives; creating opportunities for them to come together with people they might not normally meet, in a warm and positive atmosphere. In this way you can be the catalyst for a larger movement for positive change.

We should be proud of our success as a tolerant, integrated nation. While we should not be complacent – there's much more to do – we should note that the Community Life Survey (2015-16) found that 89% of people agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. There is still the 11% to work on. I am not saying everything is done. But I don't think we should bash ourselves up too much. There are successes out there and we are building on those successes.

## Hate Crime, Anti-Semitism, Anti-Muslim hatred

We know that inter faith can also involve more challenging conversations about our beliefs, values, attitudes and differences.

We were all, I am sure, horrified by the spike in reported hate crime which happened after the EU referendum result. It has rightly focused greater attention on how people treat others who are different or identified as foreigners.

We are now seeing levels of reported hate crime reduce to the kind of peaks and troughs observable in previous years. That's not success, but at least means that the challenge is evened out, as it were.

Let me be clear – hate crime of any kind, directed against any community, race or religion has no place in our society. Hate crime of any sort is a crime against all of us, not just a crime against a particular group. All communities must be able to live their lives free from fear of verbal or physical attack.

We believe the best way to tackle hate crime is through effective implementation of the UK's strong legislation against racial and religious discrimination and racially and religiously motivated crime. We also need to do more to understand the hate crime we are seeing and to tackle it. That is why we have published a new hate crime action plan covering all forms of hate crime. It includes measures to increase the reporting of hate incidents and crimes. There is evidence that that is happening. It also involves action to help victims and help to put an end to this pernicious behaviour by encouraging reporting.

## Conclusions

We are living in difficult times internationally and these are times of uncertainty at home as well. I don't want to minimise that but, at the same time, the message I want to give out today is that much is being done and communities up and down the country are doing an awful lot – for which we're incredibly grateful.

Every single contribution made by people in communities around this great country of ours is important – not least in Peterborough where terrific work is happening I know. Thank you Jaspal for the



warm welcome that you gave us today to Peterborough. Peterborough is an exemplar in many ways of things that are going right. As is Waltham Forest, which I know is also represented here today, where steps are being taken to end gang violence.

I really welcome the role that the Inter Faith Network is playing in supporting people to come together to focus on what they have in common and to celebrate differences, which we have of course, and to promote understanding. Thank you very much indeed for all the work you're doing. I am really grateful and want to engage positively with everything you're doing. Please keep me closely involved and anything I can do to help I will.

I hope that the rest of the day goes well and that Inter Faith Week next month is successful.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Lord Bourne, thank you for what you said, for the affirmation of our work, for the support that Government gives us to enable that work and for the partnership that we have together.

We've got just a couple of minutes for questions and answers.

**Mehri Niknam (Joseph Interfaith Foundation):** The subject of this year's annual university seminar for the Joseph Inter Faith Foundation is 'Hate crime – its causes and effects'. It is student-led and particularly directed at Islamic Societies and Jewish Societies.

**Jenny Kartupelis (World Congress of Faiths):** Lord Bourne, thank you for your affirmation of all the work that's done in the name of inter faith. You mentioned Near Neighbours, a programme that seems to be doing excellent work at grassroots level in some areas of England. Is the Government likely to consider extending that into other regions?

**Pejman Khojasteh (International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)):** We are arranging an event for 30 November – it's about the role of faith

communities and their contribution to UK society as a whole.

**Fakhera Rehman (Kirklees Faiths Forum):** You mentioned that hate crime figures are reduced. As a British Muslim female, that's not my experience and the experience of my friends and family. So I am just interested to know from when it has been reduced?

**Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)):** Recently the Government put out a document about hate crime and it is quite a concern that mainly the Abrahamic faiths are mentioned there. I think that the Government needs to be aware that other faiths face equally difficult situations.

**Lord Bourne:** First of all, on the last point from Mohinder – absolutely we take the point. All faiths are involved in making sure that our society is a more tolerant society and a better society and we need to display equality on that and I hope we do so.

In relation to the brilliantly put across representation from Kirklees in Yorkshire, hate crime figures are produced via the Police and the Office of National Statistics and I think they are reliable figures. The figures from the last few weeks – which we receive on a weekly basis rather than a monthly one because of the seriousness of this – are evening out and are now comparable with what the figures were this time last year. There was a spike after the EU referendum, there's no doubt about it, but it has evened out over a period of time. So not to minimise that people are suffering hate crime every hour of every day and until we have eliminated it, the job is not done, but I just wanted to provide the reassurance that it is not at the level that it was at the time of the EU referendum.

Hate crime is directed at Muslim and Jewish communities and it's happening to other communities as well. It's happening to the Sikh community. The essence of the message I want to get across – and I think schools have an important part in this, hence how important it is for our young

people to be here – is that hate crime is a crime against all of us. We must get the message across that it is unacceptable against any member of any community in our country.

In answer to the question about Near Neighbours, that is a project that we've backed locally.

I can't second guess what the Chancellor is going to do in the Autumn Statement, but the Department believes in this work, the Government believes in it, and the Prime Minister believes in it.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you, once again.

# Dialogue on the spot and plenary discussion

**Bishop Atkinson:** We've just got a few minutes now for a conversation amongst ourselves which is called 'Dialogue on the Spot'. This is an opportunity to turn to our neighbours, particularly to somebody you have not met previously, even if that means just moving to engage. We've got about six or seven minutes of conversation and we might have a couple of minutes of feedback and comment.

*[Conversations ensued]*

**Bishop Atkinson:** Would anyone like to share one or two reactions, responses, thoughts from their conversations?

**Canon Bede Gerrard (South East England Faiths Forum):** Bishop Joe talked about salt and light. We had a conference in Oxford and we were told not to be disheartened, because it takes very little salt and very little light to make a difference. If there's a few of us working, we can make a difference. So don't be disheartened if the young people aren't there or the old people aren't there or whatever. In salt and light, you are really living.

**Bishop Dr Joe Aldred (Churches Together in England):** What came up in the conversation there was the way in which, in being in an inter faith context, (I mentioned Jesus' use of 'the least of these'), there appear to be some things which are often either side-lined or scarcely mentioned whilst others seem to get much more prominence. The question is, is there any way of changing the landscape so that there is true equality within the inter faith?

**Pejman Khojasteh (International Association for Religious Freedom (British**

**Chapter)):** I am a Muslim and I was talking to a Jain representative. I said that one contribution that we make to humanity is raising awareness because the greatest problem we have in the world right now is needless violence.

**Rabbi Maurice Michaels:** I was in dialogue with Fazal Rahim from Oldham Inter Faith Forum and what we found in our discussion was a similarity, a reciprocity in reaching out to the other in the way in which you demonstrate that you care. For example, Fazal was telling me about having a Holocaust Memorial Day programme in the mosque for the Jewish community and I was telling him about having an Iftar for the Muslim community in a synagogue. I think that when we demonstrate that it's not just that we can sit together and talk together, but we can actually invite each other's communities into our places of worship, that's when it works.

**Jamie Spurway (Interfaith Scotland):** I just want to make a couple of points relating to hate crime. I think there is an important observation to be made about the wide gap between the reporting of hate crime and the reality of it on the ground. A Muslim lady earlier and the Sikh gentleman said that. In Glasgow we're conscious of the terrible impact that hate crime against Muslim, Jewish and Sikh communities is having at the moment. A lot of people tell us they won't report it to the police either because they're fearful of the police or they don't have faith it's going to change anything. So data is an indicator of hate crime only, and does not fully reflect the reality on the ground.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you.



# Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum

Councillor Saima Mahmud and Canon Steven Saxby

**Bishop Atkinson:** I have the pleasure to introduce Councillor Saima Mahmud and Canon Steven Saxby from the Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum (WFFCF). They're going to tell us a little about the work of WFFCF and its wide range of activities, particularly including a focus on hate crime, but also assisting refugees, developing work with young people, dialogue and much more.

Thank you, particularly, to Councillor Mahmud for rearranging some commitments to be with us this morning. We are very appreciative of that. Steven, it's good to have you here as a long-term inter faith practitioner as well as a priest working for London Churches Social Action.

**Councillor Mahmud:** I am a local councillor for the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It was great of Lord Bourne to give us a shout out in his presentation.

Steven and I are going to do a double act, I'm going to explain a little bit about why it's so important for us in Waltham Forest and then hand over to Steven.

I've lived in Waltham Forest my whole life. It's always been a very diverse borough, rich in its diversity. We have around 270,000 residents and 104,000 households. Just to give you an idea of the make-up of the borough: 48% of residents are from a minority ethnic background; the top five countries of origin for residents born overseas are Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Jamaica and India; the top five languages spoken locally other than English are Urdu, Polish, Romanian, Turkish and Lithuanian; 1 in 4 residents (26%) residents do not

speak English as their main language compared to 8% nationally and the majority can speak English very well; about 6% of the borough's residents have said that they either do not speak English well or at all; between the 2001 and 2011 censuses the proportion of White/British/Irish residents fell from 58% to 38% in Waltham Forest while the proportion of other ethnic groups increased. So Waltham Forest is ethnically a very diverse borough.

We have also a diverse range of faith communities in the Borough. Christianity remains the main religion, with 48% of residents identifying as Christians in the most recent census. 22% identified as Muslims, an increase from 15% in the 2001 Census.

This picture of the diversity in Waltham Forest will give you an idea of why it's so important that we continue to engage with different communities in our Borough.

**Canon Saxby:** I think it's fair to say that in Waltham Forest there are very good relationships between the different faith communities going back many years. I came to work in Waltham Forest in 2003. That was soon after the events of 9/11 and the riots in the Northern cities. The new language of faith communities and community cohesion was fostered by those events at the time. One of my roles was to help to set up WFFCF. We have about 200 faith organisations in the borough: about 150 Christian congregations, 16 mosques, 3 synagogues, temples and other places of worship and other worshipping communities. Through the time that we've

been operating we've always had a very strong emphasis on today's theme which is 'cohesive communities'. We have worked very closely with the Council over the years and also with the Police and other partners in the community.

Some of the things we've done over the years have included initiatives around knife crime. We've had knife bins outside religious venues. We've also had education programmes where we've trained religious leaders to be 'health preachers' and to be 'environment preachers'.

In the last year we've had a real emphasis in our work on three particular things: harmony, cohesion and work around the refugee crisis.

Harmony is something that is at the heart of what we do together. We are committed to trying to build understanding between our different faith communities about who we are and what we represent and what we have to offer to our community. Every year we have an inter faith walk where we go to different religious venues. That's always a highlight of a year. I know that happens in many other places as well. We also have an inter faith fayre, in the middle of Waltham town centre, where we set up stalls and people give out information and we have presentations throughout the afternoon about the different religious traditions in the Borough.

It is a good sign that we are, despite our differences, working together in our local community. We are also planning this year a youth conference. This is a conference that is going to be led by young people from a school in the Borough. They will set the agenda. They will frame the questions which they would like to put to the different religious communities in the Borough. Then we will have an inter-generational conversation between young people and people across our faith communities, engaging with the questions that young people would like to put.

We've really worked hard on cohesion. From the beginning we've been part of the

Borough's Community Cohesion Group which has always been keeping an eye out for signs of tension in community. There are many times over the years where we've come together at times of tension to express our compassion and our solidarity together during all the troubling things that are happening in our world. In the last year, as we know, there have been many such. We have come together, made statements, stood together in solidarity and compassion in relation to those things. We have, more recently, been part of the local Hate Crime Strategy Group and I shall say a little more about that at the end. We are taking the work around hate crime very seriously at WFFCF because we know how that impacts upon people in our communities.

We have been wanting to make some kind of contribution to responding to the refugee crisis. We have been fortunate that in our Borough our local Council has agreed to take 10 families, as part of our contribution. We have been working with others in the community. There is so much compassion in Waltham Forest for the refugees. People are working together and saying to the Council "How can we help? We'd love to be part of the refugee welcome. We'd like to help to integrate people into communities, to provide support."

We have a Migrant Action Group in our Borough of which many of us in WFFCF are also part. We worked with them together recently on an event where we made it clear that we want to be a place of welcome for refugees in our community. We've done a lot of practical things as well, like collecting for Calais and lots of people have been to Calais from our community. Soon we're having a fundraising event on Remembrance Sunday when we're going to be working together and putting on an event remembering the victims of war from the Somme to Syria – 100 years of people who have died in war. We will be having contributions from Syrians, opera singers and community choirs and, of course, the Mayor of Waltham Forest.

**Councillor Mahmud:** Growing up in Waltham Forest, a very diverse Borough where people are on the whole very respectful of different backgrounds and very tolerant, it's easy to take for granted that people are happy living side by side. It wasn't until I attended a couple of years ago a presentation and exhibition on the genocide over 20 years ago in Bosnia, that I began to question whether we were really that cohesive in Waltham Forest. Are we taking things for granted?'

Well, it's not perfect in Waltham Forest but the work of WFFCF is incredibly important in helping making sure that we are getting there. The Council is very supportive of the work that WFFCF does, particularly highlighting issues around hate crime. There have been incidents of hate crime in Waltham Forest and this is something we take very seriously. WFFCF was very involved in Hate Crime Awareness Week last week.

There are other issues as well that WFFCF gets involved in, for example we had a very good meeting with representatives from different faith communities talking about emergency planning and contingencies for what happens when there is a tragedy or a very serious emergency in Waltham Forest. We are very, very grateful, and lucky to have, faith communities who offer us support in times of need.

I am a strong believer that we have much more in common than that which divides us. When we come together and work together we achieve wholeness. That's how we achieve the outcomes and improvements that we want to see in society. The Council relies quite heavily on WFFCF to bring communities together so that we can have that dialogue and experiences such as iftar events in churches and similar types of initiatives continue. We would like to see our relationship with WFFCF strengthening further.

**Canon Saxby:** We were extremely fortunate last year to have a fantastic mayor in Saima! She attended many events throughout the year. Having a mayor and

group of councillors go through that experience and really understand how diverse our community is, how many different kinds of events go on throughout the year, is a really powerful thing. I know every time somebody becomes a mayor and goes through that experience it's a real learning opportunity for them. We are so fortunate to have Saima and other councillors who really do contribute and work in partnership with us as a Forum on these issues. That's very relevant in relation to the hate crime issue that's been flagged up and we've taken that very seriously. Our last meeting was on hate crime and we had a police speaker, a rabbi and a Muslim woman activist in our community. What the latter said to us was very powerful. She said that she had been born in Walthamstow and grown up there. When she was 15 years old she had no idea how much her life was going to change following the events of 9/11 and the last 15 years of increasing narrative in our society viewing the Muslim community with suspicion. Nor could she have imagined the way in which now we have a context in which we are being asked to take foreigners into our country. What is going on? What has happened to the multicultural, multi religious society, that we took for granted and were so proud of around 15 years ago? It now seems to be being unpicked. What she said was that the way in which these things impact is that the whole community internalises the issues of hate and fear. She, as a 30 year old, has always been confident in her own community but is beginning to feel fearful of leaving her front door – and that's in multicultural, multi tolerant Walthamstow.

We have had hate crime incidents. We have had incidents of women having a hijab pulled off their head. In London there was an incident yesterday in Oxford Street. This has to concern us very much indeed. Hate crime went up by 41% in the last year. That's 50,000 hate crimes and of those 3,500 specifically against people of faith. Those are very alarming statistics and I think that there needs to be much more conversation around how we tackle hate crime in our community. That's one of the

things that we're committed to do in Waltham Forest in partnership with others.

I want to close by talking about three things we will be doing in Inter Faith Week: holding an exhibition in the library about the faith communities; the event mentioned previously which will be held on Remembrance Sunday; and also on 16 November a story-telling event in one of the Hindu temples. So we take a very active part in Inter Faith Week.

We appreciate all your work at the Inter Faith Network and we try to play our part at WFFCF.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you very much to you both.

**Yann Lovelock (Buddhist Society):** A lot of what has been said sounds like faith compact partnership. I wondered how the partnership works between the Council and WFFCF and what kind of resources are being given from the Council to support WFFCF?

**Councillor Mahmud:** The relationship between the Council and WFFCF has been strengthened. It wasn't great a few years ago. Since Steven's come on board, it has been strengthened. I remember when he set up the Twitter account for WFFCF and how good that was. In terms of support, I am a local councillor and am a member of WFFCF so if there is anything I can do I will obviously recommend things to the Council Leader, who usually agrees. We also have a Council officer on the WFFCF. I'm working very closely with her. She's from the Community Safety Team. So for issues around hate crime, domestic violence and other issues she is our liaison.

**The Revd Canon Dr John Hall (Devon Faith and Belief Forum):** Earlier Jenny Kartupelis asked Lord Bourne whether Near Neighbours funding could be extended. You are in an area that has Near Neighbours. What is its contribution?

**Councillor Mahmud:** I believe that there is a group in St Gabriel's Church in

Walthamstow. With a lot of third sector organisations, we at the Council find that they have been flourishing for years without any kind of support from the Council. I did find out about the Near Neighbours programme recently and I would very much welcome them having a relationship with the Council. We certainly will be working closely with the voluntary sector as well in the coming months.

**Canon Saxby:** The project at St Gabriel's Church is one where a Muslim organisation is providing food for the homeless in the church. It is a good example of Near Neighbours funding helping to strengthen work in communities as well.

**Laurie Burrow (Rugby Inter Faith Forum):** Given that hate crime is not just to do with faith communities but affects, for example, Eastern Europeans quite heavily, I want to know how we can address that – especially since faith communities amount to quite a small proportion of the total population.

**Canon Saxby:** You can find information about the meeting we held on hate crime on my Twitter account. We are committed as a faiths forum to tackling all forms of hate crime. We have contributed to other actions in our community around that. Shortly after the Referendum vote had a community event which was 'Refugees welcome, migrants welcome, no hate crime'. It was again in the town centre. I want to make it clear that we stand with other communities against hate crime.

**Dr Peter Rookes (Birmingham Council of Faiths):** I'm just wondering whether you have carried out any analysis of the source of hate crime. It's my personal observation that it is not from people of other faiths but from people of no faith. And there are sections of our community that exhibit that hatred towards people of different ethnicity, or with physical or learning disability. It would be very interesting to know whether you have an analysis. Have you got one?

**Canon Saxby:** If you create a narrative and a culture in our society which views certain

sections of our community with suspicion, if you harden our attitude as a country toward migrants and now towards foreigners, if you put out questionnaires to schools telling them to list foreign children, and ask employers to list foreign workers, you are contributing to a culture in which many in our faith communities feel threatened and marginalised. Our communities are largely migrant communities in Waltham Forest. There's no such thing as a church that's not a migrant church. I think one of our agendas may be working together to really think carefully about what kind of narrative is going on in our society and how that's impacted, not only on the faith communities, but also on ethnic minorities and minorities generally. I believe an attack on anyone is an attack on us all. We have a mutual responsibility to stand up, not only for ourselves, but others who are vulnerable in society. And I think that's one of the contributions we can make at the Inter Faith Network.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you for sharing something of the priorities and the significance of the work in Waltham Forest. Of course that stands for all the contributions that have been made at the local level through you and others associated with IFN.

# Supporting a faith community in creating and contributing to cohesive communities

**Gillian Merron**

Chief Executive, Board of Deputies of British Jews

**Vivian Wineman:** Gillian Merron is the Chief Executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. She came to that role from a background which includes a number of years as a Member of Parliament and as Parliamentary Private Secretary to a number of Secretaries of State, being promoted on each occasion and ending finally as a Minister of State in the Department of Health. The Board of Deputies is the representative body of British Jews and the oldest non-Christian representative body in the UK. It was established in London in 1760 and it serves as the community's principal reference point for government, the media and wider society. It represents the entire Jewish community from extremely Orthodox to completely secular. Gillian will be offering reflections on how it works to help its community to contribute to cohesive communities and benefit from these. It gives me great pleasure therefore to call upon her to speak.

**Gillian Merron:** As is customary at this time of year I wish you all *Shanah Tovah*, a good year, as it is the time of the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashanah*. It is a great pleasure to contribute to today's thinking and discussion.

How do we support our faith communities in creating and contributing to cohesive communities? My reflections on this are that cohesive communities require strong faith communities. Strong faith communities that can offer leadership, as

well as cooperation. Strong faith communities that can offer practical action, that can also offer participation. And strong faith communities that can offer a distinctive flavour and a sense of self as well as understanding about commonality.

if we're looking at the challenge of developing cohesive communities, let's take a moment to look at the context in which we find ourselves

It's probably very appropriate to follow on from the words of our friends in Waltham Forest and think about the fact that, sadly, people are being attacked, in some cases physically in the street, because of their colour, their accent, their religion. This would be unsettling at any time, but is particularly now because the perpetrators seem to consider that their hateful views are somewhat legitimised by political circumstances.

A few months ago I spoke at a community cohesion summit which brought together a cross-party grouping of politicians, leaders from the world of faith, football, the trade unions, the police and various community organisations. Together we acknowledged our concern for the environment and the atmosphere in which we find ourselves post Brexit, in terms of the vote but also in terms of the negative reaction to the refugee crisis. As further context it is worth saying that for Jews, life in general is very good in Britain. It's a diverse and caring home and we have a long established and



vibrant community here. We also know what it is like to experience hate, antisemitism, division in society. We are overwhelmingly children, grandchildren, descendants of refugees and immigrants to this country. My own grandparents came from Lithuania and fled from the danger, danger is perhaps a small word to use, of the pogroms which were sweeping across that area at the time. People came here to make their contribution to a cohesive community.

You will understand that in carrying that history with us is why we worry, not just for our community, but for our country. In terms of antisemitic incidents, the highest level ever recorded in Britain was in 2014. No accident that it coincided with the Israel-Gaza conflict. We find in August 2016 the second highest level of recorded incidents of antisemitism. Secretary of State for Communities, Sajid Javid, warned in a recent article about the rise of what he called 'the dinner party anti-Semite', which is where hatred becomes normalised. We are witnessing an exponential growth in anti-Muslim hatred and spikes have often occurred following incidents of terrorism. According to Tell-MAMA we saw a 200% increase in Islamophobic incidents in 2015. Sikhs and Hindus too are being targeted by hate crime, often because the perpetrators ignorantly assume that they are Muslim. Sikhs in particular have suffered incidents of jeers of 'Taliban' or 'Bin Laden' directed at turban-wearing men and we have seen the fire-bombing of a gurdwara in Kent.

It was just this month we saw the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street. It serves as a reminder to us that only unity can defeat fascism and hate and that unity between faith groups and those with no faith is vital. You may be aware of the Battle of Cable Street which took place in 1936 in the East End of London where the Metropolitan Police protected a march by the British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Moseley. It was the people of the East End who fought back that march under the slogan 'They shall not pass'. For me 'they shall not pass' is as timely today as it has always been. Who were those people who

forced back the march? They included the Jews, the Irish, the Socialists, the Communists – people from all across the East End coming together.

So, in this year, what do we do? I believe we have our own duties. In an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear and divisiveness, it is the duty of communal faith organisations, like the Board of Deputies of British Jews, to promote messages of unity and mutual respect and to engage in work which tackles the root causes of hate. We will always call out antisemitism, racism and xenophobia wherever it occurs, without fear or favour, whether it is targeted at Jews or any other group, whether it is coming from the political right or political left – wherever it comes from. So when Polish and other migrant communities were attacked in the streets of the UK, we needed to do that. As it says in the Board of Deputies statement of June this year: *"Everyone, including European Union citizens and other minorities resident in the UK, has the right to security and protection from hate speech. The Jewish community knows all too well these feelings of vulnerability and will not remain silent in the face of a reported rise in racially motivated harassment."*

So what else can we do that's practical? Security. Community cohesion starts from a basic principle of security, both security in one's own identity but also physical security. That's why we, along with other Jewish community organisations, lobbied for and were delighted to receive additional Government funding to help secure our Jewish schools – not just those in the state sector, because frankly terrorism doesn't make a distinction between whether your school is privately funded or state funded.

In our inter faith work we have a golden rule which was articulated by Hillel – "that which is hateful to you, you do not do to your fellow". And I know that communities in this room share that.

An example of the kind of projects that we engage with is Nisa-Nashim, which is a network of Jewish and Muslim women

which aims to embrace the similarity, empower those women in leadership, and through them engage their wider communities, and to address misconceptions across and about the two faiths.

On education, it is our duty to reach out. We have a Jewish Volunteers School Network where Jews go into schools up and down the country, often where a Jew has never knowingly been seen. They talk about Judaism and answer questions about the Jewish way of life, whatever that might mean to that person or to the Jews that they are speaking for. We have a travelling exhibition which allows pupils, members of the community and teachers to gain an insight into Judaism as a living faith and we have, recently for the first time ever, put together a definitive resource to help teachers to provide teaching of quality with information which is accurate in terms of GCSE studies of Judaism. You heard from Lord Bourne about the inter faith projects that we have set up, including a coding class bringing together Muslim, Jewish and Christian girls to learn through the common language of computer programming.

We know that the Israel-Palestine conflict produces much emotion and different opinions. Because we want to ensure that as cohesive communities we export peace rather than import conflict, we've developed a new project 'Invest in Peace'. It will proactively bring together local communities to host joint delegations of Israelis and Palestinians at UK places of worship. We hope to roll this out nationally next year and we look forward to working with you.

We advocate and we lobby Government, local authorities and others because those public institutions also have a duty to work with us to make that difference of cohesion.

We can't do this work alone and we know that success is only possible when we work together in unity, with all of us in this room and with all of us who are not in this room, with people of faith and people of no faith.

It is only through unity that we can achieve the goal of community cohesion and make it clear that our country is no place for hate. I want to assure you that in the Jewish community and in the Board of Deputies of British Jews people of all faiths and none have friends who are willing and ready to work and to fight to make that possible.

Thank you.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you, Gillian. That was both a reminder of some really important realities in our common life, but also some very practical and focussed responses there from the Board of Deputies with others.

**Malcolm Deboo (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe):** Canon Saxby talked about the unravelling of our multicultural society. As the Chief Executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, why do you think this is happening? Because the people who have been unravelling multicultural society are the people working within that set up as well. Has anything really gone wrong or is it something that is just a symptom of our times?

**Gillian Merron:** We have a very multicultural society. You talked about a 'symptom of our times'. I feel that's what I was alluding to when I talked about the political climate and the space that has opened up to say things and think things and do things that previously were not acceptable. And I do feel that, whilst in this room we would all take on our responsibilities not to unravel our multicultural society any further, those who are leaders in our community also have to take that responsibility.

**Laurie Burrow (Rugby Inter Faith Forum):** I'm very grateful for the presentation you've just given us, because one of my big concerns is that there are certain topics in our society which are extremely difficult to talk about and one of them is the Israel-Palestine conflict. One of the key problems for me is the difference between just criticism and, in this case, antisemitism, but equally the same could be said for



other situations. I would like to hear your thoughts on how the language should be used.

**Gillian Merron:** It is a very timely point you make. You may have noticed there have been a number of investigations and so on into antisemitism, most recently the Home Affairs Select Committee made its report. The point that you raised about language is absolutely crucial. The fact is there are many opinions about the Middle East conflict and that is fine. It's also fine to be critical of the policies of, for example, the Government of Israel. I say that because day by day that's what most Israelis are doing. It's quite normal. I believe there are probably many of us in the room that may have opinions about all sorts of politicians and express them. That is part of healthy, democratic discourse and the fact that Israel is a democracy and not just permits that, but creates the conditions for that, is most important to me. But where it crosses the line is where criticism spills over into violence, into intimidation, into damaging language and attitude and indeed conspiracy theories directed towards Jews (as some kind of imperialist group setting out to rule the world and the many other antisemitic tropes) that you will all be familiar with as certainly I am. There is a real problem in talking about the Middle East conflict if different standards are being set for Israel than they are for any other country. I always ask people when they are speaking in such a way, 'If you put another country's name in there, would you find that acceptable?' 'If you put a different word in other than Jew, would you find that acceptable?' And the answer is 'No'. I think that is the test. So, language is absolutely crucial and, yes, I do believe that there are a number of times when it crosses the line into antisemitism in a very public sense.

**Charanjit AjitSingh (Hounslow Friends of Faith and International Interfaith Centre):** You mentioned a new project for peace involving bringing people from the Middle East here. There are people as I understand it who are doing some work in Israel but that work is not really shared or known.

How do you show that it is through the Board?

**Gillian Merron:** Thank you very much for making the point about how much work is done to bring Israelis and Palestinians together in Israel. The fact that there is much work that's done but people don't know about it is exactly why we've come to the position in the Board of Deputies that we need to up our game. That's why I mentioned our new project, 'Invest in Peace', which is bringing Israelis and Palestinians together to UK places of worship. I think it's important that we do that.

**Godfrey Nix (Nottingham Inter Faith Council):** As just a small number of people out of millions in the country, how do we get our voice across, given that so much of the media of this country seems to have their own agenda for stirring up such hatred? How do we get across the message of peace and love and cooperation to the general public?

**Gillian Merron:** I can't possibly say that I can work out how to deal with all of the ills of the media but I'll give it a go! I feel very strongly that if we paint pictures, if we 'show and tell', if we tell the human story, the media and the public, even those who weren't very interested, suddenly connect. We have to find a way to connect.

**Farooq Murad (Islamic Foundation):** Thank you for your presentation. Quite often we judge society based on one-off incidents and events that happen. I am still trying to work out the criteria for a cohesive society/community. What should there be an absence of and presence of? What are the yard sticks to measure it? Aren't we in really unprecedented times in terms of the diversity in Britain? Maybe we are coming to terms with it rather than anything else.

**Gillian Merron:** Perhaps one thing that wasn't helpful during the Israel-Gaza conflict was local authorities taking a position by flying Palestinian flags from buildings, for example. I don't find that helpful because that works exactly against

community cohesion. What are the measures? I would say local authority leaders not thinking through what division that will create in our communities is not a good place to be. Again, because this is very practical work, one of the things that we do at the Board of Deputies is run sessions for councillors across the country to give an understanding of what it is to be Jewish in their community and how what they think is a political action not connected to the community can create a wedge and divide communities.

Whilst it would be beyond my pay grade to assess the level of community cohesion in this country, I think there are some fantastic examples. The kind of things I hope I came up with in terms of practicalities shows you that. There is not a great understanding of cause and effect and I suspect those who most need to hear the connection between cause and effect are not sitting in this room sadly. That is why it is our duty to be advocates, to lobby local authorities, our MPs, whoever is in a position of responsibility, so that they can understand why we as separate yet connected communities need to see and feel cohesion. That is for the health of both our local communities and our whole country. It is for us to take that message, not just to complain when something like the flag-flying happens. That is why we are in the Board of Deputies so focused on practical action.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you, Gillian, not least for reminding us of Cable Street 80 years ago. They shall not pass. Very important to hear.

# Mutual respect and understanding as a keystone of cohesive communities

**Trupti Patel**

President, Hindu Forum of Britain

**Vivian Wineman:** Trupti Patel is the President of the Hindu Forum of Britain. She also has a wide experience of cohesion issues from other aspects of her experience, including involvement in local inter faith activity. She will be exploring themes such as why understanding and respecting each other's traditions is of vital importance and giving an insight, based on her experience through the Hindu Forum of Britain and other national and local contexts, into how Hindus are contributing to cohesive communities.

*A copy of Ms Patel's PowerPoint slides is at the end of her presentation note.*

**Trupti Patel:** Good afternoon everyone and Namaste. For the last few years I have had the privilege of being the President of the Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB). HFB has over 300 member temples and community centres of various kinds and sizes. I have the privilege of visiting many of them so that gives me an insight into how they operate. Some years ago HFB carried out an important consultation about the community in this country and some of that was very relevant to cohesion.

I started living in Oldham in 1993. The Hindu community is among the minority communities there, although participating widely in the activities of the borough. Some activities stand out in memory. For example, in 2000 when the Millennium projects came, we had a great experience of working together with different groups.

This slide shows you an extract from the Rig Veda, which is the HFB mantra. *[Slide 2]* The Rig Veda goes back over 5,000 years.

How do you see respect and what do you think it is? Everybody's perspective is completely different. This is what came to my mind a few days ago when I started preparing this presentation. *[Slide 3]*

- **R:** Rare qualities of open mindedness. If you don't have an open mind and always think about yourself and your community, then you won't think about others at all.
- **E:** Education about open mindedness.
- **S:** Selfless SEWA (volunteering) with open mindedness. Almost everyone knows the word *sewa* now. From the UK the world has learned what volunteering means.
- **P:** People from different religions co-operating with open mindedness. When you come to my temple or I come to your mosque or church, what kind of respect do we give one another? Do we bow our heads? We do. This is respect cooperating with people from different religions.
- **E:** Energizing your community with open mindedness.
- **C:** Closing doors to narrow mindedness. You cannot judge a book by its cover. When people see me in a sari, they think I

am from an Eastern region. But we are all together, regardless of the colour of our skin or the way we dress.

- **T:** Trying to be open minded towards all beings. There is a Hindu belief that the whole world is part of one family – *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Everything is connected and part of that family.

As an engineer, I have also put together a formula!  $E=MC^2$  E is the energy flowing through the universe. M is the mass created by all entities engaging with one another and then becoming part of a larger mass, a great ball of energy. So the ball becomes larger and goes to regional level.  $C^2$  is the communities. Everyone understands one another. For example, I attended the Adam Day celebrations in Greater Manchester and everyone was there. That understanding of each other grows into a larger sphere of, for example, everyone being here today. We are converted people because we all believe in working together. The number of people here then go out into the community via the same route backwards to the grassroots. We make that happen.

This [Slide 4] shows the reply from the Hindu Forum of Britain to the Government a few years back on what cohesion and integration mean to HFB. A society that is well integrated will be “a society in which peoples of all faiths and backgrounds have equal opportunities and share common civic values of law, human rights, solidarity and trust”. That sentence, I think, says quite a lot in terms of us all respecting each other.

In terms of national involvement, I am pleased to tell you that for the past 14 years we have been celebrating Diwali in Parliament. [Slide 5] Now the White House and other people in Australia and Canada have started following that example. It all started with Hindu Aid. Rt Hon Keith Vaz, who is a Catholic MP, with the Hindu community, decided to have a celebration in Parliament. We needed it because in those days although we tried to raise awareness in Parliament about Hindu issues and the community, there wasn't a lot going on. The Diwali event is co-hosted

by Parliamentarians of the All Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus, and about 70 to 80 MPs attend, usually including the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. It is for Hindus but also for others. One year, we were very fortunate to have the Revd Jesse Jackson present. At Diwali, it's lighting a lamp to banish the darkness. That darkness can be in your mind, from your heart, it could be the darkness of ignorance. It's a celebration, a festival with a wide meaning.

We also participate in many National Services. [Slide 6] It is a wonderful experience before and afterwards to network with people and to listen to other people as well. What do they think about your community? What do they think about you? And is there any room for improvement? That is very important – if I keep thinking that I'm superior to other people then I'm never going to learn anything or experience anything. Such services are very important and one of the most important ones in which we participate is the one in Westminster Abbey when all faith leaders get the chance to read prayers as part of the service (the Commonwealth Day Observance). My most treasured moment of participation this year is meeting the youngsters from different schools who attended. They asked me lots of questions, including about the *Rig Veda*, from which I read at the service. It gives me lots of satisfaction that people are inquisitive and really want to know more.

In terms of regional participation, I could go on for a long time! But I have just listed a few things. [Slide 7] The 2002 Commonwealth Games gave the whole of Greater Manchester and the UK a fantastic opportunity to know other communities. We took nearly 300 people to participate in the closing ceremony. You can just imagine the logistics of it, collecting and organising people from 10 different temples across the North West. Rehearsals brought many people together who had never previously met. Unless you experience that you won't know the impact. When you are walking about during rehearsals everyone is talking to one another and it's a tremendous

experience. The volunteers who helped us were amazing.

We also do lots of regional *sewa* programmes. A few weeks ago I took part in a cycle ride for *sewa*. We also do lots of fundraising, for example for Rotary, Cancer Research. Sometimes we fundraise on an inter faith basis, for example we had a local inter faith network, a women's faith network that organised it and we knitted blankets for little kids in Africa.

There is continued participation in the GM youth games so that youngsters actually understand and meet youngsters apart from the school environment through the sports and the dance. Now dance is particularly close to my heart. I'm passionate about Indian dancing! I and a small number of other volunteers ran a dance school for 17 years in Oldham and we participated in many, many events nationally, regionally, locally, internationally. [Slide 8]

We run a women's group and we have a luncheon club for the elderly and we also organise NHS days, hold events raising awareness, bringing in other communities. On International Women's Day we have all faith communities from Oldham, mainly ladies, come to our celebrations. It's a very interactive programme and everybody thoroughly enjoys it. We also go to other women's association events and to the local church events in Oldham. So it's very inclusive. If you keep an open mind that is the only way that you will attract people to talk to you openly as well.

This slide [8] shows a photo from Oldham's programme called the Festival of Light. The festival celebrates light in the beginning of December. All communities participate. The photo is my students doing the ballet dance.

In Oldham in 2002 after the riots there was a big need for community cohesion. The Oldham Gallery started a project called 'Communities and your faith'. It was an intergenerational project and children from all communities attended and they had

different ideas about the home, the *deva*, what they in their mind thought about the Hindu religion. The biggest topic was the swastika. [Slide 9] A long time ago I had to explain to people about the swastika in the temple in Southall and to dispel the myth that it is a Nazi symbol; it's a Sanskrit symbol, that we consider one of the holiest. In Oldham it has been even more necessary to explain this. Such an important point but how can we best explain and teach this?

Another important thing about integration in our society is the manner of our family way of living. When you think in your society to give your daughter away regardless of who the groom is, looking at the groom's quality but not his colour, race or creed, that is the best way that any immigrant community can integrate with the host community, accepting daughters and giving your daughters. We have plenty of examples and on the slide [9] is the one that my friend's daughter was involved in. The slide also shows the work of a charity locally as well.

Thank you very much.

**Vivian Wineman:** Thank you very much for your wide-ranging and interesting presentation.

I'm now going to invite contributions from the floor.

**Reynold Rosenberg (Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group):** I think that you said early on that Hinduism is one of the smaller religions. Is it not the third largest faith community in the UK?

**Trupti Patel:** What I said was that we are in the minority amongst the minorities where I live in the North West in the Oldham area. When you talk about the population in Oldham it's mainly the host community and then you've got a large portion of the Muslim community, then there are 2 small temples and a small Hindu community, so we call ourselves a minority among the minorities in that part of the world. But, yes, the Hindu faith is the third largest in the UK overall and our contribution, as the

Prime Minister said last year in his Diwali message, is immense relative to our size. I think that is to do with education and being open; we are quite open-minded people.

**Dina Mandalia (Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group):** I think we use the swastika because it says 'North, South, East, West' and because when we draw it says 'No entry, No entry, No entry'. No evil can get in and it brings you good luck. In 1920 Hitler stole it from us and he tilted it. In his view the meaning of the swastika changed. It was for suppression and superiority. They said in *The Guardian* that we have to disown it and not use it. I think we wrote and said that if something is meaningful and highly originated and valued by us, why should we disown it. If somebody steals something from us, they should be punished, not us.

**Rajni Reddi (Peterborough Inter Faith Council):** Hitler stole our swastika, which is actually meant to be the wheel of life. The wheel of life for Hindus always turns in a clockwise direction, but he made it anti-clockwise. So the spokes are anti-clockwise in Hitler's swastika and that's how you distinguish it from the Hindu symbol.

**Unnamed speaker:** No, the Nazi version is still clockwise.

**Trupti Patel:** It is like when you experience 'om' it is so beyond our boundaries of faith and energy. Similarly, the swastika has so many different meanings to it. We do a dance which has the 8 directions. Each deity sits on each direction. We could do a debate on the swastika. It would require long discussion.

**Ajay Aggarwal (Leicester Council of Faiths):** Do you feel there are challenges facing the Hindu community in the UK?

**Trupti Patel:** There are many challenges. One is to try and help our youngsters and younger generations understand our religion. That is because most of our prayers and *pujas* are done in Sanskrit. As we all know, Sanskrit is the mother language of European languages. It's a real

shame that a very small portion of the Hindu community actually understands, reads and writes Sanskrit. So the first challenge is when we run the voluntary schools in our communities to increase the number of those who can do so – for Hindus, Jains and Sikhs, because we all have that common bond.

The second problem that we face, I think, is the same for others as well. That is how we make the professional generation, the mid-30s with disposable income, think beyond the pleasures of the world. There are also other sides to life, doing volunteering and good things. Having said that, by the time they're in their 40s people come back and think about what they can give back to the community.

The biggest challenges at the moment are the restricted crematorium facilities available and the caste issue, were we want to recall the legislation. This is not the platform to talk about these issues but they are the two big challenges that we have at the moment.

**Vivian Wineman:** Thank you very much, Trupti.



Hindu Forum of Britain

Proud to be British  
Proud to be Hindu

"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"  
(The world is one family)

**RESPECT – The Hindu Way of life**  
Interfaith AGM 2016

Mrs Trupti Patel  
President :HFB  
Director: The Inter Faith Network for the UK;  
Community Arts Northwest  
Action Oldham  
HFB



## Rig Veda – HFB mantra

- "Let us walk together; let us sing together;
- In togetherness can we understand each other's minds;
- Thus did the ancient seers share; together to reach their divine ends;
- May our intentions come together;
- May our hearts become inseparable;
- May our minds become as one to truly; know one another;
- May we all unite in togetherness"



The HFB is the leading Hindu umbrella organisation in the UK and has been actively engaged in the public and private sphere advocating the needs and aspirations of British Hindus.


**RESPECT – The Hindu Way of life**

- **R: Rear qualities of open mindedness**
- **E: Education about open mindedness**
- **S: Selfless SEWA (volunteering) with open mindedness**
- **P: People from different religions co-operating with open mindedness**
- **E: Energizing your community with open mindedness**
- **C: Closing doors to narrow mindedness**
- **T: Trying to be open minded towards all beings.**

**My interpretation of RESPECT :**

**E=MC (SQ)**  
We all are intricately linked with the Energy of the universe ; mass of the universe including all entities and beings and C2 for communities . This Csq is very important . What do we call communities and their commonalities . Where we live , neighbourhoods , common interests , common faith and beliefs !  
When we people from these communities at grass route level connect to make c 2 , it becomes a small mass , at regional level it grows into a bigger one , and multiply to reach global level .

Advantages of this kind of community cohesion brings peace and harmony in the society .  
Today I will talk about my personal experience and connectivity into and within these spheres.



What cohesion and integration mean to HFB ?

What does cohesion mean to you? What does integration mean to you? What might a society that is cohesive and integrated look like?

The Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB) believes that a cohesive society is one where people belonging to different backgrounds, races, faiths and class are able to interact with each other with a feeling of mutual respect and belonging. Different communities in a cohesive society are able to respect the law, uphold each others rights, and share a commitment to the local community and to wider society. Integration refers to the process by which minority groups in a society are treated with equality. Benefits from the same opportunities as the mainstream, interact and become connected to mainstream society, accept similar levels of active civic responsibility, and are able to and work together for the common good of society.

A society that is well integrated and cohesive would be a society in which peoples of all faiths and backgrounds have equal opportunities and share common civic values of law, human rights, solidarity and trust. In an integrated and cohesive society, differences are welcomed and treated with dignity while similarities are recognised and used to bind and enrich people. Another critical aspect of an integrated society is whether its subgroups are affected equally by concerns for the nation and its general welfare. HFB is concerned that the debate around integration has often raised contradictory messages around the viability of multiculturalism. HFB subscribes to the views expressed in the Runnymede Trust's report 'The Future of Multi Ethnic Britain' that Britain is and should remain a vibrant society that must combine respect for diversity with shared common values. The stigma attached to multiculturalism stems from the fact that it is sometimes taken to mean that different cultural communities should live their own ways of life in a self-contained manner. Such an interpretation has long been obsolete and is not true. HFB believes that multiple values should not in any way pose barriers to integration if each culture, faith or region is able to benefit from a critical dialogue with others, respects the right of others to co-exist in Britain, and links itself to common core values based on patriotic loyalty and citizenship of the British nation. Some have expressed a view that everyone should be British and that all other cultures should be subordinated or assimilated into the British identity. HFB believes that this is impractical and unworkable. Forcing everyone into one homogeneous unit that is a replica of the dominant culture will move the race and faith discrimination dialogue back by fifty years.

HFB believes that in the UK, the debate surrounding multiculturalism needs to be replaced by pluralism. In this context, pluralism does not refer to the notion that all faiths are the same, but to a society where links between different cultural and faith communities fosters a climate of dialogue.



## National and international participation

Diwali Celebrations at Palace of Westminster : organised by the HFB Diwali committee for over 14 years ; this is a community celebration with full cross party support and cross party Parliamentarians co-hosting it with the HFB . It requires a huge undertaking by a small numbers of HFB team members to work towards making this event a success. This multi-party reception is the only event that encompasses and invites members and peers from all political parties to share the colourful and wondrous Diwali celebration with Hindu community leaders, religious leaders and leading figures from businesses across Britain.

- The HFB Diwali Team with Rev. Jesse Jackson, Speaker of the House Rt Hon John Bercow MP and The Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin at Diwali at Palace of Westminster , 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015



## National and international participation

Participation at National memorial services , helping to organise some of the events with Armed Forces Hindu network like the 100 years of remembering soldiers perished in WW1 at Memorial Gate and at Imperial War museum in Manchester . Participating in service at the Westminster Abbey and Police memorial service at St Pauls . Interfaith events organised by various national faith organisations



Religious Education , facilitating visits from schools to places of worship , new faith schools etc should be a core activity of any faith based umbrella body. We participate in educating school children about not just the temple, Hindu way of life but also how we integrate with the host community where ever we are in the world

2002 Commonwealth games and celebrations of Queens Jubilee created opportunities for communities across the region and beyond to working together and showcase their work to the mass audiences

Me and my volunteers set up an organisation called 'Nrtya Jyoti' community arts organisation and a supplementary school of Indian Association Oldham to participate in many of the festival, workshops and conferences and continued for 17years . Under my project management , we took over 300 women and children to participate in closing ceremony of CG, QJ celebrations , urban skies & in the mix by CAN. Over the years we trained over 200 students/ artists in various art forms besides dancing traditional classical and folk dances and performing like, Rangoli, tie-dye and block work printing , story telling , script writing , music , film making ; the list is endless.

We regularly participated at events organised by various local authorities and faith organisations like Adam's day celebrations, Fundraising for Rotary , SK run for Cancer research , cycle4 sewa for sewa international

Participating in 'Raising awareness' about sexual grooming problem within and with all communities is extremely important.



### Regional participation

Continual participation in GM youth games is a testimony of volunteers in training youngsters to participate and mingle in social context

Local participation is one of the most important ingredient for local community to coexist . Living in silos create mistrust leading to dissatisfaction and situation like Oldham riots .

Participating in local health days, workshops, interacting with NHS and Police and sport activities is very important for different faith communities to come together in locality . All attempts to understand each other starts from home , neighbourhood and spread like sun rays.

People form the Hindu community have integrated well within the host community and always have been a good participant in many of the community events like celebrations of Diversity by OMBC , Oldham carnival, art events by Oldham Gallery , exhibitions , workshops with completely out of box activities like kick boxing , intergenerational art work projects involving people form all ages .

Soon after Oldham riots , we also had to deal with extremism, racial hate crimes and trained our youngsters to understand differences , to respect all still keeping their identity. Dance and exercising sessions were aimed at intergenerational participation, we want to utilize the wisdom of our elderly and teach the young one lots of home tips and secrets of keeping fit. The young ones on the other hand will act as energy source for the elderly and the middle-age group acting as a link between them.

### Local Participation:



Students of NJ join hands with children from local Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities to participate in 'Festival of Light' , by IFN - Oldham





- **Trupti Patel**
- **President**
- **Hindu Forum of Britain**
- Mrs Trupti Patel : ECBE, MSc. Highways and Transportation, BEng (Hons) Civil Engineering, MSTD -Visharad Bharat Natyam (B Arts ) , Yoga Teacher.
- [president@hfb.org.uk](mailto:president@hfb.org.uk)
- 07875015865
- The Hindu Forum of Britain is an umbrella body with a broad-based membership of over 300 Hindu organisations from different regions and cultural backgrounds in Britain. At the core of the Forum's activities is a strong belief in the richness and diversity of the Hindu culture, its value system that encompasses respect for all beings and faiths, and a cultural heritage that facilitates community cohesion and coexistence. The HFB has wide support from the regional Hindu councils in the North, West Midlands, East Midlands, Brent, Harrow and large temples and community organisations in most regions of Britain. The Hindu Forum has also established a fully consultative system that has become the driving force for affecting change and delivering projects.
- Visit our website: [www.hfb.org.uk](http://www.hfb.org.uk)
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- **Email:** [info@hfb.org.uk](mailto:info@hfb.org.uk)





# Feedback from discussion groups

**Vivian Wineman:** We now come to the feedback from each discussion group. I am going to invite a representative from each discussion group to feed back to us for one minute, summarising your discussions.

## Discussion Group 1 – Cohesive communities: compassion and social action

**Rapporteur:** Malcolm Deboo

We had a fruitful discussion. It opened with a presentation by Peterborough Inter Faith Council whose members told us about how they were serving meals to the homeless, including at Christmas. That led on to one from the Church of the Latter-day Saints about one of their practical projects. Our one minute statement is to recognise that all of us, both people of faith and of no faith, are drivers for compassion. We need to turn this kindness to social action by working together – not just reviewing the symptoms of the problem, in this case homelessness, but also finding out the cause and addressing it, by using creative solutions.

## Discussion Group 2 – Cohesive communities: a place for those of all abilities and disabilities

**Rapporteur:** Narendra Waghela

Our subject was making an inclusive space for everyone: for those of all abilities and disabilities. We discussed a lot in a healthy way and enjoyed the gathering. The bottom line was that you change the world if you change your mind.

## Discussion Group 3 – Cohesive communities: creating connections across generations

**Rapporteur:** Zac Lloyd

We heard a presentation delivered with great passion and enthusiasm by a speaker from Near Neighbours and its Catalyst programme and from two students from Redhill Academy who spoke very inspirationally. The main point that we took from the presentations and our discussion was the continued importance of our various institutions, groups and organisations reaching out to sections of the communities they represent that may not previously have been engaged with. We heard of some of the innovative and remarkable ways in which people are reaching out and bringing people of all ages together. So that's our conclusion, to reach out to people from different ages because this is what will really sustain inter faith relations in the future.

## Discussion Group 4 – Cohesive communities: equality within society as a vital dimension

**Rapporteur:** Acharya Modgala Duguid

We had a fascinating discussion and learned some interesting things from Jamie Spurway of Interfaith Scotland. We would like to emphasise the need to be realistic; we have achieved some things but we need to review strategies and take notice of effects of politics at local and national level. And we need to take personal responsibility and have a wider view. Particularly we need effective education on human rights and religion involving real communication to

dissolve barriers and to have dialogue at grassroots level. We need to understand that equality is not fully achieved and to use means to help us to be more equal. We need together to challenge inequality wherever we see it and to bring on our younger generation.

### Discussion Group 5 – Cohesive communities: diversity and commonality

**Rapporteur:** Sean Finlay

We were dealing with the issues of diversity and commonality, trying to square the circle. If I can use a quote from a fellow participant which I thought captured our thoughts: “if you’re not afraid of difference, then there’s no need to hate”. This was elaborated on when we were talking about celebrating diversity rather than thinking in exclusive terms. Somebody else used the analogy of a garden. In a garden if you have only one kind of flower, it’s pretty boring; when you’ve got a great collection, it is something beautiful to behold.

### Discussion Group 6 – Cohesive communities: the importance of learning and dialogue

**Rapporteur:** Mike Stygal

Lots of different ideas and concepts came up in our discussion. We would like to highlight: listening actively and with humility; needing to engage with the issues and to seek to understand the emotions; and using practical activities including the arts, that can enable the young people at primary and secondary school age to experience that early learning.

### Discussion Group 7 – Cohesive communities: the impact of the web and social media on cohesion

**Rapporteur:** Jenny Kartupelis

Our group looked at a web information site, Jainpedia, and the social media project called ‘More Tea Less Hate’. We heard how

they can provide information and also act as a call to action and also how cost effective this sort of thing can be in promoting better understanding. The message for us was that we should not be afraid of social media, we shouldn’t worry too much about reviews and trolling, for example, because they can be countered in clever ways. These are in fact powerful media to be used positively and proactively. One learning point was that there is likely to be considerable under reporting of hate crime due to lack of understanding about reporting channels and what actually constitutes such crime. This is a challenge to us all.

**Vivian Wineman:** Thank you very much. I’m now going to invite comments from the floor.

*None offered.*

# Reflections on themes of the day

**Dr Norman Richardson MBE**  
Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum

**Vivian Wineman:** We will move on now to our speakers on themes of the day. The first one I'll call is Dr Norman Richardson. Norman is an Executive member of the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum. He's been involved in inter faith dialogue and learning for many years, including through his work as a Religious Education specialist.

**Dr Norman Richardson:** This has been an interesting and very positive day, and I have been personally challenged and encouraged by the many and varied inspirational models, of inter faith living and action about which we have heard.

Yet at the same time we must also be concerned at the accounts that have been given of some people's unwillingness to listen, to learn, to try to understand; there have been too many experiences of intolerance and of hatred. It is no surprise that these negative responses have come at a time when many communities have been looking into themselves and closing mental and physical doors to those whom they perceive to be 'different'. One fears that this is a sad consequence of the attitudes that were inflamed during and following the Brexit referendum debate.

These contrasting positive and negative experiences recounted here today raise the question of where our own communities are focused at this time. Are our faith and belief communities and our inter faith movements looking into themselves or outwards towards others? I am reminded of the work of the American political scientist,

Robert Putnam, who, in his book *Bowling Alone* (published in 2000), examined issues of community interconnectedness in the USA – what we would call 'community cohesion'. He wrote of 'social capital' in terms of 'bonding and bridging'. Bonding is inward-looking and potentially exclusive; bridging is outward-looking and inclusive, forging relationships. Both are necessary, of course, but they must be in balance. There is an inevitability that faith and belief communities will be inward-looking – building a sense of shared community, or what some traditions call 'fellowship'. This is important, but if that is all a community does then it becomes dangerous, self-reinforcing and lacking a vision of a shared, connected world. Faith and inter faith communities must constantly examine where we are on this spectrum and aim to be outward-looking.

The examples we have heard today suggest a healthy balance and commitment to looking outwards. I will take away with me some very striking models of inclusive activity, some cited in plenary sessions and some from the workshops. These include accounts of the work of the Hindu Forum of Britain and work in Oldham; or the creative co-operation between faith and inter faith groups together with local councillors in places like Peterborough and Waltham Forest; the welcome presence and example of sixth formers representing the Religious Education Council's Young Ambassadors programme; the unexpected welcome given by members of a York mosque to an antagonistic right-wing group which actually undermined their protest; and the

striking account shared by Rabbi Maurice Michaels of a Holocaust Memorial Day event in a mosque and an *Iftar* meal in a synagogue. There were many others for us to take and share back in our own places.

If we ask what is at the heart of such work, we quickly recognise the importance of shared learning and encounter. A quote from the *Rig Veda*, shared by Trupti Patel, expresses this well: “In togetherness can we understand each other’s minds”. In my own region, Northern Ireland, these concepts of learning and encounter are ever more crucial, both in terms of our local relationships and our understanding of the wider world.

So, in our post-Brexit-debate society, with its disturbing potential for increased antagonism towards difference, we can take encouragement from many of the accounts we have heard today, and continue to commit our faith and inter faith communities to what one speaker, Gillian Merron, described as a ‘show and tell’ approach to building cohesive communities. And we do well to remember, as another speaker pointed out in paraphrase of the New Testament, that “a little salt and a little light can go a long way”!

**Vivian Wineman:** Norman, thank you very much for those thoughtful reflections, something to take away with us today.

# Reflections on themes of the day

Abid Khan

North Lincolnshire Multi-Faith Partnership

Good afternoon, Assalamu Alaikum.

After listening to the great speakers, I shall try not to bore you! English is my fourth language, but I'll try my best. First of all, it is an honour for me to be participating. It has been an eye opener. I wrote a few things I wanted to say about the day, but the previous speakers have already covered them well.

What I would like to emphasise is young people. We need the best seeds to get the best fruit. It should be a bottom to top approach, not top to bottom. If anything public goes wrong, they put all the resources into trying to resolve the problem. Yet the problem has usually been building up for a number of years. We need resources at the right level at the right time in order to bring about a better society.

Something I'd like to share. A friend of mine is a poet and he's written some poetry in Urdu which I will read here in translation:

"Oh my Lord please forgive your servant who is sinful.

ALLAH ALLAH (LORD (LORD)

We search here and we search there

But look into your heart

And your Lord you will find there.

Neither your Lord is different

Or my Lord is different

Our Lord is one

ALLAH ALLAH"

In this, he is saying that he is trying to seek God in heaven but in fact he is also in the mosque and he also says, "God has created the whole human race as one, but as many humans we have also created the borders"

# Closing reflections

**Vivian Wineman:** We now have come to the end of the National Meeting. I would like to thank everybody who has taken part in this. In particular, I'd like to thank our speakers, all of whom contributed something which has changed our outlook and informed us. It was a real pleasure to hear them all.

Can I thank also the discussion group facilitators. The group that I attended was brilliant – well-led, with lots of interesting contributions. Thank you also to the rapporteurs who conveyed briefly and effectively a distillation of the key thoughts of their respective groups.

Thank you to the staff at the DeafBlind UK Conference Centre for laying this out today so well.

I'd like to thank my fellow Officers, who I will thank in more detail later on at the end of the AGM, and other Trustees.

The IFN staff, of course, deserve our heartfelt thanks for all the work that they put into today's programme and arrangements.

Finally, I'd like to thank all of you for attending, participating and sharing your thoughts.

That closes the National Meeting. I hope people will stay on for the AGM. If you are leaving now, I wish you a safe journey home.

# Discussion groups notes

*Note: The discussion points listed in each of these notes are points and suggestions made by individual participants during the sessions rather than conclusions agreed by the discussion group as a whole.*

## Discussion Group 1: 'Cohesive communities: compassion and social action'

**Facilitator:** The Revd David Musgrave, the Methodist Church in Britain

**Presenters:** Jaspal Singh, Sajjad Jivraj and Rajni Reddi, Chair and colleagues, Peterborough Inter-Faith Council; and Keith Bishop, Interfaith Advisor, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

*The glue of human kindness and mutual help at times of difficulty is a vital part of cohesive communities. The presenters offer an insight into a very practical form of assistance to their local community.*

.....

**The Revd David Musgrave** welcomed participants to the discussion group and introduced the theme. He began by asking what did a 'cohesive community' meant for inter faith organisations. He thought that it was a community where there was respect for diversity; a sense of belonging; where all residents had comparable opportunities; and where there were positive relationships between people of different backgrounds. There were many words that were associated with a cohesive community but the two words to focus on in the workshop were 'compassion' and 'social action'. He invited the representatives of Peterborough Inter-Faith Council to offer their presentation.

**Mr Jaspal Singh, Mr Sajjad Jivraj and Mr Rajni Reddi** offered the following reflections:

- Peterborough Inter-Faith Council (PIFC) was 35 years old.
- For the past 10 years, its members had provided lunch to homeless people. Not only had this allowed them to help individuals but this activity had also allowed people of different faiths to get together and connected various places of worship, which had increased cohesion.
- They used to organise this at St Theresa's – a non-for-profit organisation, where they had the facilities to organise this. However, since this has closed down they had been using other facilities. PIFC brought together different faiths in the same kitchen. Each faith had their own resources which contributed to the whole team – for instance, Christians provided the church as a venue, Muslims provided people, and Sikhs provided cooks.
- One of the main issues was finding out where the homeless people were. They had arranged to involve the local homeless centre and also invited the Mayor and local dignities. Some of the homeless people who came to the Christmas lunch expressed their gratitude and commented that they felt like royalty because of the various meals organised for them. PIFC had no external funding so it was a challenge to fund it themselves.
- There were several food banks in Peterborough. Yet, homeless people did not usually get food in those – either because they did not know they existed or simply because there was not enough. The Council was keen to have assistance



from a body which could organise a variety of cuisines for the homeless people. People were very happy with the different cultural foods provided by PIFC. This in turn was a reward for PIFC itself as contentment and happiness were achieved.

- Homeless people were often judged but they each had their own stories. For example, one was a professional architect who had fallen out with his brothers so had to pull out of the family business. He tried coping but could not, so started gambling and because of this ended up living on the streets. By attending the meal gatherings he was given hope to live and be something again because he met other people who were also like him.
- In order to improve the situation so that homeless people can find help, there should be a central system. A particular concern that the country was facing at present regarding homelessness was that homeless people were getting younger day by day. It had now become a stopping place for the young adults between 18 and 25 which was worrying. This definitely needed to be considered when discussing new opportunities.

### CJCLDS Helping Hands project

**Mr Musgrave** invited Mr Keith Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CJCLDS) to offer his presentation.

**Mr Bishop** offered the following reflections:

- In Doncaster, there was a similar activity that aimed to bring cohesion within the community. The programme was called 'Helping Hands'. For the last 2 years, the local Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had been responsible for managing this.
- Helping Hands was made up of voluntary projects organised once a year in each of the CJCLDS congregations and mobilised about 10,000 members for 1 day each year. Each stake (diocese) was

independent and chose the Saturday most convenient to it to take part. They usually took place between May and September because outdoor projects were often preferred, such as cleaning parks.

- These service projects sometimes concerned co-operation with the local authority and around half were undertaken with other faith communities.
- Inter faith projects in his local area had included painting the railings round St George's Minster, the main Anglican Church in Doncaster, and tidying up an Anglican cemetery. They also organised blood donations which had saved a lot of lives in the area and Poppy appeals.

At Mr Bishop's invitation, **Mr Andrew Clow**, a leader from the Peterborough CJCLDS Congregation offered the following reflections:

- The "Helping Hands" project had recently been involved in an Interfaith Service at the Sikh Temple in nearby Northampton.
- CJCLDS also had such groups in Peterborough, Leicester and Loughborough. They had not yet reached out to local inter faith groups to work with these. This was something they would be focussing on as they also had the resources to help people.
- Events such as the IFN National Meeting were helpful as they enabled people to find out how to reach such goals, and were a catalyst to help people. It was helpful to be able to meet other local inter faith practitioners and to share details.

**Mr Musgrave** thanked the speakers for the presentations and invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed. They are grouped by general theme.



## Social action projects

- For the last 25 years in Cambridge, a Hindu temple had been used as a night shelter for homeless people. However, following its closure 2 years ago – there were no such venues available to help them. The speaker's group had potentially helpful resources, such as the ability to donate food at the food bank in Cambridge, but did not know where to go to help them.
- Many people of faith supported charities. In Peterborough they had tried to create more opportunities for action for young people in order to help them and to avoid them being exploited. However, activities such as setting up a soup kitchen did not solve the problem. Root causes, such as politics, also had to be tackled.
- In Rugby, they tried to take action by directly communicating with their MPs. Yet, there were difficulties, primarily because of the expense of operation of holding a soup kitchen. There was the problem of arranging the venue and the kitchen to use. The local authority was sympathetic but there were no resources available. Rugby Inter Faith Forum had no funding and was not sure where to begin.
- Some local inter faith groups had no funding for such projects. Instead they raised donations themselves and used faith buildings for venues. A lack of funding should not be a deterrent.

## Local authority involvement

- Hillingdon had a low level of terrorist incidents because inter faith relations within the community were positive. Although Hillingdon Inter Faith Network had a contact at the local authority it faced the issue of the local authority not authorising it to provide help on public premises. They did sometimes manage to help people at the carnivals that were held in the borough.
- Similarly, in Ealing, there was a policy of not being allowed to advertise inter faith

events on local authority premises, such as the public library.

- Peterborough also faced the same problem concerning displays but still had good relations with the local authority.
- In the Birmingham area, the local authority did not provide financial support for inter faith events. The Birmingham Council of Faiths had complete autonomy to do anything. It aimed to empower people to move on with life. It ran a scheme for individuals whereby they could sit to discuss anything and then be offered advice.

## Refugees

- The Joseph Interfaith Foundation was running a programme that focused on refugees between the ages of 16-25. The programme was called "Introduction of social culture in Britain". As part of this project, participants were provided with an understanding of law and equality before the law in the UK. This included information for women about assistance from the NHS and women's help groups in the event of domestic abuse.
- There were currently no known homeless refugees in Peterborough. This was because they do not like declaring themselves as such. Following the campaign for 5% of Syrians to come to the UK, there were many people in Peterborough who had nowhere to go. Yet many who had arrived did not like being treated as homeless and avoided seeking help. PIFC had tried helping refugees to integrate into society by teaching them English, but, again, they did not seem to like what they saw as charity being given to them. However, whilst it was true that they did not like the help, until there was a utopia, it was important to continue helping people of faith and non-faith. Such help was motivated by the teachings of faith and by being human beings. By coming together as one, helping people became much easier.

- 5 years ago in Cambridge, there had been a challenge programme with young refugees with permission from the local authority. The young people helped with tidying up places and were enabled to empower themselves. They connected with football teams in Cambridge and Luton and matches were organised between the teams integrating the refugees with them. This helped the young refugees and gave an idea of how to utilise their potential.

### Drivers for building cohesive communities

- What were the drivers to help people? To sell a vision to the community and become an inspiration to others. Faith and kindness. Humanity and compassion.
- There was a need to work together as partners through the journey – that included the local authority, leaders and workers.
- There was a need to listen to people and identify their needs and to have an awareness of the community before stepping in to help.
- It was helpful to create awareness in the media. Events and activities could be promoted on IFN's website and in its e-bulletin.

### Discussion Group 2: Cohesive communities: a place for those of all abilities and disabilities

**Facilitator:** Minister David Hopkins, Spiritualists' National Union

**Presenters:** Christine Hardy, Advocacy, Rights and Awareness Manager, DeafBlind UK, and Dr Dale Dishon, Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas, Historic England

*Faith communities include people of all ages and abilities. Physical and mental disabilities should not be a bar to participation in community life. What are some of the ways that faith communities are working to enable inclusion in this respect?*

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**Minister David Hopkins** welcomed participants and invited Ms Christine Hardy to make her presentation.

**Ms Hardy** offered the following reflections:

- In the UK 19% of working age people had a disability.
- 10 million people in total in the UK had a disability.
- There were many people with hidden disabilities who still gave 100%.
- In the 1500m at the Paralympics the top four visually impaired runners ran a faster race than the athletes who won the Gold Medal in the equivalent race in the Olympics.<sup>1</sup> The runners were unable to see their competitors so ran to the best of their ability not comparing themselves with others.
- The disability movement had moved to the next stage. It had achieved equality legislation on the basis of which rights

1 A reference to Abdellatif Baka of Algeria winning the T13 1500m with a performance that set a new Paralympic world record and was the fastest 1500m time recorded by an able-bodied or disabled athlete in Rio over both the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

could, at least theoretically, be defended and now the focus was on moving towards a fully inclusive society.

**Minister Hopkins** thanked Ms Hardy and invited Dr Dale Dishon to make her presentation.

**Dr Dishon** offered the following reflections:

- Historic England was the public body that looked after England's historic environment. It championed historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.
  - 'Historic environment' meant places of worship built as centres of faith communities in past centuries – but was not limited to these.
  - Definition of historic environment: 'All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time'. (*National Planning Policy Framework*)
  - So 'Historic environment' also included places of worship converted from other historic buildings, such as the Jain Centre, Leicester, which was converted from an 1862 Congregational Church in the 1980s and the Aziziye Mosque, Stoke Newington, London, which was converted from a 1913 cinema in 1983. It also included places of worship built in the second half of the twentieth century which had architectural and historic interest – such as Europe's first traditional Hindu temple, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Neasden, London.
  - Historic England worked with its partners to increase understanding – leading to valuing, caring and enjoying. Its partners included local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, owners and developers, building preservation trusts, civic societies, national amenity societies, voluntary bodies and public sector organisations and funders.
- The Heritage Cycle:
    - Recording evidence;
    - Evaluating significance;
    - Articulating vision;
    - Securing quality;
    - Establishing capacity;
    - Deploying capability;
    - Managing change; and
    - Realising benefits.
  - Historic England was working to understand the significance of faith buildings across the spectrum of faith groups. It was supporting research on: Buddhist buildings in England; Sikh places of worship; and Quaker Meeting Houses. It would be publishing books in 2017 on 'The Mosque in Britain' and 'Nonconformist Chapels'. Future research was being discussed with the Hindu, Jain and Zoroastrian communities.
  - Access to heritage was a great way to create cohesive communities. They wanted everyone to be part of the 'Heritage Cycle'. That meant making the buildings more accessible to everyone!
  - The booklet entitled: 'Easy Access to Historic Buildings' published in June 2015 (updating the English Heritage note of 2012) was a useful advice guide. It covered: Why Access Matters; Planning Better Access; Making Access a Reality; Published Sources of Information; and Where to Get Advice.
  - If permanent solutions to access issues were not possible, places could think of: temporary solutions; alternative ways to provide services; or improvements to interpretation.
  - It was not just about physical access – there were lots of things that could be

done to be more inclusive and enable everyone to participate. Consideration should be given to sensitive installation of lighting, signage, speakers and screens.

- It was good to involve the community in thinking about access solutions – it was about bespoke solutions for each faith community and each building – and having a ‘can do’ attitude!

**Mr Hopkins** thanked the speakers for the presentations and invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of the discussion which followed.

- How faith communities handled access to their buildings was a significant issue. There were a number of potentially conflicting demands imposed upon them by legislation and by religious custom. Some faith communities occupied buildings of considerable antiquity where access and sightlines were problematical. Some occupied modern buildings built to traditional models where flights of stairs or similar barriers to ease of access could be a problem. Yet others occupied buildings originally constructed for purposes other than their current use and all three could pose problems, not just for access.
- In England and Wales the relevant legislation was the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which imposed restrictions on what could be done to a building which was itself listed or positioned in a Conservation Area. Similar legislation applied in Scotland and Northern Ireland but the terminology used was different. The significant wording read, “A listed building may not be demolished, extended, or altered without special permission from the local planning authority, which typically consults the relevant central government agency, particularly for significant alterations to the more notable listed buildings. In England and Wales, a national amenity society must be notified of any work to a listed building which involves any element of demolition”.
- There was an exception for some religious groups where they had established what was known as a “listed buildings advisory committee” and then they rather than the Local Authority had to be consulted.
- The problem for the different faith communities was that the requirements of the planners with regard to listing might clash with the wishes of the community with regard to use and also with what were the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005 and now the Equalities Act 2010. Under this legislation there was an obligation to treat all people equally, so far as might be reasonable, with regard to access and general facilities. One possible problem was that “reasonable” had never been defined and therefore what must be done might vary depending on each situation. However it could mean more than just providing access etc.
- A further complication was that what might be done to assist people with one form of disability might create problems for those with a different form. Also, provision of suitable lighting which made it easier for the deaf to lip-read or for those with limited sight to read, may be an issue. Ensuring that a separate entrance for those with limited mobility was of approximately equal status might be required.
- These and other related issues were discussed and assurances were given that in these and similar matters the advice of the regional office of Historic England, or the equivalent in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, should be obtained. They were used to dealing with the conflicts between planning and disability legislation.
- Although there was a presumption that generally a building needed to be over 100 years old before being considered for listing this was not always the case. Some

buildings were deemed of sufficient importance to acquire listed status much earlier but in all cases the mere fact of listing should not prevent necessary steps to improve access and other facilities for those with disabilities.

- The relevant officers of government and voluntary bodies should be seen as friends and were there to assist faith communities in dealing with the various issues raised by legislation in relation to buildings and similar areas.

### Discussion Group 3: 'Cohesive Communities: Creating Connections Across Generations'

**Facilitator:** Bhupinder Singh Bhasin, Inter Faith Youth Trust

**Presenters:** Aishah Mehmood, Graduate of Near Neighbours' Catalyst Programme and Communications and Media Officer, Near Neighbours, and Lynsey Wilkinson, Redhill Academy Nottingham and Coordinator of the RE Ambassadors Programme of the RE Council of England and Wales with Qaa'Sim Uhuru and Laura Norris, RE Ambassadors and students at Redhill

*Projects involving learning about and between faiths can sometimes offer opportunities for cross generational engagement – as well as for enabling young people to develop skills that enable them to continue to grow as new generation bridge builders.*

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**Mr Bhupinder Singh Bhasin** welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Ms Aishah Mehmood to offer her presentation.

**Ms Mehmood** offered the following points. A copy of her PowerPoint presentation slides is annexed to this note.

- Near Neighbours worked to increase cooperation and understanding between members of different faiths and beliefs through a number of projects. It provided opportunities for social engagement, offered small grants, and provided 'seed funding' for local community projects.
- She had studied for an MA in Abrahamic Religions at Heythrop College at the University of London. This is where she came to an understanding that good inter faith relations created more harmony between people of different faiths and beliefs.



- She then thought she wanted to pursue work in inter faith activity. However, there were not many jobs in the faith-based sector, and even less that related directly to inter faith activity and engagement.
- This was how she got onto the Near Neighbours Catalyst Programme, and this developed her understanding of inter faith relations and made her want to go further. Living in South London, she regularly asked herself whether she knew the people around her as well as she could. She wondered where she would be able to ask questions and learn more.
- The Catalyst Programme was a free, youth-led engagement programme that celebrated the UK's multi ethnic and multi religious composition, and tried to develop positive identities out of this. Being part of the Catalyst Programme gave her confidence, and showed her that she could make a difference to the lives of others, without necessarily having a job.
- The Catalyst Programme tried to help young people gain skills and employability. At one of its events, someone from 3FF happened to be there and had suggested that she apply for a 3FF Internship. She had completed an internship at 3FF and at the end of it still wanted to work in inter faith dialogue.
- She then applied for a job at Near Neighbours, as their Communications Officer, and, as a graduate of the Catalyst programme, was delighted to be accepted. She had found the job amazing, and had been privileged to visit a wide diversity of projects. Among other work, she had helped to start a project for World Peace Day that asked the question, 'What does peace mean to you?'. This evolved into a social media campaign that used the hashtag #peacemeans.

## Q&A

- Near Neighbours received significant funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government. How many bases or centres did it have?

*There were Near Neighbours bases in London, the East Midlands, Luton, the North West, the Black Country, and more.*

- How did Near Neighbours create connections across generations?

*It was always looking for people of different faiths and beliefs, and people of all ages, to work together to create a more cooperative and tolerant society. The Catalyst programme was a good way of engaging young people in inter faith activity, as it was solely focused on those aged 16-30.*

- In respect of creating connections across generations, what was an effective project that Near Neighbours had done or supported and how could people find out more and get involved?

*'Elders and Visionaries' was a specific project that all participants could draw upon, as this directly brought people of different generations together to share in inter faith learning and dialogue.*

- What could be done in schools?

*The Near Neighbours Catalyst programme was an excellent way of engaging young people in inter faith work, and persuading them to engage with older generations.*

- Harrow Interfaith was developing work in Sixth Forms across the Borough.

- Bolton Interfaith Council (BIC) had a Young Ambassadors Programme. BIC considered work with young people to be at the top of its list of priorities. Young people were the pride and joy of their work, and they believed that young people made a real difference to inter faith work, particularly when they related to people older than themselves, and others that they did not normally interact



with. For example, young people in Bolton were holding three events during Inter Faith Week that promised to be a great success.

- The Elders and Visionaries project had been developed some years ago<sup>2</sup>. In Nottingham the local inter faith group had put out a notice to other local inter faith groups and schools and invited them to come together to talk about faith and belief. The room was split into two sides, anyone under thirty on one side, and anyone over thirty on the other. The two sides would then have an opportunity to share conversations for two or three minutes in a 'speed dating' style before moving onto the next person. This could be successful, particularly during Inter Faith Week, and in contexts other than intergenerational settings.

**Mr Bhasin** invited **Ms Lynsey Wilkinson, Ms Laura Norris and Mr Qaa'sim Uhuru** to offer their presentation. They offered the following points:

- Ms Wilkinson was an RE teacher at an academy in Nottinghamshire, and believed that RE was really thriving. She also worked for the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. The RE Council was founded in 1973 to deepen and strengthen Religious Education across the country.
- The RE Council's Young Ambassadors programme was going from strength to strength. The programme gave young people who were committed to RE the opportunity to represent the subject at a national level, and to engage with others that had a similar level of enthusiasm. These students represented the true meaning of the subject.
- It had to be recognised that the provision of RE still faced a number of challenges. Lots of people thought that the subject was out of date, and not in keeping with

the values of a modern, forward-thinking society. People had to understand that RE teachers were not encouraging people to be religious, but rather were promoting greater understanding and tolerance of difference. Some of these problems were the result of RE being left out of the English Baccalaureate of five core subjects. This might damage the provision of Religious Education in the future.

- The Young Ambassadors programme was born in the wake of these concerns, and was initially thought of as a way of re-elevating the status of RE, amongst parents, teachers and pupils. Thanks to the RE Council's Young Ambassadors programme, her school had enabled young people to present their work in Parliament, at an annual event, now in its third year.
- The Young Ambassadors programme had also allowed young people to connect with others across generations. This was made particularly evident at her school through an event held with Simon Winston, a Holocaust survivor originally from the Ukraine. People from across the local community were in attendance, and the event was based around the important message that people should treat each other well despite their differences.
- The Young Ambassadors Programme increased cross-generational learning for three reasons. Firstly, it gave young people confidence, enabling them to talk to people older than themselves and to engage with those they might not usually meet in an educational context. Secondly, it improved their communication skills, through opportunities such as addressing MPs in Parliament. Thirdly, it gave young people commitment, enabling them to share positive outcomes.
- Ms Norris was in her third year of being an RE Young Ambassador.

<sup>2</sup> Note: The original Elders and Emerging Visionaries programme was developed by the United Religions Initiative (UK).

- A lot of young people would shy away from such a role, but being a Young Ambassador had helped her to develop the skills she needed and come up with new ideas about the importance of RE, and the direction it should take. She could now use these skills to approach situations in a mature and sensitive way without offending people, and she thought this would help her to live in a multicultural society better in the future.
- The Young Ambassadors Programme had helped to encourage communication across generations and had helped her to become a bridge builder for the future.
- Mr Qaa'sim Uhuru had just become an RE Youth Ambassador. This would also help him to become a bridge builder for the future. The programme had enabled students at his school to have philosophical and ethical conversations with people of all ages and beliefs. They had learnt that it was always important to address people sensitively and to use the right language that was careful not to offend. This stopped people being afraid of talking to each other.

## Q&A

- How did the young people cope with being perceived as not 'cool' in some way because of their passionate interest in RE and the Young Ambassadors programme?

*Young Ambassadors knew themselves that RE was an amazing subject, and this was all that mattered. Everyone needed to know about Religious Education, it was vital for the future of a healthy society.*

*It was true that RE did not have a 'cool' image, and it was understood that there was a stereotype. The whole point though was to change opinions, and small steps must be taken to start breaking down barriers.*

*RE teachers needed to make sure that RE kept gaining a higher profile, but small steps were best in the first instance. Students with an interest in RE could not be made to feel*

*inadequate because of it. These were the building blocks of the good inter faith relations of the future.*

- The reflections from the Young Ambassadors should make all participants proud; they were excellent examples of the cohesive communities of the future.

*It was important to make sure that everyone's hard work was not wasted. These ideas and skills needed to be taken forward into the future.*

- Young people, by their very nature, had an urge to question and explore new ways of being.

*It was extremely important to provide a safe space for young people to ask the big questions in life, and to make sure that they felt comfortable doing so in the right environment.*

*One of the Young Ambassadors had studied RE in order to find out who they really were. Life could be influenced in a positive way by lots of other things.*

*RE at Redhill Academy was never about persuasion to believe one thing or another, but was instead about becoming aware.*

- At some faith schools there was a tendency to teach one religion over another. To what extent did the Redhill Academy teach a range of religions, as well as philosophy and ethics?

*Redhill Academy followed a locally agreed syllabus, but could technically make its own decisions. GCSE was not allotted very much time, so only two religions could be covered in any depth. At Redhill Christianity and Islam were taught as it was felt that students developed a comparative perspective that would allow them to understand other religions in the future.*

- Were other religions not covered as well?

*At Key Stage 3 this was being attempted, but there was a danger of going beyond the specification, and overloading students with too much information.*

## **General Discussion**

- There was a need for authenticity and for more intergenerational work.
- SACREs needed to do more to facilitate connections across generations.
- Bolton Interfaith Council had often been heavily involved with its local SACRE. They had tried their best to work with schools and sharing the same goals helped them to do valuable work with young people.
- With regard to schools, it was really important that the right older people talk with young people.
- Students were not always after 'high theology'. It was often the simple things that really mattered to young people when they were learning about how to engage with older people and people of different faiths and beliefs.
- To what extent were people in this discussion group coming from within a faith tradition when they talked about the provision of Religious Education?
- Schools should interact with other religions. Universities needed to be engaged with carefully, and the provision of education about religion in higher and further education contexts needs to be considered
- Bolton Interfaith Council had organised faith trails as a way of generating intergenerational inter faith work. Young people had come from all over the North West, especially from places where there was not much diversity, such as Barrow, to see the diverse places of worship in Bolton. A lot of good work was going on, and the children were absolutely fascinated. This sort of simple, practical

engagement needed to be encouraged, through other projects such as Sewa Day.

- It was vital that everyone valued young people. This task was, however, incumbent upon older generations as well. It was not much use only having enthusiastic young people! All faith and inter faith institutions needed to reach out beyond the confines of their four walls and connect with sections of the community with which they might not have done previously.

**Mr Bhasin** concluded the discussion, noting that it was necessary to encourage connection in all walks of life, but particularly in schools, which played the most important role in creating future cohesive communities. Young people needed to connect with older people, and this was as much about everyday life as theology. Faith communities provided a good way of getting people of different generations engaged with each other.



## NEAR NEIGHBOURS

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Near Neighbours brings people together in religiously and ethnically diverse communities, through its two key objectives:

- § Social interaction - to develop positive relationships in multi-faith areas i.e. to help people from different faiths get to know and understand each other better.
- § Social action - to encourage people of different faiths, or no faith, to come together for initiatives that improve their local neighbourhood.

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## Catalyst

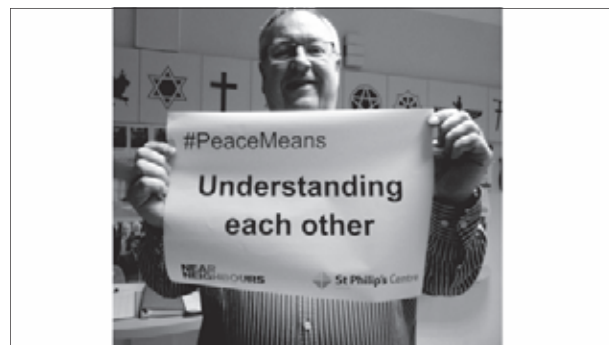
NEAR NEIGHBOURS

The Catalyst programme aims to help people who are 16 - 30:

- Develop a **positive identity** for living in a multi-faith, multi-ethnic Britain.
- Develop the **skills and experience** to play their part in building a strong civil society and enhance their employability.
- Develop the **confidence and the commitment** to act as agents of change in their neighbourhood.

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## Discussion Group 4: 'Cohesive communities: equality within society as a vital dimension'

**Facilitator:** Rabbi Maurice Michaels, IFN Trustee

**Presenter:** Jamie Spurway, Religious Equality Officer, Interfaith Scotland

*Equality within society has a bearing on good inter faith relations. Where communities and their members feel equally treated, there is less likely to be tension or disagreement over issues of resources or experience of marginalisation or exclusion.*

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**Rabbi Maurice Michaels** welcomed participants and invited Mr Jamie Spurway to make his presentation.

**Mr Spurway** said that he was a trainer in equalities and human rights, working mostly in colleges and universities. He offered the following points in his presentation:

- Equality in education, service provision and so forth was about recognising differences and responding to them; aiming for fairness according to need rather than treating everyone the same.
- Though some discrimination was deliberate, most was not. Prejudiced actions often came from lack of awareness of needs.
- Indirect discrimination was one problem. For example, a workplace that had a policy where all staff had to have bare heads (for uniform) would indirectly discriminate against Sikh, Jewish, Muslim and other faith groups.
- Equality was needed in opportunity, process and outcome.
- Statistics on equality came from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- Equality was better now but there was still hidden discrimination, for example in Scotland there were worse employment outcomes for Catholics.
- Underlying this could be anxiety of employers about needs of obviously religious people and also an unconscious bias towards potential employees who were similar to themselves.
- People felt anxious when asked about their religion or sexuality on forms, however, data was needed to identify discrimination.
- Ethnic minorities were twice as likely to have a degree but were three times less likely to get through the interview stage of job application for a local authority. This implied projected prejudice or unconscious bias at the recruitment stage.
- Changing legislation did not always change people's hearts – education and engagement did.
- Hate crime was the sharpest end of discrimination. However discriminating tactics such as stop and search and the Prevent scheme caused more division. These could make people feel more alienated and less likely to apply for jobs in mainstream society.
- The marginalisation made people feel like a persecuted minority with little trust in other groups. Trust was needed to engage on an inter faith level. That lack of engagement and connection was a breeding ground for stereotyping and prejudice.
- There was a need to increase trust and respect in police, health service etc, by increasing knowledge of faiths.
- Local authorities sometimes felt under-resourced to invest in training to understand faith needs.
- The media stereotypes of religions could lead to negative impact.



- Contact theory offered suggestions on how prejudice could be overcome – bringing people together and challenging false beliefs and enabling people to see themselves of equal standing.
- Interfaith Scotland worked from an assumption of indirect discrimination coming from a lack of understanding and information and their work was increasing basic knowledge.

**Mr Spurway** invited the discussion group participants to consider three questions. These, and a summary of responses from the group, are below.

*What other forms of discrimination do faith communities (including non-religious) experience in the UK?*

- There had been progress in some areas but not all and further work was still needed.
- Prejudice was usually based on possessing false information.
- Fear underlay everything.
- There was also positive discrimination.
- What about equal opportunities when there were specific requirements of a faith, for example wearing something particular or going to prayers?
- There was often unconscious discrimination and prejudice.
- There was not enough understanding of Dharmic faiths.
- The mistaken identity of Sikhs for Muslims had led to attacks on the former.
- Perhaps the funding pots and how they were used affected our actions.
- Some incidents created a sense of victimhood.

- Government initiatives could brand some people as victims or troublemakers.
- Local and national politics could affect discrimination.

*How can faith communities work to challenge such inequality (standing up for the rights of others)?*

- Don't shout about things.
- Understand that going through discrimination procedures is exhausting.
- Need to start fresh and see all people as human beings.
- Deal with root causes.
- Understand more about unconscious prejudices.

*What else needs to happen to challenge inequality?*

- Local councils need to be more involved.
- Law enforcement agencies need to be present at discussions such as this one, as do the media.
- IFN should have a dedicated public relations officer to work with the media.
- There needs to be a reconsideration of history. For example slavery was not just ended by white people's actions but also, and earlier, by slaves themselves.
- Positive action rather than using "victim" language.
- There is a role for self-empowerment.
- We need to see the reality on the ground.
- We need to realise that others are like us and none of us are perfect.
- Get rid of all labels.
- Review strategies.



- Take personal responsibility.
- Encourage leaders.
- Have a wider view.
- We need effective education on human rights and religion involving real communication to dissolve barriers.
- More dialogue at the grassroots personal level.
- Understand we are not equal but need the means to help us be more equal.
- Challenge inequality wherever we see it.
- Bring on the young generation.

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*Note: The following information has also been included in this note at Mr Spurway's request. Many of the statistics quoted are from 'Is Scotland Fairer?' by the Equality and Human Rights Commission:  
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/devolved-authorities/commission-scotland/about-commission-scotland/scotland-fairer>*

The average pay drop over recent years is 50pence per hour, but Sikh people have seen the largest drop of £1.20 per hour – it is unknown why, but perhaps relates to their being higher than average self-employment among Sikh (and Muslim) people. If their own business is suffering due to economic downturn then their take-home pay will drop.

In 2013, religious minorities were less likely to be employed (at 61.1%) than Christians (74.4%) or those with no religion (72.9%). There are no significant differences by occupation between religious minorities and those with no religion. There is no robust data on unemployment by religion for Scotland.

Ethnic Minority people often do not live in the areas of greatest deprivation therefore

they often do not gain from efforts to improve and invest in such areas. So we should not think simplistically and only put efforts into the areas of greatest deprivation.

Related to the above is that employment outcomes are poorest among young Muslim and Sikh people.

## Discussion Group 5: Cohesive communities: Diversity and commonality

**Facilitator:** Dr Harriet Crabtree, Inter Faith Network for the UK

**Presenters:** Ngakma Nor'dzin Pamo, Buddhist member, Inter-faith Council for Wales, and Fazal Rahim, Project Coordinator, Oldham Inter Faith Forum

*Balancing the affirmation of diversity with the need for identifying commonalities and shared values.*

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**Dr Crabtree** welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Ngakma Nor'dzin Pamo to offer her presentation, a copy of which follows:

**Nor'dzin Pamo:** I have been Chair of the Buddhist Council of Wales since 2011, and as such am invited to attend a variety of interfaith events.

As a religion, Buddhism is both a little awkward to accommodate in inter faith interaction, and also offers an unusual opportunity to encourage the spirit of inter faith openness and tolerance. In Buddhism there is no holy book to which all Buddhists will refer; there are no teachings that refer to a creator god, or an all-powerful, beneficent god; and even the word 'faith'—which seems to be commonly preferred to the word 'religion'—is slightly problematic in Buddhism because faith is not demanded. The emphasis is on practice. Shakyamuni—the historic Buddha—asked his followers to practise and find out for themselves, rather than simply because of their devotion to him.

So... no book, no god, and no faith – and yet Buddhism is most certainly a religion. I have to regard 'faith' and 'religion' as synonyms, else it make no sense for me to be present at inter faith events.

There can be a tendency at inter faith events to wish to find commonalities as a reason for different faiths coming together. I regularly attend events where someone—of any faith—will say; 'Well, we all believe in the same god, don't we'. This is meant as a friendly, open and inclusive assertion, but it is actually rather disrespectful – and indicates a lack of knowledge of at least one of the religions represented in their audience. I usually keep my head down. It would be rude to challenge them. It would be appreciated if presenters would avoid generalisations, or claims of knowing anything about the beliefs of the people they are addressing. No person of religion can ever fully know or understand the faith and practice of another religion.

Another time I was told that 'We are all sinners.' When I replied, 'I'm not!', the gentleman repeated his statement with more emphasis. I again replied, 'I'm not!' He looked rather exasperated at this point, and I was finding myself rather too strongly reminded of a Monty Python sketch—which seemed potentially disrespectful—so I explained: Buddhism states that we are all beginninglessly enlightened. It does not include any teaching that correlates with the concept of 'original sin'.

There are commonalities that can be found, but these are not generally in the religion itself – they are more about the limitations and expectations a person of religion places upon themselves, such as:

- living within parameters of your faith
- being willing to allow something to be bigger than you are; to allow the needs or precepts of your religion to take precedence in your life
- the wish to change, to be greater than you are, and/or to achieve a state of grace, enlightenment, or whatever is the aspiration of that religion
- believing in the potential of your religion to bring out the best in human beings

- to care about others; to regard compassion and kindness as an important aspect of being a human being

Involvement in inter faith should not demand compromise of the representatives of religion or faith. Friendly inter faith interaction should not require such a compromise, or any sense of a dilution of the tenets of the religions represented. Inter faith must applaud and support each religion's right to be different – to be practised in different ways, and to hold widely different beliefs and views.

Yet seeking commonality seems to be pervasive. Seeking and finding what is the same in the world religions, however, is not a guaranteed road to harmony. There is a danger that choosing this route will lead to too much that cannot be said for fear of upsetting the balance. There is the danger of feeling the need to carefully steer a rather narrow path. I feel that the broader path of openness, respect, and appreciation of difference is preferable, though not always easy. I recognise that I do sometimes avoid being clear that Buddhism is an atheistic, or non-theistic religion, because I know that for people I care about, who believe in a creator god, this is not easy to hear or understand.

Knowing that our faiths or religions are different—possibly radically different—yet finding that we are people of kind heart; discovering that inter faith colleagues also cultivate patience and openness; recognising inter faith friends can like one another and enjoy each other's company – this is the opportunity offered by inter faith interaction.

Friendly and respectful interaction, and intermixing of people of different religions—or of no religion—can ripple out into the community. When there is no fear of difference, then there is nothing to hate. Inter faith harmony and respect can help to create a society that is tolerant. Respect for difference, appreciation of difference, the enjoyment of difference – this is the value of inter faith interaction. Let us celebrate that

our freedom to be different is the key to a healthy society.

**Dr Crabtree** thanked Ngakma Pamo for her presentation and invited Mr Fazal Rahim to offer his. A copy of his PowerPoint slides are annexed to this note.

**Mr Rahim** offered the following reflections:

- Oldham Interfaith Forum (OIF) had been in existence for 14 years.
- Its focus was on building respect and understanding.
- It had a programme of work with schools in which people from different faith backgrounds, such as vicars and imams, visited schools to speak with the students. Attending together was a demonstration of cohesion. By the end of the sessions there was an increase in the number of students who thought that Christianity and Islam had strong similarities. When OIF members visited schools the presentations brought in as many faiths as possible.
- Christians and Muslims were the largest two faith communities in Oldham. Oldham had two Hindu temples. It did not have a settled Jewish community. The nearest synagogue was at Heaton Park in Manchester but Oldham had adopted its rabbi!
- OIF also had a programme through which imams and mosque leaders visited synagogues. Some of the imams had been surprised to learn of the similarities between the faiths.
- In 2007 OIF had taken a group of young people to Srebrenica and Auschwitz to learn about the impact of extremism. Unfortunately, funding for this programme had ceased.
- OIF brought a group of Christian, Hindu and Muslim students together to share stories. This was funded through the Near Neighbours programme.

- OIF helped Oldham Sixth Form College to set up an inter faith group. They held an event entitled 'Any Questions on Faith' at which they were able to ask *any* questions. There were 4 faith leaders on the panel and students were able to ask questions that they were usually too embarrassed or shy to ask.
- OIF used to have a women's inter faith group. As the younger members of the group married and moved away, the group closed down. In 2015 OIF brought together Christian, Hindu and Muslim women in a group called 'Women Growing Together'. They met on a monthly basis. Around 50 women had attended each event. A female Muslim cleric was involved. Events had included themes based on faith and food and sharing stories.

## Q&A

- What were the benefits of inviting open questions?

*It helped those who would otherwise be embarrassed to ask.*

- Faith communities had many concerns in common, such as justice, poverty and domestic violence. People encountered such issues regardless of sexual orientation or faith.

*Domestic violence was one of the topics that had been discussed by OIF's Women Growing Together group.*

- How did OIF accommodate Buddhism?

*There was a very small Sri Lankan Buddhist community in Oldham. OIF arranged an event with a Buddhist speaker but they only came in one year.*

- It was easier for some faith communities to find commonalities than others. That was why some faith community groupings, such as Abrahamic or Dharmic, worked together.

- It was very good that OIF had strategies for raising awareness with young people. Inclusivity was the key to increasing cohesion.

## General discussion

In discussion the following points were made. Points have been grouped by theme.

## Diversity and commonality

- Diversity should be celebrated and enjoyed. It was like a beautiful garden of mixed flowers.
- It was nice to find similarities between people as human beings. People shared basic needs for example for food and water.
- Islam valued diversity and saw it as a gift from God. If there was only one type of flower in the garden, it would have little beauty. The world was a vibrant garden for everyone.
- The common values of, for example, love, respect and care, were in many religions. The Abrahamic faiths had similarities between their scriptures.
- It was fortunate to live somewhere like the UK where people were diverse.
- What was commonality? Shared beliefs? Similar practices? Common humanity? Common or compatible views on transcendence?
- There were many differences within individual faith communities, not just between them.
- Points of difference with otherwise similar traditions were sometimes the most challenging to address – for example between denominations of one tradition or two traditions with much in common.
- The speaker said that she had become a widow 20 years before. At the time she

- had been shown compassion by people from all backgrounds and walks of life.
- If people were not afraid of difference, there would be no need to hate.
  - It had been interesting to watch IFN's membership widening. Birmingham Council of Faiths had also been widening its membership.
  - A truly religious person, such as the Good Samaritan in the Christian tradition, responded to need with compassion. Many groups, including Humanists, also began with the heart. Many people had a good heart without being religious.
  - Rugby Inter Faith Forum was a small discussion group. In Rugby there were many churches, but only 1 mosque and 1 temple. There were no synagogues, nor any Buddhist groups. The people who attended the Forum's meetings came together to share their faith journeys and to look for commonality and diversity.
  - Bedford as One was an organisation made up of community and faith groups specifically looking at commonalities. Those involved had badges saying 'We belong'.
  - It was a shame that at one of the 'We Stand Together' events there had not been a wider variety of faiths involved. A lack of inclusivity could lead to alienation.
- 'Faith' did not necessarily mean 'religion'.
  - The media played a large role in the use of language. Everyone should take a lead in promoting good inter faith work. It was saddening the media often did not report good news.

### Young people

- Schools projects were very important. Children were not born racist; they learnt to be so. Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group was running a project with schools.
- The speaker said that she had been invited into a school to answer questions from pupils in Years 5 and 6 about Buddhism. One child asked if Buddhists believed in God. When she replied that there was no belief in a God in Buddhism, a member of staff had walked out. That kind of behaviour was not helpful in teaching children. It was a missed opportunity to celebrate difference.
- When children asked questions about faith, they needed to be answered. It was not enough just to say that there was some diversity and some commonality. All agencies, such as schools, the NHS and the Police, needed to be on board, not just places of worship. IFN's lead was very good.
- Practitioners often fell back on cultural practices when responding to questions. Many faith communities shared cultures.
- No religion had all the right answers. The speaker had worked in India and mixed with people from many religions and appreciated this. He was very open to learning from other faiths. It seemed that Buddhists were encouraged to question, but Christians not so much.

### Language

- Humanists sometimes objected to people being described as "all children of God". It could be preferable to say "all part of the human family".
- People often used language thinking that others had the same definition of certain words. However, for example, there could be a distinction between 'religion' and 'faith'. The speaker said that she belonged to a religion but faith was what drove her.

### Chaplaincy

- In chaplaincy work people had spiritual and pastoral needs. They often did not mind who supported them.



- Bedford University chaplaincy supported people of no faith and belief as well. The chaplaincy team discussed diversity and commonality every day because there were open discussions with the students at the chaplaincy centre. Everyone could have compassion, however, occasionally a chaplain from a specific faith background was needed, such as when a student died.
- There was a need to encourage people more widely. Chaplaincies across the board contributed a lot.
- Spirituality was known to help mental health patients to recover, regardless of faith.

## Oldham Interfaith Forum

Fazal Rahim

## Work with Schools

- 5 Pillars of Islam & similarities Christianity & other faiths
- Begin by asking the Question "how many people think that Islam & Christianity are similar?"
- Finish by asking the same question

## Visit of Imams to a Synagogue

- No Synagogues in Oldham
- Imams were surprised to find similarities
  - The place of scripture in the Synagogue
  - Ablution
  - Segregation of the congregation
  - The Building and its layout

## Young People

- Leading to Respect
- Catalyst
- Oldham 6<sup>th</sup> Form College 'Any Questions'

## Women

- Women Growing Together
  - Women's Role in Faith Communities
  - Food in Faith
- Sharing of Stories

## Conclusion

- This is a snap shot of the work of Oldham Interfaith Forum to show the similarities that we often explore together. But we always recognise that there are differences which we respect.



## Discussion Group 6: Cohesive communities: the importance of learning and dialogue

**Facilitator:** Karl Wightman, Baha'i Community of the UK

**Presenters:** Dr Avijit Datta, Chair, York Interfaith Group, and Dr Jane Clements, Director, Council of Christians and Jews

*Learning and dialogue play a vital role in creating positive encounter and engagement and cohesive communities.*

.....

**Mr Karl Wightman** welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Dr Avijit Datta to offer his presentation.

**Dr Datta** offered a PowerPoint presentation, illustrating the combination of educational and dialogue work that had been taking place through York Interfaith Group. A copy of his presentation is annexed to this note.

- York Interfaith Group had been focusing on the following five areas:
  - a) Cohesion
  - b) Terrorism
  - c) Refugees
  - d) Hate crime
  - e) Education- this was identified as central to generating a climate for long term dialogue.
- An important factor in ensuring the possibility for education between different faiths to occur was the creation of an effective environment.
- In 2013 a remembrance service was held reflecting on the Jewish massacre in York in 1190.

- There was an Anti-Muslim march on York Mosque by the EDL who were met with offers of tea and dialogue.
- The Bradford women's faith group in collaboration with Touchstone, had worked on a project to create a Carpet of Wisdom through a Weaving Women's Wisdom inter faith project.
- Projects such as this demonstrated that it was at a grass roots level where things really worked in reality.
- It was important to incorporate elements of positive discrimination in inter faith groups in order to create an environment that enabled all to feel included.
- With regard to school-based education, a good example was a sixth form project entitled 'Disagreeing well', which was designed through a collaboration between York Interfaith Group, York Minster and the University of York. It involved a rabbi, Muslim solicitor, Roman Catholic Educator, Anglican Canon Chancellor and senior Humanist.
- In summary, the following were important elements in developing learning and dialogue: the learning environment was crucial; there needed to be practical activities; youth engagement; art; and discussion and learning needed to be from young people and not in the form of lectures.

### Q&A

- There had been no mention of primary and secondary schools. There was a need to catch young people earlier.

*There was a schools programme planned for Inter Faith week that would begin to address this.*

- The point had been made in the presentation that dialogue needed to engage with the issues and not emotions when tackling objection to inclusion. However, emotions were a real and valid

aspect of how people responded to issues.

- Criticism of other religions through preaching could create conflict, rather than cohesion.

**Mr Wightman** thanked Dr Datta for his presentation and invited Dr Jane Clements to offer hers.

**Dr Clements** offered the following reflections:

- The Council of Christians and Jews began as a bilateral dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi in 1942.
- The vision was for Christians and Jews to meet and get to know one another, developing a positive relationship.
- Dialogue was both a skill and a process.
- The Council of Christians and Jews was still going. Relationships in the community were actually getting worse, partly because of issues around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Dialogue should never be over.
- There were three key features required for learning and dialogue:
  - Relationship: to override/challenge ideology that would be negative about 'the other'.
  - Motivation: might be different from different groups, but the quality and nature of dialogue and what it could achieve should be of primary importance.
  - Listening: Really listening to others, rather than planning your next response while 'the other' was speaking, was essential to a learning dialogue.
- The quote '*I don't know what I've said until you tell me what you've heard*' illustrated

the point that, even when we were really listening, what we understood and interpreted of the words we heard might differ from what it was intended be communicated.

## Q&A

- Personal perception was a feature within dialogue: one person's freedom fighter was another person's terrorist and it was important to try to understand what was dividing us.

*Advocacy might be one response, speaking out against wrongs, but that suggested conflict. Dialogue was another response altogether, with a need to focus on relationship, and to engage in humanising 'the other' to help the process.*

## General discussion

- In order to move forward from conflicts, it was important to not look back in sorrow, but forward in joy.
- Some school teachers might not have skills necessary to promote learning through dialogue, or be aware of them. Teachers should be encouraged and supported in developing skills to create the right environment for a learning dialogue, including active listening, understanding and empathy, and how to engage with children so they engaged with each other, perhaps with the message 'in listening, you can learn something new'.
- The dialogue 'industry' had begun developing a rationale, and that dialogue must also include a critical understanding of what religion meant today. Also, that it was important to actually engage with issues.

The following points were identified with regard to the importance of learning and dialogue to cohesive communities:

- The need for listening actively and with humility.

- Engaging with issues and seeking to understand emotions connected with the issues. There was discussion about the role of emotion within dialogue: some feeling that dispassionate dialogue was the best way to resolution with others feeling that emotions were a vital part of any dialogical process.
- Including practical activity, such as art that enabled the young, including those of primary and secondary school age, to facilitate their own learning.

*Offers reflections on dialogue in the local context from the perspective of a group which has used both its regular programme and Inter Faith Week to expand opportunities for dialogue, including "Christian and Dharmic" dialogue,*

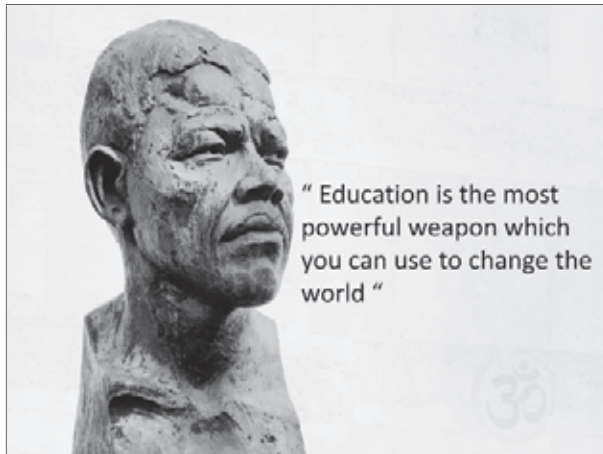
*as well as dialogue with members of the York Mosque (which attracted national notice in the context of its 'tea and chat invitation' response to the EDL)*

Dr. Avijit Datta

Chairman, York Interfaith Group



- The question of how communities 'cohere' and what common values and expectations they share has come increasingly to the fore in the following months.
- Partly, this has been triggered by the impact upon communities in this country of international terrorist attacks and persecutions and the refugee crisis.
- Other factors have included the increase in hate crime in some areas following the EU referendum.
- There also continue to be many other reasons that faith and cohesion are a focus of attention: the positive contribution of faith communities to community wellbeing; the role of educators about religion (and non-religious beliefs) and the manifold community affirming dimensions of inter faith engagement.



### Long Term Dialogue - Take Home Messages

- Practical Activities
- Youth engagement, Education
- Arts
- Food
- Discussion not lecture
- Don't Proselytise or self promote your faith
- Don't forget Humanists, Agnostics and Atheists



"Calm Down, Dear: PMQ 2011 (Angela Eagle)"

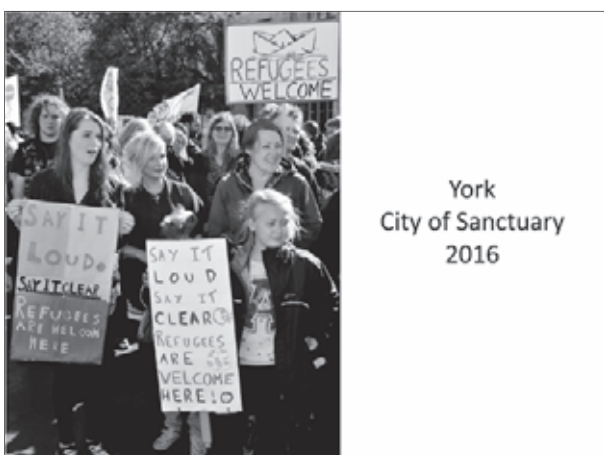






**2016 Annual Programme**  
**Imam as Vice Chair**

- Making Sense of Islam in a Modern World  
 ( Ataullah Siddiqui – Markfield Inst HE)
- What happens after death ?
- The Seduction of Extremism
- The Hajj
- Refugees, City of Sanctuary
- Arts, Tree Planting
- University students
- Joint Project – Multifaith Centre
- Touchstone Centre, Bradford



## 2017 Dharma - Interfaith Studies

- Religious Freedom in an Increasingly Secular World – Lord Parekh
- Six Interfaith Principles from the Bhagavad-Gita – Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies
- Meeting Sikhs, exploring Sikhism – Prof E. Nesbit
- Linkages between Dharmic and Abrahamic Faiths, with a particular emphasis on Buddhism – E. Harris
- Visit to Samye Dzong Buddhist Centre
- 'Introducing Theravada Buddhism and its cultivation of mindfulness' Prof Peter Harvey
- Dharma and Christianity

## Look Forwards with Joy, not back with sorrow:

- Practical Activities – Football, Tree planting, Flood relief
- Youth engagement, education
- Music, Dance, Art
- Food
- Discussion, not lecture
- Don't Proselytise or self promote your faith
- Don't forget Humanists, Agnostics and Atheists

## Discussion Group 7: Cohesive communities: the impact of the web and social media on cohesion

**Facilitators:** David Hampshire, Inter Faith Network for the UK, and Ashley Beck, Inter Faith Network for the UK

**Presenters:** Natasha Blank, More Tea Less Hate campaign, 'Worrying Signs', and Dr Harshad Sanghrajka MBE, Deputy Chairman, Institute of Jainology

*Cohesion is significantly affected by action in the virtual as well as the physical world. The internet and social media are increasingly affecting our participation in community life and our views and understandings of each other.*

.....

**Mr Ashley Beck** welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Ms Natasha Blank to offer her presentation.

**Ms Blank** offered her presentation remotely, via Skype. [A link to her video presentation is at [http://prezi.com/l4fv\\_-25io41/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy](http://prezi.com/l4fv_-25io41/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy).]

- Following the increase in hate speech and hate crime in the wake of the Referendum result, a group of young professionals set up a Facebook site called 'Worrying Signs' to collect reports of abuse, which rapidly grew to a membership of around 19,000.
- Neither government nor police had been able to keep any real measure of such incidents, insofar as many did not get reported officially; either because people were uncertain as to what actually constituted a hate crime, did not understand their rights in this respect, or were nervous of the process of reporting.
- Those concerned were acting independently, with no establishment support or funding. Their initiative grew,

and evolved into an action programme called 'More Tea Less Hate'.

- They encouraged small, local groups to hold events for their community, in particular involving those fearing hate abuse, and they provided support materials for tea parties.
- On the 2016 August Bank Holiday numerous events were held around the UK. More Tea Less Hate had also grown as a workplace movement, and some organisations held tea parties for staff and/or community.

### Q&A

- Was there any way of getting more accurate recording of hate crime?

*MTLH had been in contact with the Crown Prosecution Service, as they and other groups such as Stop Hate UK wanted to see this improved. Many people thought they should only report hate crimes if violence was involved.*

- Did MTLH suffer any online backlash?

*Yes, it was trolled and attracted abusive tweets, for example from the English Defence League. Now every post on the Facebook site was subject to moderation, and MTLH had 30 volunteer moderators.*

- MTLH showed what a positive role social media can play in cohesion, on a very low budget and with no official help.
- Those wishing to use social media positively should not be deterred by the threat of trolling.
- Policy on hate crime was not based on realistic figures, and there should be more help and encouragement of reporting through an active channel, rather than an assumption that the reaction to the Referendum was a short-lived phenomenon.

**Mr David Hampshire** thanked Ms Blank for her presentation. He noted the ongoing



work that IFN was doing in this area on updating its guidance: *Looking After One Another: The Safety and Security of our Faith Communities* and also the presentations made to IFN's Faith Communities Forum and to an IFN day event for Local Inter Faith Practitioners by Sally Sealey OBE, Senior Policy Adviser on Hate Crime, Integration and Faith Directorate, Department for Communities and Local Government, on the Government's Hate Crime Action Plan published in July (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016>). He then invited Dr Harshad Sanghrajka to make his presentation.

**Dr Sanghrajka** offered a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which is annexed to this note.

- 'JAINPEDIA' was a reference site created by the Institute of Jainology for ancient manuscripts from the Jain faith.
- The three volume Catalogue of Jain Manuscripts in the collection of The British Library was the basis of the JAINPEDIA website. (A copy of this was shown to participants.)
- Whilst the catalogue was a comprehensive record of the Jain manuscripts, it did not solve:
  - the problem of accessibility of the originals at the source libraries;
  - the problem of understanding ancient languages; or
  - the understanding of the philosophy.
- The website was developed using 5,000 original folios of the manuscripts digitised at a very high level of resolution.
- Jain scholars worldwide were invited to write essays on Jain philosophy and doctrines.
- The images were then linked to the essays contextually to eliminate the three problems stated above.

- The material was divided into 4 easily understandable themes, which were broad, overlapping categories:
  - People
  - Principles
  - Practices
  - Places
- Copies of the following publications were available for browsing:
  - Discover Jainism ~ Primary school text
  - Jain Tales ~ Supporting text
  - Coffee Table Book ~ 25 years of achievement
- A demo of the JAINPEDIA.ORG website was run and the LEARNJAINISM.ORG website was introduced.

## Q&A

- How was Jainpedia funded?

*By the Jain community worldwide and by public donations and by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.*

- Was the purpose of Jainpedia educational or to proselytise?

*It was intended to be educational.*

- How was the accuracy of texts ensured?

*They worked with accredited academic institutions and expert scholars in the field, such as the Digital Humanities Department of King's College, London.*

**Mr Beck** noted that Jainpedia was creating resources to educate the public. This was proactive work to educate the public and thereby reduce the likelihood of ignorance and prejudice. Such work complemented the reactive work of More Tea Less Hate.



## Inter Faith Network for the UK National Meeting 2016 Peterborough

Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016

[www.jainpedia.org](http://www.jainpedia.org)



## From ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS To GLOBAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA

[www.jainpedia.org](http://www.jainpedia.org)



### The IDEA ~ Cataloguing of Jain Mss.



- Reference source
- Record of collections
- HOWEVER:
- Problem of language
- Difficulty of access
- Understanding philosophy



### PROJECT TIMING: 2008 - 2013 OUR PARTNERS

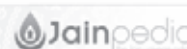


Cultural Association of the UK



### Folios/Artefacts digitised

COLLECTION	NUMBER	REMARKS
Bodleian Oxford	267	
British Library	4000	Best collection
Royal Asiatic Soc.	84	Artefacts
V & A Museum	448	
Wellcome Trust	544	Medicine related



### The *FOUR* simple *THEMES*



- *People*
- *Principles*
- *Practices*
- *Places*



### ARTICLE CONTEXTUAL MATERIAL



- \* images
- \* reading list
- \* web links including audio/video
- \* glossary
- \* e-Library
- \* timeline





# Participant list

Mr Ajay Aggarwal  
Leicester Council of Faiths

Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE  
Islamic Foundation

Ms Charanjit AjitSingh  
Hounslow Friends of Faith/International  
Interfaith Centre

Mr Saeedbhai Akuji  
Bolton Interfaith Council

Bishop Dr Joe Aldred  
Churches Together in England

The Rt Revd Richard Atkinson OBE  
Inter Faith Network Co-Chair

Mr George Ballentyne  
Christians Aware Faith Awareness

Dr Joy Barrow  
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Miss Susan Barton  
Rugby InterFaith Forum

Mr Michael Berkson  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group

Mrs Valerie Berkson  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group

Mr Keith Bishop  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Ms Natasha Blank  
Worrying Signs

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth  
Department for Communities and Local  
Government

The Revd James Breslin  
United Reformed Church in the  
UK/Newcastle Council of Faiths

Minister David Bruton  
Spiritualists' National Union

Mr Laurie Burrow  
Rugby InterFaith Forum

Cllr Ruth Bush  
Westminster Faith Exchange

Mrs Cynthia Capey  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource

Dr David Capey  
East of England Faiths Agency

Mr Mohinder Singh Chana  
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)

Mr Nemu Chandaria OBE  
Institute of Jainology

Dr Jane Clements  
Council of Christians and Jews

Mr Andrew Clow  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Revd Jon Dal Din  
Westminster Interfaith

Dr Avijit Datta  
York Interfaith Group

Mr Philip Davies  
Department for Communities and Local  
Government

Mr Malcolm Deboo  
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Dr Dale Dishon  
Historic England

Acharya Modgala Duguid  
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)

Mr Forrest Dunbar  
Bedford Council of Faiths

Fr Mozes Estee Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum	Ms Jenny Kartupelis MBE World Congress of Faiths
Mr Mustafa Field Faiths Forum for London	Mr Rajnish Kashyap Council of Dharmic Faiths
Mr Sean Finlay Wisbech Interfaith Forum	Mr Abid Khan North Lincolnshire Multi-Faith Partnership
Mrs Phiroza Gan Kotwal Harrow Interfaith	Mr Pejman Khojasteh International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
Mr Kulwant Gautam National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)	Mr Jitesh Ladva BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
Canon Bede Gerrard South East England Faiths Forum	Ms Sabira Lakha World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
The Revd Canon Dr John Hall Devon Faith and Belief Forum/Exeter Inter- Faith Group	Mr Mark Lilley Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
Miss Christine Hardy DeafBlind UK	Mr Yann Lovelock The Buddhist Society
Mrs Helen Harrison Religious Education Council of England and Wales	Councillor Saima Mahmud Waltham Forest Faiths Forum
Minister David Hopkins Spiritualists' National Union	Ms Dina Mandalia Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group
Mr David Horner Religions for Peace UK	Miss Aishah Mehmood Near Neighbours
The Revd Cassandra Howes Bedford Council of Faiths	Ms Gillian Merron Board of Deputies of British Jews
Mr Sajjad Jivraj Peterborough Inter-Faith Council	The Revd Prebendary Michael Metcalf National Association of SACREs
Ms Julie Jones Inter-faith Council for Wales	Rabbi Maurice Michaels Inter Faith Network Executive Committee Member
The Revd Prudence Jones Inter Faith Network Executive Committee Member	Mr Satya Prakash Minhas Hindu Council UK
Ms Sophie Jones Department for Communities and Local Government	Miss Varsha Mistry Hindu Council UK
	Mr Farooq Murad Islamic Foundation

The Revd David Musgrave  
Methodist Church in Britain

Ms Mehri Niknam MBE  
Joseph Interfaith Foundation

Mr Godfrey Nix  
Nottingham Inter Faith Council

Mrs Rose Norgate  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource

Ms Laura Norris  
Religious Education Council of England and  
Wales/Redhill Academy

Mr Nitin Palan  
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

Ngakma Nor'dzin Pamo  
Interfaith Council for Wales

Mr Chandrakant Parmar  
Bolton Interfaith Council

Mrs Trupti Patel  
Hindu Forum of Britain

Mr Neil Pitchford  
Druid Network

The Revd Dr Alan Race  
World Congress of Faiths

Mr Fazal Rahim  
Oldham Inter Faith Forum

Dr V P Narayan Rao  
Inter Faith Network Executive Committee  
member

Moulana M Shahid Raza OBE  
British Muslim Forum

Mrs Rajni Reddi  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council

Ms Fakhera Rehman  
Kirklees Faiths Forum

Mr David Rennie  
Interfaith Milton Keynes

Dr Norman Richardson MBE  
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum

Mrs Barbara Richardson-Todd  
East of England Faiths Agency

Mrs Jean Rookes  
Birmingham Council of Faiths

Dr Peter Rookes  
Birmingham Council of Faiths

Mr Reynold Rosenberg  
Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group

Ms Mandip Sahota  
Baroness Warsi Foundation

Dr Harshadray Sanghrajka  
Institute of Jainology

Canon Steven Saxby  
Waltham Forest Faiths Forum

Ven Bogoda Seelawimala Thero  
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB

Dr Natubhai Shah MBE  
Jain Network/Jain Samaj Europe

Mr Vinay Shah  
Institute of Jainology

Pandit Satish Sharma  
Inter Faith Network Executive Committee  
Member

Mrs Vinaya Sharma  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)

Pandit Madhu Shastri  
National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)

Mr Anthony Silkoff  
Board of Deputies of British Jews

Mr Jaspal Singh  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council

Mr Bhupinder Singh Bhasin  
Interfaith Youth Trust



Mr Jatinder Singh Birdi  
Warwick District Faiths Forum

Mr Resham Singh Sandhu MBE  
Inter Faith Forum for Leicestershire

Mrs Valerie Skottowe  
Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group

Mrs Manjula Sood MBE  
Leicester Council of Faiths

Mr Jamie Spurway  
Interfaith Scotland

Mr Mike Stygal  
Pagan Federation

Mr Robin Taylor  
Pagan Federation

Mr Qaa'Sim Uhuru  
Religious Education Council of England and  
Wales/Redhill Academy

Ms Marie van der Zyl  
Board of Deputies of British Jews

Mr Narendra Waghela  
Leicester Council of Faiths

Ms Marion Waraguru  
Women's Interfaith Network

Mr Martin Weightman  
All Faiths Network

Bessie White  
Quaker Committee for Christian and  
Interfaith Relations

Mr Karl Wightman  
Baha'i Community of the UK

Ms Lynsey Wilkinson  
Religious Education Council of England and  
Wales/Redhill Academy

Mr Vivian Wineman  
Inter Faith Network Co-Chair

# The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Inter faith understanding, respect and cooperation is ever more important in the UK today.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) links and works with national faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations, academic and educational organisations with an interest in inter faith relations, as well as with other organisations including Government and other public agencies, to strengthen inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. IFN is unique in its scope and role both within the UK and in Europe. It has been bringing organisations and people together for 30 years and its work is always evolving to meet fresh needs.

IFN carries out its work of strengthening good inter faith relations through:

- providing advice and support to inter faith organisations around the country to add value to their work
- running a helpline which each year assists hundreds of people with their inter faith projects or issues
- advocating for support of local inter faith groups and national and regional inter faith initiatives
- producing resources, in cooperation with its members, on issues of common concern such as faith based dietary practice
- bringing its member bodies and others together regularly to meet and discuss issues of common concern
- other programmes of work including Faith and Public Life and Inter Faith Week

For more information about IFN, visit [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk).

The work of IFN is supported by faith communities, trusts, other donors, and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

# Member organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2016–17

## Faith Community Representative Bodies

Baha'i Community of the UK  
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha  
Board of Deputies of British Jews  
British Muslim Forum  
Buddhist Society  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland  
Churches Together in England  
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)  
Druid Network  
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches  
Hindu Council (UK)  
Hindu Forum of Britain  
Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain  
Islamic Cultural Centre  
Jain Network  
Jain Samaj Europe  
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)  
Methodist Church in Britain  
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board  
Muslim Council of Britain  
National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)  
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)  
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)  
Pagan Federation  
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations  
Spiritualists' National Union  
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB  
United Reformed Church in the UK  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)  
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League  
World Islamic Mission (UK)  
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

## Educational and Academic Bodies

Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme  
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds  
Institute of Jainology  
Islamic Foundation  
National Association of SACREs  
Religious Education Council of England and Wales  
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education  
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter  
Wales Association of SACREs  
Woolf Institute

## National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum  
Interfaith Scotland  
Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru  
  
Faiths Forum for London  
North East Regional Faiths Network  
South East England Faith Forum  
  
All Faiths Network for the UK  
Children of Abraham (Imams and Rabbis Council of the United Kingdom)  
Christian Muslim Forum  
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme  
Coexist Foundation  
Council of Christians and Jews  
Council of Dharmic Faiths  
East of England Faiths Agency  
Hindu Christian Forum  
Interfaith Alliance UK  
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)  
International Interfaith Centre  
Joseph Interfaith Foundation

Lokahi Foundation  
 London Boroughs Faiths Network  
 London Inter Faith Centre  
 London Society of Jews and Christians  
 Maimonides Interfaith Foundation  
 Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby  
 Religions for Peace (UK)  
 Scriptural Reasoning  
 St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace  
 St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society  
 Three Faiths Forum  
 United Religions Initiative (UK)  
 Westminster Interfaith  
 Women's Interfaith Network  
 World Congress of Faiths

### **Local Inter Faith Groups**

Altrincham Inter Faith Group  
 Learning Together, Living in Harmony (Aylesbury)  
 Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum  
 Barnet Multi-Faith Forum  
 Bedford Council of Faiths  
 Birmingham Council of Faiths  
 Blackpool Faith Forum  
 Bolton Interfaith Council  
 Faith Links (Bournemouth and Poole)  
 Bradford Concord Interfaith Society  
 Brent Multi-Faith Forum  
 Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group  
 Bristol Inter Faith Group  
 Bristol Multi-Faith Forum  
 Building Bridges in Burnley  
 Muslim-Christian Forum (Bury)  
 Calderdale Interfaith Council  
 Cambridge Inter-Faith Group  
 Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action  
 Cheltenham Inter Faith  
 Cherwell Faith Forum  
 Cleveland and Tees Valley Inter Faith Group  
 Cornwall Faiths Forum  
 Coventry Multi-Faith Forum  
 Crawley Interfaith Network  
 Faiths Together in Croydon  
 Cumbria Interfaith Forum  
 Devon Faith and Belief Forum  
 Doncaster Interfaith  
 Dudley Borough Interfaith Network  
 Eastbourne Faiths Forum

Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum  
 Exeter Faith and Belief Group  
 Gateshead Inter Faith Forum  
 Hampshire Interfaith Network  
 Harrow Interfaith  
 Hastings and District Interfaith Forum  
 Hillingdon Inter Faith Network  
 Horsham Interfaith Forum  
 Hounslow Friends of Faith  
 Huddersfield Inter Faith Council  
 Inter Faith Isle of Man  
 Inter-faith North/West (Northern Ireland)  
 Islington Faiths Forum  
 Keighley Interfaith Group  
 Kingston Inter Faith Forum  
 Kirklees Faiths Forum  
 Faiths Together in Lambeth  
 Lancashire Forum of Faiths  
 Faith in Lancaster  
 Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship  
 Leeds Faiths Forum  
 Leicester Council of Faiths  
 Interfaith Forum for Leicestershire  
 Loughborough Council of Faiths  
 Luton Council of Faiths  
 Faith Network for Manchester  
 Mansfield Interfaith Group  
 Medway Inter Faith Action Forum  
 Merseyside Council of Faiths  
 Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)  
 Milton Keynes Council of Faiths  
 Newcastle Council of Faiths  
 Newham Association of Faiths  
 North Herts Faith Forum  
 North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council  
 North Lincolnshire Multi Faith Partnership  
 North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths  
 Northampton Inter Faith Forum  
 Norwich InterFaith Link  
 Nottingham Inter Faith Council  
 Oldham Inter Faith Forum  
 Oxford Round Table of Religions  
 Building Bridges Pendle - Interfaith Community Project  
 Peterborough Inter-Faith Council  
 Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity  
 Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum  
 Preston Faith Forum  
 Redbridge Faith Forum  
 Rochdale Multi Faith Partnership  
 Rugby Inter Faith Forum  
 Sheffield Inter Faith  
 Solihull Faiths Forum

South London Inter Faith Group  
South Shropshire Interfaith Forum  
Southampton Council of Faiths  
Southwark Multi Faith Forum  
Stafford and District Friends of Faith  
Stratford-on-Avon Interfaith Forum  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource  
Faiths United (Tameside)  
Torbay Interfaith Forum  
Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum  
Wakefield Interfaith Group  
Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum  
Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network  
Warwick District Faiths Forum  
Watford Inter Faith Association  
Wellingborough Inter Faith Group  
Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group  
Westminster Faith Exchange  
William Campbell-Taylor (City of London  
Interfaith)  
Windsor and Maidenhead Community  
Forum  
Wisbech Interfaith Forum  
Interfaith Wolverhampton  
Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum  
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths  
York Interfaith Group

*List as at the close of the 2016 AGM*

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2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH

[ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)

[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

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