

The Big Picture:
National and Local Faith
Communities Working Together
for Inter Faith Cooperation
and Understanding

*The
Inter Faith
Network
for the
United Kingdom*



Report on the
2011 National
Meeting

The Big Picture: National and Local Faith Communities Working Together for Inter faith Cooperation and Understanding

Report on the 2011 National Meeting of
the Inter Faith Network for the UK

held on 13 July
at Maple House, Birmingham

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Foreword

This report records the proceedings of the 2011 National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The day was a chance for participants to explore:

- the roles which national faith community bodies play in resourcing local inter faith cooperation and learning – including through resources, guidelines and modelling particular forms of inter faith engagement, such as dialogue and joint social action;
- some particular ways in which national faith community organisations are working to help increase involvement in work to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation and some examples of this in local contexts; and
- how learning from local members helps inform national reflection and guidance and what local inter faith practitioners find helpful from national faith communities in supporting their work.

Workshops allowed for more in depth discussion of particular topics linked to the theme of the day.

The report records the day's sharing of ideas and good practice as well as the exploration of new opportunities and challenges. The Inter Faith Network hopes that it will be a valuable resource for all working on the crucial task of promoting and deepening inter faith understanding and practical cooperation in the United Kingdom today



Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE
Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Welcome

Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE

Director General, Islamic Foundation
Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the morning session of our National Meeting. I suggest that we keep a brief period of silence in which we can remember and give thanks for all those in this country and around the world working for inter faith understanding.

People from around the UK and from different types of member bodies are present here. As you know, each year a different theme is chosen for our National Meeting and last year it focussed on the very important role of local inter faith bodies in shaping our shared society. A key issue emerging from discussions at the meeting last year was how national faith community bodies encourage, support and learn from their local members' engagement in inter faith work. Today's meeting offers the chance to focus on 'The Big Picture: national and local faith communities working together for inter faith cooperation and understanding'.

We will be considering the roles national faith community bodies play in the resourcing of local inter faith cooperation and learning, including guidelines and 'modelling' particular forms of inter faith engagement such as dialogue and joint social action. We will be exploring some particular ways in which national faith community organisations are working to help increase involvement in work to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation and hearing about examples of this in local contexts. We will also be thinking about how learning from local members helps inform national reflection and guidance and what local inter

faith practitioners find helpful from national faith communities in supporting their work. We are delighted to have an excellent range of speakers and workshop facilitators and presenters and I hope that everyone will very much enjoy the day and have a chance to share ideas and examples of good practice.

May I invite Ann Lovelock, representing the Birmingham Council of Faiths, and Gerald Nembhard, of the West Midlands Faiths Forum, to say a few words of welcome to us.

Ann Lovelock Birmingham Council of Faiths

Welcome. It is lovely to see you all here in Birmingham. I belong to Birmingham Council of Faiths which has been in existence for over 35 years and so was one of the first to be set up in the country. There is a great deal of inter faith activity going on here with smaller and more localised groups being set up within the city. Trying to organise dialogue across such a large area as Birmingham is quite difficult and it is good to see smaller groups springing up where people can get to know each other better. We are hoping that the Birmingham Council of Faiths will still be with us after another 35 years.

Gerald Nembhard

West Midlands Faiths Forum

It is good to see you all here. As you will see, we have done our best to bring the sun out for you today. I am grateful to all those of you who have travelled here from different parts of the country. I was born and bred in Birmingham. We have a number of wonderful cities and towns across our West Midlands region, with a great number of active inter faith groups and networks. The West Midlands Faiths Forum acts as an advocate or champion for them and for what they are doing and to get various agencies to understand that our faith communities have a lot to contribute to our society. The Forum has become a company limited by guarantee which provides it with a firmer framework. As we can see today, in unity lies strength. Hopefully we can take our work forward together, with colleagues from across the country.

National faith communities and the development of inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK

Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE

Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Dr Manazir Ahsan: Thank you very much for that welcome. Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director of the Inter Faith Network will now offer some opening reflections.

Dr Harriet Crabtree:

1) Introduction

Across the day, you will hear presentations and reflections from people from a wide range of different bodies. I shall not anticipate in detail the work that they will be describing but, rather, will seek to sketch the contours of the topic and to offer some broad reflections on ways that national faith communities contribute at national level to the development of good inter faith relations and cooperation on social issues and also some of the ways that they support local members in their inter faith work – as well as, very importantly, learning from them.

Last year's National Meeting explored how local inter faith bodies help shape our shared society. However, local inter faith initiatives, with their local faith community members, do not, of course, exist in a kind of national – or indeed international – vacuum. There are important links and webs of connection between the local, the national and the international. These connections were stressed by a number of last year's speakers

and other participants. They did not just want to be thought of as local groups split off from the national, or national practitioners without good connection with local members. This interconnection was stressed and interest was shown in how national bodies also contribute to the development of inter faith understanding and cooperation. So this year sees the focus of the National Meeting shifting to consider the contribution of national bodies in working with local members.

This recognition of interconnectedness of national and local is an important one more generally. There has been, in recent years, a strong focus in Government policy on the 'local' – on local communities. This is an important corrective to over focus on the national. At the same time, it is important to remember that people do not live in atomised communities; they are part of a society that both incorporates and transcends the local and is bound together by national and regional and virtual bands of shared knowledge and experience. No local community is an island 'entire of itself'. This is perhaps especially true of faith groups and their members. They often feel very much part of a wider community of belief and are influenced by – and in turn influence – the wider faith community to which they belong. There is a two-way engagement as we work together nationally and locally that gives us great strength in developing good inter faith

relations and working together for the common good.

The interconnection between national and local has always been at the heart of the Inter Faith Network's work and, indeed, its organisational structure. It was established from the start with both national faith community representative bodies and national and local inter faith organisations in its membership, as well as educational and academic bodies. This structure, like the range of participants here today, reflects the profoundly important cross-engagement both between UK, national and local (and in England in recent years also regional) work to develop inter faith understanding and cooperation.

2) Faith communities, inter faith relations and cooperation at national level

Before I go further, two points on terminology and scope. Firstly, I would like to say a word about the use of the word 'national' in today's proceedings. Sometimes this is used to refer to the UK and sometimes to refer to individual nations of the UK. Some bodies in membership of IFN which describe their work as 'national' operate within one, or two, national contexts within the UK; others across the UK as a whole. In what I say, I reflect their usage.

Secondly, let me make clear that I am focusing in what I say today about national faith community engagement primarily on the work of national faith community representative bodies. There are, of course, also members of many traditions who make contributions at a national level not on behalf of faith community representative bodies but as individuals through particular inter faith initiatives. For example, they might contribute through the development of programmes such as that of Religions for Peace (UK), the Cambridge Inter Faith

Programme or the Inter Faith Alliance. However, as I have just noted, in what I am saying this morning, the focus today is principally on what are called, for shorthand, 'national faith community bodies'.

In the coming year, IFN is hoping to embark on an exercise with the national inter faith bodies to look at how they are developing strategies for engagement with other faith communities at national level, as well as considering what it means for their members at local level. But, ahead of that, let me offer a few very broad brush observations.

The types of links that exist between national faith community bodies and their local congregations and members vary considerably from faith to faith. Some faith communities have hierarchical structures, where people look for and provide guidance in a tiered way; others have a much more horizontal way of engaging with each other between national and local levels.

The work of these national faith community organisations on issues of inter faith dialogue, learning and cooperation might be seen as falling into the following areas.

- a) *Developing strategies for engaging with other faith communities at national level* – through their inter faith sections and also through other areas of their work, such as faith and public life and education
- b) *Establishing the basis for inter faith engagement* – through research, dialogue and teaching about the theological and doctrinal bases in the tradition in question for engaging with other faiths; and also through continuing contribution to relevant guidance being produced globally or ecumenically
- c) *Developing resources for inter faith engagement* – producing guidelines and educational resources and providing training for their members in engaging with inter faith issues

- d) *Providing personal support and advice* to their members (and also others) through personnel such as inter faith officers or specialist volunteers
- e) *Modelling relationships* through clergy and lay members taking part in high profile inter faith events or being seen to take part jointly in particular campaigns or projects
- f) *Learning from the experience of and sharing the good practice of their local members*
- g) *Contributing to the work of their communities internationally*

a) Developing strategies for engagement with other faith communities at national level

So, first, national faith communities develop strategies for engagement with other faith communities on a national level.

If one went back as little as ten years ago, this was not a major part of the work of most national faith communities. Yes, some had worked on inter faith issues at some level for many years and important work had been done. But the scale of activity was nothing like it is today. Since 2000 – and perhaps especially since 2001 – the range of opportunities for engagement have continually increased. There are many of you here who know first hand that ten years ago, if you looked at the diary of somebody working this area, they might have days in which to reflect, they might have meetings in which they could sit for an hour or so and have deep discussion. Now, people have jam packed diaries. The work has just increased and gone on increasing.

Faith communities have taken a range of different approaches. Some have tended to focus almost entirely on what Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks has termed the ‘side by side’ approach to inter faith engagement –

focusing on social action and working alongside each other on social issues. Others have put particular energy into reflecting on how best to be involved in dialogue on the substance of faith traditions and considering the theological or religious basis for engagement. Most have been exploring both aspects of engagement. Sometimes this is in what one might call overtly ‘inter faith’ contexts: for example, considering how to be involved in dialogues or shared learning processes. But in many cases faith communities’ inter faith strategies also involve consideration of what might more accurately be termed multi faith processes such as multi faith chaplaincy where there is inter faith engagement by dint of collaborative working in the course of which interaction takes place even though that is not the primary goal. Religious Education is another such area and Guy Hordern and Dr Girdari Bhan will be opening reflection on this in Workshop 7 later today.

In some respects what one might call the inter faith dimension of the faith and public life work of the national faith communities has swept much else before it these last few years and takes up an ever greater part of the work of those with inter faith responsibilities on behalf of their faith communities. How many people in this room have been engaged in inter faith work for more than 15 years in Britain? (*a show of hands*). And how many of you who just raised your hands would say that the balance between dialogue and faith and public life work has now tipped very heavily towards the latter? (*a show of hands of similar number*). It is a kind of visceral awareness; we do not measure it, but we know this. The support given by national faith community bodies to inter faith structures, enabling local faith group members to deal with this increasingly complicated issue, is such a growing area of their work.

In considering how they are taking forward their strategies of engagement, one of the issues that faith communities consider is where they put their energies. In terms of

chosen focus, they might choose to focus on particular dialogues, for example, the Buddhist-Christian dialogue or Abrahamic dialogue. The Council of Christians and Jews is one of the key bodies through which the major Christian and Jewish denominations take forward their dialogue. In recent years, the Christian-Muslim Forum has come into existence and the Hindu-Christian Forum is in the final stages of its development. Nitin Palan of the BAPS Swaminaryan Sanstha who is involved in the latter initiative is bringing to the meeting copies of the report that has just been produced on the latter stages of the development of that new forum. There are moves afoot involving other communities, such as the Sikh community.

Multi-lateral engagement is also very important for the national faith communities. The Inter Faith Network has in its membership national representative bodies from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities. As well as taking part in its overall work, these communities come together in IFN's Faith Communities Forum which they use to discuss many issues of common concern, both in inter faith relations and public life issues. Some national faith community bodies, like the Hindu Council, actually build into their self definition an inter faith dimension.

The question of parameters of engagement is also something considered by faith communities. There has been a lot of debate in recent years about the range and pattern of engagement. For example, are Humanists to be part of how the national communities define their inter faith engagements? Or newer religious movements? How do national faith community bodies respond to the desire to be involved in dialogue and social cooperation on the part of bodies which may self define as part of their traditions, but whose self-definition is contested by them? How do the other religious groups respond? These issues are coming up increasingly and are very important to consider.

So for the national faith communities there are complex waters to navigate when it comes to inter faith engagement. Across the last few years there has been considerable interaction between national and local faith community members about how to handle requests to engage on an equal footing in the context of local inter faith work with groups about which they may be cautious. And also discussion within such groups about the matter. This is an issue which will be picked up in Workshop 6 with Sister Isabel Smyth and Alistair Beattie later today; and a statement on how matters now stand on exploring it further in an IFN context has been provided to the AGM.

On a different point, I should add that there are also a number of groups that still do not want to be involved in inter faith engagement – something which is frequently overlooked. For example, there are some very conservative groupings that remain opposed to the idea of most or all sorts of inter-religious engagement.

So the national faith communities think about how and with whom they engage within the religious organisations and about how, within their own communities, they encourage the unpersuaded. They also have to think about their engagement with external structures such as Government, for example, in the past through the Faith Communities Consultative Council (which has just been disbanded) within the Department for Communities and Local Government and through a range of other routes.

But let me come back to the broader issue of national faith communities and shaping of faith community strategies. It may be interesting to consider some of the many questions which are being tackled in the development of national faith community strategies:

- Should we seek to understand and be in dialogue with other faith communities? Why?

- Should we work together on social issues? Why?
- On what basis can we engage with other faith communities?
- What are the principles that guide our engagement?
- What in our religious teachings encourages engagement?
- How do we engage in ways which do not compromise our integrity of belief and practice?
- Are there limitations to engagement and, if so, what may these be?
- How do we need to tackle certain dialogues which, for historic reasons, are particularly significant to our faith?
- When do we opt for multilateral engagement and when for bilateral or trilateral engagement?
- What materials and resources do we need to provide for our local members to help them engage well? Are these well sign-posted?
- How can we support our local members in engaging, with integrity, with people of other faiths?
- Are all sectors of our faith community being encouraged to be involved – men, women and young people?
- How can we learn from our local members' experiences?
- How do we train our clergy and lay leaders to engage with these issues?
- How do dialogue and mission interrelate (where mission is part of a tradition's teachings)?

- How can we do all of this on very little money when there are many other pressing priorities?

And I expect there are more that can be added.

b) and c) Establishing the basis for inter faith engagement and developing resources to support this

Many times we find ourselves in discussion or working together on projects with people of different faiths almost, as it were, by chance, and not starting from places of discussion or dialogue about theological issues. But – while encouraging social cooperation is clearly desirable – national faith communities cannot avoid questions about the basis, or perhaps bases, for inter religious engagement – about the theological or philosophical basis for entering into dialogue and for contributing side by side to our religiously diverse society. The materials they develop are part of their support and guidance for local members.

Some local members of faith communities might not be particularly interested in what the national guidance is. But for the majority of practising members of faith communities, it is certainly of concern for them to know what their faith community has to say on these issues. The national faith bodies have the responsibility of helping to develop thinking within their community on this and to ask the questions and to offer the reflections about the basis on which their inter faith work is taken forward.

Sometimes documents reflecting on these issues are closely argued texts designed principally for clergy; sometimes they are directly geared to local members. Thus, for example, as we will be hearing from Katharina Müller, the Catholic Church in England and Wales spent some considerable time developing its guidance *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* to help its members in thinking through the basis in their own faith

for their engagement with people of other faiths in our diverse society. Examples can be found in all faith communities. Increasingly, these sorts of resources are available on-line, including videos such as the Churches Together in England one for Inter Faith Week which Celia Blackden will no doubt touch on in Workshop 1 later today.

Many times these guidance documents evolve in an interactive process where the key teachings are developed and their application considered in the light of the current experiences of members of the community in question.

Sometimes this sort of document emerges directly from one national faith community organisation. At other times it may be through contribution by a number of bodies to a special focus booklet, such as the Islam Awareness Week booklet, *Living in a Multi Faith Society*. Last year's Inter Faith Week saw a number of communities producing relevant materials. For example, the Jain Network produced a special text for the Week about the Jain basis for engagement in inter faith relations. A brief excerpt from this will give you a flavour of it: "The Jain faith's approach to interfaith relations is based on its teachings and traditions, namely three main principles of: *Ahimsa* (nonviolence and reverence for all life), *Aparigraha* (non-attachment to material things) and *Anekaantavada* (multiple views or pluralism). *Anekaantavada* teaches Jains the acceptance of multiple views and qualifying dogmatic assertions (relative pluralism) to understand multiple facets of the truth."

Some guidance blends religious teachings with practical advice on getting involved in local inter faith activity. For example, the Hindu Forum of Britain, whose General Secretary, Bharti Tailor, will be speaking shortly, produced a leaflet for Inter Faith Week of this kind. If you are interested you can find it on the HFB website.

<http://www.hinduforum.org/HFBinterfaith.pdf>

Such resources are very important in the context of helping many practising members of local faith communities engage in inter faith activity. While some people may get involved off their own bat or may not particularly care what their wider faith community thinks, many religious people wish to know what their faith tradition has to say and may even feel uneasy about engagement without validation and encouragement for doing so.

d) Providing personal support and advice

Providing support and advice is not just about books or guidance, but also, of course, about *people*. Many national faith communities now have inter faith advisers or designated officers. We are going to hear from Dr Toby Howarth in Workshop 4 on his work for the Church of England. The Board of Deputies of British Jews has an inter faith officer, Philip Rosenberg, who will be speaking in this plenary session, and many other communities have designated specialists. A significant number of these people work on a voluntary basis. In this room today are many of you who are giving up your spare time (and some taking leave from work) to play this vital role of passing on your knowledge and wisdom born of practical experience.

A number of faith communities are facing real challenges in rising to the demands on them for help. Because the field is a relatively new one and because most national faith community bodies are still relatively small, it continues to be hard to find the resources to deploy sufficient numbers of people. If you are a very large faith community and you have designated officers, you can respond to most of the requests that come in, and you can support people locally. It is much trickier for a smaller community that has very few staff and where volunteers shoulder the majority of their work, where once they might have had only three or four requests a week for help and information and now may have a dozen. How many people are here as volunteers and have taken time off work to be

present today? *(a significant number raised their hands)*. Volunteering is good and positive but with the ever increasing growth of interest in inter faith relations, it is vital that national faith communities help more people to get training in this area and find more resources for it. It would be good to see philanthropists and trusts in communities adding their support to enable this work to be developed more rapidly.

There is, perhaps a particular issue in terms of how national faith communities encourage their local congregations to get involved in inter faith engagement. It is not just a matter of support and advice to individuals – it is about a considered and well implemented approach across each faith community. Last year Maulana Shahid Raza spoke with some passion about this and about the wish of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) to see all imams in all affiliated mosques involving themselves in local inter faith initiatives and encouraging their members to do so. A radical (in the old fashioned sense of the term) and positive approach which is also reflected in MINAB's youth toolkit which Imam Qari Asim will be introducing in Workshop 3 later today.

There is one area in particular where faith communities are developing new advice and guidance. While dialogue and understanding are key arenas for local engagement, there is a growing emphasis on how we can make our commitment to inter religious engagement practical, both through involvement in civic structures but also through the development of social projects for local communities. It is not yet clear how this trend will develop, but support from national faith communities – as well as their learning from local good practice – will be increasingly important.

I spoke earlier about the two way interaction between national and local. In terms of the support and encouragement needed, national faith communities recognise that it is very important that they continue to listen carefully to local needs. In their reflections

later this morning Acharya Modgala Duguid and Gareth Jones will be considering some aspects of this issue as will Saleem Kidwai later in the day and Taki Jaffer and Anula Beckett in Workshop 2.

e) Modelling relationships

It is also important to bear in mind the importance of the national faith communities visibly modelling inter faith work and highlighting what their local members are doing in this key field.

The modelling takes place through well publicised meetings of faith leaders as well as through such activities as joint visits and involvement in such campaigns as the current one about Religious Education.

Highly visible national events such as the Millennium Act of Reflection and Commitment at the House of Lords, the joint participation of faith leaders in projects such as Inter Faith Week, Mitzvah Day (whose Chair, Laura Marks, will be speaking alongside Dr Rao of the Hindu Council UK in Workshop 6) and Sewa Day also play a role. I have been struck by the number of comments from local inter faith bodies about the importance, for example, of having a high profile national event linked to Inter Faith Week.

Effective use of the media by national faith communities to put across the message that people of different faiths can engage respectfully and positively with each other and, indeed with people of non-religious beliefs, is an important encouragement. One of our final speakers, Dr Indarjit Singh, is a well known broadcaster on inter faith issues and perhaps he will touch on this.

f) Learning from the experience of and sharing the good practice of their local members

National faith community bodies can learn from the experiences of their local members and draw together good practice which all can

share. They also have the power to raise public awareness of local members' work

g) Contributing to the work of their communities internationally

Today's focus is the UK, but it is important to note also the role of national faith communities in feeding into their international networks the learning experiences from their members in the UK and, in turn, feeding into national and local discussion of inter faith issues key discussions at international level.¹

Conclusion

I have touched on the vital importance of local inter faith engagement; the key role of national faith communities in helping support and resource that work and some of the ways that they do this; and two way learning between national faith communities and local members. In conclusion, I would like to end by emphasising the mutuality of national and local efforts. National faith communities and local faith groups are intimately interconnected partners in the vital endeavour of working together to strengthen and maintain good inter faith relations and cooperation in the UK. There can be few more important tasks today.

Dr Manazir Ahsan: Thank you very much for giving us a very comprehensive definition of the local and the national and providing a panoramic view of what we are going to be exploring today. You have helped to set the context for this. We have a few minutes for questions or comments.

Harun Rashid (Wolverhampton Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network): Sometimes national leaders make statements which can make our job more difficult locally in pursuing community cohesion. I do not know whether there is any machinery to make them sensitive to this? You also said that some

conservatives are very reluctant to engage in inter faith dialogue. Why is this, and what can we do to help overcome it?

Harriet Crabtree: May I start with your second question first? I used the term 'conservative' in a rather blunt edged way. There are people who, from a number of perspectives in some faith groups, are reticent about inter faith engagement. They may be conservative or they may actually fall elsewhere on the spectrum. They may feel that they have in some way to betray their faith to engage in inter faith activity. Therefore, part of what is needed is explanation from within that faith community to give the basis in their own tradition's teachings for their involvement. One has to have intellectual assent as well as assent of the heart. The argument has to be made clearly, and honestly and persuasively.

There are perhaps also people who are resistant to involvement in inter faith activity because they have become somewhat cynical about the process. Across the last ten years, inter faith relations has moved from being a marginal pursuit that people just thought was a kind of 'add-on' extra, to being something that has come to the centre of the public agenda. With that, within some communities, has come a mixture of exhaustion and slight cynicism. So you will find people who say "It's just a tick box exercise. All this cohesion stuff, all this inter faith relations, is a waste of my time. It's not real" and they speak dismissively of it as 'all tea and samosas', not recognising the real significance of social interaction (and the place of food within this), nor acknowledging the breath of inter faith activity today. So, one has to re-establish the worthwhileness of inter faith work. Only by showing the benefit of it in action can one persuade others of this. There is no facile argument that can be made; one has to live out the process and make it work and then people will realise that it has a reality.

On your other point about national faith

¹ This last point was not included in the spoken presentation because of time constraints but has been added from the speaker's note

leaders making statements, it is often part of their role as leaders of their communities to do so. Whether you at local level take issue with their statements depends no doubt on what has actually been said in a particular case.

I might add, in this context, that the Inter Faith Network has a policy “statement on making statements” which is in effect, a statement on not making statements. Because from early on in the Network’s life, it was agreed by people, both local and national, that it could be quite toxic to become completely hooked on making statements which you had to spend all your time developing in terms to which people would happily assent.

John Murray (Nottingham Inter Faith Council): Now that we have a new Government, I would welcome an overview from you on the national perspective on support for inter faith work from it. We are experiencing difficulties locally in putting into action the many things we have to do and coping with the increasing demands on our time. Last year the DCLG Minister was present, but is someone from the Government here today?

Dr Harriet Crabtree: Warwick Hawkins, Head of Faith Communities Engagement in the Department of Communities and Local Government, is here as an invited guest, although not as a speaker. We will ask him for an input at the end of the day.

Resourcing local members for inter faith engagement – an insight into the approaches of two national faith communities to supporting and learning from local members in building of good inter faith relations

Katharina Müller

Interreligious Adviser to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Dr Manazir Ahsan: The next item on the programme is resourcing local members for inter faith engagement – an insight into the approaches of two national faith communities to supporting and learning from their local members in the building of good inter faith relations. We are fortunate in having two speakers; Katharina Müller, who is the Interreligious Adviser to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and Philip Rosenberg, Interfaith Officer of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Katharina Müller is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Inter Faith Network. She will focus on how the Catholic Church is working to support its local members, through guidance and training opportunities, in developing good inter faith relations.

Katharina Müller: First of all, many thanks for the chance of addressing you. I have been in a national role for England and Wales with

the English and Welsh bishops now for almost two years. It has been a very interesting and busy period of time. Most of you will remember the Papal visit last year and the inter religious dimension of that. As was mentioned earlier, our Bishops have launched a teaching document on inter religious dialogue, called *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*. This is available for free download on our website. A lot of development work has been going on. I am really glad to see in the title of this presentation and the suggestion for this talk, both of the terms 'supporting' and 'learning', because from my experience it is really important not to see the national body's role as one of simply coming into local work and telling people what to do. That is not my role at all.

Let me start by talking briefly about the structure of the Church. As Harriet said quite rightly, the structure of every organisation

obviously plays into the way that the interaction of national and local takes place in practice. We are fortunate as a Church to have very clear structures. We have diocesan administrative structures with a bishop responsible for each of them. So that makes organisation easier. We are also lucky to have a system of teaching in place already. We know that at certain points young Catholics (and maybe not so young Catholics!) come into contact with the Church and its teachings. So for first communion, or for confirmation, there are already courses in place. At the same time, it is a really important principle of the Catholic Church not to do things for people that they can do for themselves. That is really important for the relationship that we have between the national and the local level as well.

I see it as a very important advantage of our work that the message that we bring into inter religious dialogue is that we have a whole host of theological reasons for involvement in it – reasons that come from the very self-understanding that we have of ourselves as a Church. A really nice example of this is the messages of greeting that the Holy See publishes on the occasion of the festivals of other major religions, which ties in with the work at local grass roots level as local Catholics bring the messages to their community contacts.

There are structures at many of its levels for the interreligious work of the Catholic Church. At the highest level we have the Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Dialogue, which publishes the messages of greeting to which I referred. Its 1991 document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, is available for download and provides a pattern for dialogue. Harriet talked about decisions on entering into dialogue with other religious groups. The Catholic Church's position is that dialogue can take a number of different forms. *Dialogue and Proclamation* speaks of the dialogues of life, of action, of theological exchange and of religious experience. The 'dialogue of life' is a sharing in life together, our griefs, problems,

issues; it's sharing that cup of tea and a samosa – or a biscuit! The 'dialogue of action' sees us working together for the common good. 'Theological exchange' is fairly self-explanatory – the exchanges between theological experts. But also, and really importantly, there is the 'dialogue of religious experience' – sharing our spirituality and being present at each other's acts of worship in respectful silence, attending, watching and finding inspiration in each other's spirituality.

Within each diocese, the diocesan co-ordinator carries out inter religious work. There is normally at least one inter religious co-ordinator in each diocese, of which there are 22 in England and Wales. The dioceses organise their work in different ways as they see fit. Some of them have teams, some have loose groups of volunteers. Others have officers in each parish of the diocese, which is really good. The aim is for them to be supported in their work, and through them, the volunteers on the local level. So in a way this is the level between my own work and that at the grass roots.

We have twice yearly meetings of the diocesan co-ordinators and these are very important for their work in providing them with support and enabling people to share good practice. It is not support that necessarily comes from me or even from Archbishop Kevin McDonald, who is the Chair of our Committee for Relations with Other Religions; it may be the support that the co-ordinators can give to each other. A large part of these meetings is taken up by exchanging good practice – what is working for us, but also what is not working for us, what are our issues and our concerns. These meetings are a chance to recognise the work that is being done. A danger of inter religious dialogue at local level can be that people often feel like a lonely traveller in the desert – not recognised and supported. They can feel that they are putting their energies into this work for years and years, but nothing much happens.

There can also be a problem of a generation gap in that it is quite hard to recruit new people into inter religious work. There is a generation within the Catholic community that has been enthused about inter religious dialogue but is now struggling to find people that can follow on from their work. So it is very important to provide supportive networking opportunities. I think that this is one of the most important tasks I have. It also gives me a chance to find out through these meetings what resources people need, and what I can do to help with their work, and what the Bishops can do to facilitate the work of their inter religious co-ordinators. This help is provided in a number of ways. For example, there is the website of the Bishops' Conference which offers resources. If you are interested, you will find it at www.catholicchurch.org.uk/interreligious. Catholics from all over England and Wales can find there the document of our bishops, *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*. This is a central resource for inter religious dialogue. They can now also find working materials which give a chapter by chapter guide to that document, with questions for discussion and ideas for action, so a formula for workshops can be found there. The development of that workshop formula is a really good example of how we would ideally like to develop all our resources. The need for it was noted by some of the local diocesan co-ordinators. The document itself is some 60 pages long. While it is written fairly accessibly, obviously not everyone will have the time and inclination to read through the whole text. So we need ways of making it easier for people to access the document. This material was largely developed by a group which I brought together: so the work on it was done by volunteers for volunteers. All I did was to facilitate the process.

It is really important that production and dissemination go hand in hand. It is not much use my sitting in a corner and producing a resource that is not then disseminated, because people will not know about it, or it might not even address a need that is there.

I have also started a blog to provide an informal focus for Catholics who are interested in inter religious work. Again, the danger is that people feel "Oh, I am the only one – no-one else in my parish or in the wider world, is interested in inter religious dialogue". My blog helps people to see that there are a lot of events going on that are focused on inter religious dialogue. It covers different categories – events, resources, news, good practice, and contacts that might be useful. The blog gives me a chance to share with others all the information to which I have access because I work at national level and need to share with the grass roots level. So I see myself as a channel through which that information gets to the community as a whole. I am quite lucky to have my unusual name – it is enough to Google my name and 'blog' and that will get you there. That is one of the many advantages of being a German in England!

Building on that blog is also very important. I have started doing so by linking the good practice section of it to the website that I mentioned earlier. So there are now the beginnings of a list of good practice events – just very short reports such as "We organised a peace walk; we did the following; here are some of the problems we encountered; here are some of the solutions we found; if you are planning something similar then contact us" and then an email address. As simple as that. Then on the blog, I put that on as good practice, just literally a sentence of two, "The Diocese of Hexham developed the following Peace Walk; if you are interested, then please go to the website, where more information is available". I would really like to develop that further, because I think that other dangers are that people feel they have to reinvent the wheel, or that they have to slog through the same mistakes and the same difficulties as others have done. To link these two points of contact in the digital world – so connecting the personal contacts that I have with the co-ordinators to other people in the dioceses who are interested – is my hope for the future.

Philip Rosenberg

Interfaith Officer, Board of Deputies of British Jews

Dr Manazir Ahsan: Thank you very much indeed, Katharina. Philip Rosenberg, who is the Interfaith Officer of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, will now talk about some of the ways in which the Board is helping to support local members in their inter faith engagement.

Philip Rosenberg: What Katharina has done in three years is an outstanding achievement and it presents me with some really welcome challenges in terms of ways that the Board might move forward with our own work in this field.

The Board of Deputies is the national representative organisation of the UK's Jewish community. It was founded in 1760 and it exists essentially to promote and defend the religious rights and civil liberties of British Jewry. Our local links come from our democratic constitution. We are comprised of Deputies who are elected from local Jewish communities – synagogues, charities and communal organisations. The Board is cross-communal, representing the different denominations within the British Jewish community and indeed, people who are culturally Jewish but do not have a religious involvement. On their behalf the Board engages with Government, with the media, with other faiths, with NGOs and with wider society.

The main form of the relationship which we have with our local communities is in modelling good relationships, giving people the confidence to engage in inter faith activity, showing them some of the ways that we think are examples of good engagement and encouraging them to do the same. Sometimes we actually call on our communities to get involved, for example, with Inter Faith Week. Sometimes these calls are heeded and sometimes they are not! But in the case of Inter Faith Week, twenty Jewish communities round the country responded,

saying 'We are doing this' or 'We are doing that' and it was really good to see that enthusiastic response.

We also provide an advisory service. People can contact us by phone or by email or letter. We try to advise them if they want to develop a project locally, if they have a particular challenge, and they come to us to seek advice. If we have seen something similar in other places, we might advise them on how others have overcome a challenge.

We hold events on inter faith relations, engaging people from our local communities in these, to try to set the agenda and get people talking and thinking. Sometimes we produce resources. Those we have produced in recent years include, with the help of the Department of Communities and Local Government, a research paper on inter faith work in the Jewish community, looking at who engages and why, who does not engage and why, what the different forms of engagement are and which communities are engaged with which. This helped us develop policy and provide recommendations on how we move forward. Another document is a paper that came out of an event that we did jointly with the Hindu Forum of Britain for Inter Faith Week in 2009, working with Bharti Tailor, who will be speaking later. This was on women within different faith communities, the challenges and opportunities facing them in terms of leadership, both religious and lay, relationships and education. We put this resource into an outcome document so that people can engage with the topic even if they were not able to be present at the event itself.

It is, I think, worth giving you a case study of something that has happened in the last year which will provide some background as to how our inter faith relationships work in practice. In the course of last year, we had what I think it is fair to describe as a bit of a crisis in Methodist/Jewish relations which we

have had to overcome. At the Methodist conference in 2010, a series of resolutions were passed on the Israel/Palestine conflict which really angered some people in the Jewish community. Joy Barrow, the Inter Faith Officer of the Methodist Church, and I have had to work to try to repair and take forward this situation, and to try to turn what was at crisis point this time last year into an opportunity for promoting good relations. In terms of modelling good relations, Joy and I worked very closely with our leaderships to try to bring them together, to overcome some of the disagreements and to get them to meet. Once we had got them to meet, they could try to begin to overcome some of the difficulties they had been having and to publicise that step.

Last week we were at this year's Methodist Conference. The Senior Vice-President of the Board of Deputies was there meeting the President of the Methodist Conference. We pushed that news out to the media and made sure that people in our two communities could see that this dialogue was happening, that we were moving forward and that we would like them to do the same at a local level as well. The call to action was there as in the Jewish community. Even if some of our messaging might at times have been quite critical in nature, we made sure that we emphasised the importance of those relationships. So in one publication just after the Methodist Conference in 2010, we made sure that prominent in this was the statement "We call on the Jewish community to redouble its efforts towards dialogue with Methodists around the country, appreciating that good inter faith relations will ultimately create greater understanding between our communities". We felt it was very important to emphasise this. Similarly, the Methodist Church had published a short but effective and attractive pamphlet offering guidance on inter faith relations, which is used to encourage people in the Methodist community to get involved in dialogue and inter faith initiatives as well.

So the message from the national level to the local level was in both cases "We want you to engage and try to turn this difficult moment into an opportunity for better engagement." Such calls, as I said earlier, are sometimes heeded, sometimes not. We were delighted that over fifteen Jewish communities around the country responded, asking us for advice on how they could get involved and advice on what form their engagement with their local Methodist community might take. I know Joy had many similar calls. In some cases we were able to give people advice and in some cases they developed ideas that were a lot better than ones we could have thought of ourselves! Some Methodist and Jewish communities embarked on joint social action projects for Mitzvah Day, about which Laura Marks will be speaking later in the day, collecting for local homeless charities together, thus demonstrating their unity in joint charitable work. In one particularly exciting initiative, a local synagogue is working with their local Methodist church to prepare a joint trip to Israel and the Palestinian Territories, so that people can share that experience and dialogue on that particularly tricky situation. All this shows the benefit of taking a difficult situation and making the very best out of it.

Some people in our communities were not used to this kind of dialogue. They had used the top line messaging, advocacy and engagement in a somewhat dialectical way but wanted some guidance on how they could actually start talking to each other. It might be worth sharing the three essential messages that I sent to our communities on Israel/Palestine. They are probably applicable to other international conflicts as these come into inter faith dialogue. The first message is that we should all be in some way working for human wellbeing, human safety and human flourishing, and this should be without immediate regard to nationality, ethnicity or religion. It should be a universal approach. Nation states, flags and anthems may be part of the solution, but they should not be our objective. Our objective should be all human

flourishing. Second, and this is something that the Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks, said in Inter Faith Week 2009 that really spoke to me, “In this country we should not seek to import bad relations; we should seek to export good relations”. It does not help people around the world for us to be at loggerheads here, and it certainly does not help us; but it just might help them for us to model good relations. Finally, dialogue is crucial. Sometimes people feel that these difficult issues should remain an ‘elephant in the room’, skulking around the sides of it, and not actually being talked about. On this basis we cannot move forward. I think that in all issues of inter faith dialogue, nobody has the whole truth. Those of us that visit the Middle East engage with some narratives but can never get the whole picture. We might not hear what others hear, or see what others see, so we must listen carefully to other perspectives even as we share our own.. This should not necessarily stop people’s activities and advocacy, but it is important that we have this other way of speaking together – not megaphone diplomacy, but trying to achieve a deeper understanding from one another of where we are coming from.

Going back to the case study on Methodist/Jewish relations, at the Methodist Conference last week, Joy Barrow and I organised a fringe event with the local community in Southport, which is where the Methodist Conference was held. I am glad to say it was the most popular fringe event at the Methodist Conference, indeed the most popular for some time. A third of the delegates at the conference, people drawn from Methodist communities around the country, came to this event. We unfortunately ran out of space and so were unable to let everybody attend it who wanted to do so. It was an event which emphasised our shared history. There was a model *seder* – or Passover meal – which has links to both Christian and Jewish tradition. We shared food together and shared a joint experience that helped to move things forward. I think people felt, especially in the light of a very difficult year, that this was a very positive step.

In my last couple of minutes I want to emphasise the limitations of national faith communities and the need – and Katharina also touched on this – to take a step back and allow local faith communities to take their own initiatives and do them well. Good ideas and good projects are not a monopoly of the national faith communities. Some of the best ideas come from a local perspective with the different vantage point that that brings. As national faith communities, we should certainly not be seeking at any point to stifle the actions of local faith communities. Some of the best initiatives in inter faith relations have come from completely outside the ‘establishment’. Earlier, I mentioned Mitzvah Day, this day of Jewish social action. 20,000 volunteers took part in social action on one day and 10% of its projects were inter faith ones which engaged people in the local communities. Mitzvah Day falls during Inter Faith Week and I would strongly commend that you get involved and find a local project in your area. Another initiative is the *Limmud* Conference, which engages two and half thousand mainly Jewish people exploring all aspects of Jewish life, but is a place where a lot of inter faith sessions take place, an opportunity to engage people in the Jewish community at a local level in all sorts of different ways in inter faith dialogue in which they might otherwise not have had a chance to engage. The limitation is of course, capacity. Harriet touched on this point. We have only one full time member of staff engaged on inter faith work, so as much as we want to get involved with everything, we sometimes cannot. But we are now looking at the possibility of increasing our capacity.

Some questions which arise follow on from much of what Katharina said about the challenges that are posed to us. Where do we go from here? We certainly cannot rest on our laurels. We want to increase our level of engagement and strengthen the relationship we have with local activity and empower that local work. Should we follow a model of regional engagement? I am envious of the diocesan structures that Katharina is working

with. In the Jewish community we do not have structures which are so all encompassing. But we have Jewish Representative Councils in various cities and perhaps we should be engaging more with them. Should we perhaps also develop an annual conference for Jewish inter faith activists where we can, as in the case of the Catholic Church, share challenges and best practices, develop resources and find out what our local communities are doing and where we can help them? How do we engage the different denominations within our community? We work with all of them. Each of the denominations does its inter faith work in slightly different ways. Should the Board work with that? Should we take a hands-off approach? Or an approach somewhere between the two?

We would welcome your thoughts on this. Tamara Smillie, who is working with me on our particular project on local engagement over the summer, is here today as well.

Dr Manazir Ahsan: Thank you very much indeed, to both Katharina Müller and to Philip Rosenberg for their interesting presentations. There will be opportunities during the lunch break and afterwards to talk with them. As in previous years, we are now going to have the chance to 'Dialogue on the spot' and I invite you to engage in dialogue with the person sitting next to you – to discuss the points which have arisen for you so far.

A short session then followed allowing time for delegates to speak with one another on the themes of the day.

Bishop Alastair Redfern (taking over as Chair): If the quality of the noise has been an indication of the quality of the dialogue on the spot, then that has been a very good session! After our next two presentations, we will have an opportunity to ask some questions of Katharina and Philip as well as our next two contributors.



Interfaith Partnerships Between National and Local Activists

Philip Rosenberg,
Projects Manager for Interfaith and Social Action,
The Board of Deputies of British Jews



What is the Board of Deputies of British Jews?

- The national representative organisation of the UK's Jews.
- Founded in 1760.
- Exists to promote and defend the religious rights and civil liberties of British Jewry.
- Democratically constituted
- Cross-communal
- Engages with Government, media, different faiths, NGOs and wider society.

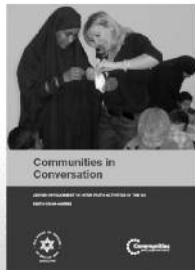


Main Forms of Relationship

1. Modelling Good Relations
2. Calls to Action
3. Advisory Service
4. Events
5. Resources



Examples of Resources/ Events




Case Study: Methodist-Jewish Relations

Modelling Good Relations: Publicising Leadership Meetings



Photo Credit: Richard Hamilton-Foy
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Case Study: Methodist-Jewish Relations

Events:

Board of Deputies, Methodist Church and Council of Christians and Jews worked with local Southport Hebrew Congregation to produce a sell-out fringe event for Methodist Conference delegates.



Photo Credit: Richard Hamilton-Foy
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Case Study: Methodist-Jewish Relations

Call to Action:

"We call on the Jewish community to redouble its efforts towards dialogue with Methodists around the country, appreciating that good interfaith relations will ultimately create greater understanding between our communities."

Board Community Briefing – July/August 2010

Giving Space and Appreciating Limitations

- Good ideas and good projects are not a monopoly of national organisations.
- National organisations must not seek to force or stifle local communities in their actions.
- Some of the best interfaith initiatives emerge outside establishment, i.e. Mitzvah Day/ Limmud.
- We have only one full-time member of staff on interfaith relations, so cannot cover everything.

Case Study: Methodist-Jewish Relations

Advisory Service:

- More than 15 Jewish communities around the country took up the call and began a process of engagement with neighbouring Methodist communities.
- Some were unused to this kind of dialogue, and contacted the Board for advice.

Questions Arising

- Should Board follow model of regional engagement, through Jewish Representative Councils?
- Should we develop an annual conference for grassroots Jewish interfaith activists, to share challenges, best practice and develop resources?
- How to engage different denominations?
- Other thoughts? Talk to us!

Case Study: Methodist-Jewish Relations

The Israel-Palestine Conflict in Interfaith Dialogue – Three Essential Messages:

1. Primary objectives are universal: Human safety and wellbeing.
2. In the UK we should export good relations, not import conflict.
3. Dialogue is crucial – nobody has the whole truth.

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Faith communities and local inter faith engagement – two perspectives

Acharya Modgala Duguid

Interfaith Officer, Network of Buddhist Organisations UK
Member, Islington Faiths Forum

Bishop Alastair Redfern: We now come to 'Faith communities and local inter faith engagement – two perspectives' and our speakers are Acharya Modgala Duguid, the Inter Faith Officer of the Network of Buddhist Organisations and the Revd Gareth Jones from the Birmingham Council of Faiths.

Acharya Modgala Duguid: I am interested in our actions and their consequences in the world. I originally ordained as a Buddhist nun to receive training and so be a better 'grass-roots' worker. I hoped to relieve some of the suffering in the world. I have worked in several countries including Zambia and Bosnia, living and learning with the people. Some years ago I started a project for the very poor in India and took volunteers to help and support groups after the Tsunami. I therefore have a good understanding of poverty at its extreme.

International problems affect us in the UK. For some years I was based in Leicester and in their Council of Faiths saw how the faiths working together could avoid problems imported from other countries from escalating there. A few years ago I settled in Islington and learnt more about poverty in this country in a supposedly affluent borough where the gap between rich and poor is very wide (this gap is bigger in Britain than in any other 'developed' country). Add to that the painful experiences of refugees and ethnic minorities and the effects of worldwide wars

and conflicts and you can have a powder keg. Our faith communities can come together in local inter faith groups to help prevent problems and ameliorate some of the suffering. As Harriet said, inter faith engagement is not a tick box exercise.

We have an active Faiths Forum in Islington. Our base is in the meetings held bimonthly at different locations where we come to know each other. From this friendship we link into the wider community looking at people's needs and the demands that these make on our centres and we also interlink with the local council and the BME and refugee forums. We do need to support each other too, especially when members face difficulties either personally or within and between communities. Very recently our local imam was sent an envelope which contained a white powder and a note saying that it was anthrax. This is the kind of thing that we have to face together and in friendship and we were able to support him as we have done in other situations. Unfortunately, the Finsbury Park mosque, where he is an imam, was notorious in the past, though they do excellent work now.

Islington is an incredibly multi-cultural borough. As you go down my local road you hardly hear English spoken. I live in Finsbury Park, on the edge of one of the poorest and most troubled areas. We need to link up and work together with other organisations,

including the BME and refugee forums. There is excellent work being done in linking up different communities and having festivals, which are helped by the local police.

Islington Faiths Forum has an annual lecture and debate in Inter Faith Week, choosing as the speaker an inspiring leader from a different faith each year. Bi-annually we host a community festival to showcase work going on locally. September is designated Peace Month, during which we have open places of worship, conduct interesting assemblies on the theme of peace in schools throughout the borough and hold a walk or event to bring people together and make our friendships across faiths visible. This year we are linking up with Arsenal football club and the police to tackle this issue of knife crime that is rife in our borough. Sadly we have many problems because of gangs. Only the other day there was another knife murder in the estate just across the road from my Centre. Yet another. When I moved to Islington four years ago, it was in the wake of a killing just down the road from where I live. I know we are not alone. There are many communities facing this problem, which is why it is important we come together to tackle it.

We have realised that conditions of poverty are worsening and this has an effect on people's mental health. This puts pressure on all our members. Also, the local hospitals are growingly aware of what faith communities can offer and are developing protocols for multi-faith chaplaincy. Recently our local imam and I offered papers at a "Spirituality and Mental Health" conference in a local hospital. When our committee came together some months ago we debated how we could more actively help our members. The other day we were delighted to receive confirmation of a grant from the Church Urban Fund to provide training for ministers and volunteers in handling issues of mental health and poverty. This will be extended to members of the Faiths Forum and members of the BME and Refugee forums in Islington.

My own work has changed. Nowadays I am more involved with both local and national Buddhist and inter faith committees. All are very important in encouraging and enabling the different kinds of work our faith groups do. This interlinking is vital in this difficult world we inhabit. Information, encouragement and sometimes practical, help needs to be shared at both local and national levels. The Network of Buddhist Organisations, where I am Interfaith Officer, is developing this role within the Buddhist world in the UK and has an e-group and Facebook page to pass on local and national information and enable discussions. Face to face dialogue is the ideal. However information technology and social networking, even for a technophobe like me, has its uses! It does enable us to reach out more widely.

I would like to echo Philip Rosenberg's comment that there are challenges for us all. For example, how to encourage groups to join national organisations, especially the hard to reach communities; how to pass on useful information to member organisations in a 'user friendly' way; and how to mobilise and enthuse people locally. No doubt there are many other issues for us to tackle and I look forward to our airing these and hopefully hearing good suggestions in the discussions in our workshops.

Above all, I look forward to seeing IFN developing even more its work in linking with, informing and enabling local communities throughout the UK. I hope however, as Katharina said, and this is perhaps most important, that the IFN will be informed and encouraged by the work of our local inter faith initiatives and that our experiences and learning can be passed on to others.

The Revd Gareth Jones

Birmingham Council of Faiths and Solihull Faiths Forum
West Midlands Faiths Forum (with voluntary support role
in relation to local inter faith groups) and
Methodist Co-Chair, Methodist/United Reformed Church
Inter Faith Relations Reference Group

The Revd Gareth Jones: I very much appreciated hearing Acharya Modgala's experiences and insights. I should add that I was also present at the excellent fringe event to which Philip Rosenberg referred, organised by the Board of Deputies at the Methodist Conference last week. It was a really wonderful occasion.

I have had the privilege, over the last four years, of working alongside some excellent inter faith organisations across the West Midlands and of experiencing a number of other visionary inter faith initiatives. I can honestly say that relationships between the faith communities, and relationships between individuals of different faiths, are very strong in all sorts of ways in this part of the UK.

The title of today's National Meeting refers specifically to faith communities. I am aware that in many cases, as Harriet mentioned earlier, it is individual members of particular faiths who are really involved in inter faith relations at local level rather than 'communities' at large. Sometimes it is a conscious decision on the part of particular inter faith groups to operate in a way which is based very much on individual involvement. But even in the case of those forums that set out to be more representative, it is not always easy to get beyond the enthusiastic, committed people who come along to meetings to the broader communities that they represent. Also, it is sometimes particular places of worship of a faith that are represented at different groups and forums, while other places of worship of those same faiths remain rather in the background. So to what extent can we really say that it is 'faith

communities' that are involved and engaged in inter faith activities?

I believe that there is great potential for local, single faith umbrella bodies to play a significant role in all of this. For many years the Christian Churches have had local 'Churches Together' ecumenical groups. We also have Councils of Sikh Gurdwaras, Councils of Mosques and local Hindu Councils. I realise that inevitably some of these latter groups tend to be mainly found in urban areas. But I have also been aware over these last few years of an increase in the number of such bodies and I am sure that such single faith umbrella bodies could be, and in many cases are, wonderful channels for inter faith involvement. The question for me is – how can they be more fully linked into local inter faith structures?

I am also aware that sometimes within 'Churches Together' groups, theological questions come into play, so that in some of them, for example, there is a prevailing ethos that reflects hesitation about, perhaps even suspicion of, inter faith engagement. In such circumstances it is left very much to individual churches, or even individual Christians, to become involved. I do not know whether there are similar issues for Councils of Mosques, or Councils of Sikh Gurdwaras, for example.

So what about national single faith community bodies? How can they encourage inter faith involvement and engagement by their members at local level? We have heard already this morning from Katharina about the role of Roman Catholic diocesan inter religious co-ordinators and a number of other

Christian denominations have regional or sub-regional inter faith officers who are themselves nationally resourced. Another well known example of this would be the Church of England's diocesan inter faith advisers. But I am also aware that, to give another example, the Hindu Forum of Britain has Vice-Presidents who are representatives for different parts of the UK, and the representative for the West of England not only has a position on the Hindu Council of Birmingham but is also a member of the Executive of the West Midlands Faiths Forum (although not as a representative of the national Hindu Forum but because of the expertise and different types of experience that he can bring). This seems to me to be a particularly helpful model – to have national faith bodies supporting local inter faith engagement through what we might loosely call 'regional appointments'. I wonder whether this sort of model could be replicated more widely among the different faith communities?

There are also some wonderful resource documents produced by faith communities at national level to support and encourage local inter faith involvement. We have already heard this morning from Katharina about *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*, a document for which I have great fondness. I think it is a wonderful document. But especially with our Methodist National Inter Faith Officer sitting next to me this morning, I cannot let the opportunity go by of mentioning two of our own Methodist resources, *Faith Meeting Faith* and *May I call you Friend?*

On the international stage, we have, of course, initiatives such as *A Common Word* from within the world of Islam, and, although it is not strictly relevant to today's theme, I would also want to mention some of the excellent materials produced by different publishing houses. Fons Vitae, for example, has begun producing some excellent books on the relationship between Islam, in particular Sufi Islam, and different faiths,

including, so far, Buddhism and Judaism.

As a final and slightly different example of, in this case, the potential link between the local and the national, I would like to give advance warning of an email that some of you may be receiving later this summer. During the last couple of years the Jubilee Debt Campaign (JDC), which campaigns for the cancellation of the unjust and unpayable debts that face many of the world's poorest countries, has created its own multi faith project. This is in part a recognition that the JDC is now strongly supported by quite a number of different faiths, and in a couple of months' time the steering group of the multi faith project of which I am part hopes to contact all national single faith and inter faith organisations in the UK to invite them to join the project database. Then, if they are willing to do so, they can act as a conduit to their local members, their local places of worship, for information about the latest JDC campaigns.

What I have said has necessarily been fairly selective. I have not mentioned training institutions or chaplaincies, which are huge topics in themselves and vital in the link between the national and the local. But I hope that I have given some examples of the very positive ways in which faith communities at national level are indeed supporting the local inter faith scene. There are two questions that I would like to leave you with. First of all, how can local inter faith initiatives make full use of the resources that are available at both national and international level? Secondly, how can national faith organisations and local single faith umbrella bodies play a full part in ensuring that it is indeed faith communities that are participating in inter faith dialogue?

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you both very much indeed. We will now take a few questions and our four speakers can offer their reflections.

There then followed a short question period:

Alan Rainer (London Society of Jews and Christians): I have written to Archbishop Rowan Williams and the Christian denominational leaders – and to the IFN office as well – on behalf of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, about the problems of young people in this country. There is a chronic problem which people have been overlooking, with two and a half million children living in poverty, one million children (National Audit 2006) going through comprehensive schools and many others without adequate education, and ten thousand children under eight years old leaving their families. I would like to know how we can bring back the religious dimension to life. Fr Bede Griffiths said that in the West religion had lost its soul and that is why he went to India. How can we strengthen sound institutions like marriage and the whole way of thinking that encourages a more religious perspective within a secular society?

Ruth Jacobs (Council of Christians and Jews): I would be very interested to know if the Inter Faith Network could possibly distribute a list of resources of the kind which have been mentioned today. I am sure that other faiths have produced them as well. I think that particularly those from outside the relevant faith would be interested to know more about them. For example, Gareth Jones mentioned Methodist publications, Philip Rosenberg mentioned Jewish publications and Katharina Müller mentioned a Catholic document. If such a list could be sent around, I think that would be very useful.

The Revd Ian Johnson (Devon Faith and Belief Forum): Devon is a place where there are very few people of ethnic minority communities. When I preached about Christianity and Islam, a man came up to me afterwards and said “I moved from Birmingham to get away from people like you!” So our stereotypes are being constantly reinforced. We need resources, help and support. I am Chair of Devon Faith and Belief Forum, and it is very difficult to find

opportunities to create the friendships between members of different faith communities to which I was used in Southampton.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Three areas have been mentioned: young people and social attitudes; resource sharing; and the interplay between rural areas and urban areas. Would any of our speakers like to offer reflections on these questions?

Acharya Modgala Duguid: I am very concerned about the youth issue – the question of how it is for young people. That is something we are trying to focus on in Islington by working together in the community with Arsenal football club. We have to make faith accessible to the young people. I am very worried about how Religious Education is being lost off the agenda in schools. This is a huge tragedy, because that is where we can reach out to young people and demonstrate the relevance of faith. When I have gone into schools, they are fascinated by what faith means, and they ask very perceptive questions.

Philip Rosenberg: In response to the gentleman from Devon, can I say that, if you get in touch with us, we can put you in touch with our local Jewish representatives – either our Deputies or representatives on the local Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. So we can use our networks to give you some resourcing where you are.

The Revd Gareth Jones: On the question of urban/rural, the West Midlands Faiths Forum has affiliated organisations from all the different parts of our region. On my travels over the last few years, I have been very conscious of some wonderful inter faith work in places like rural south Shropshire. For example, there is a terrific festival, ‘Rhythms of the Heart’, that takes place for a whole weekend every year in south Shropshire. It provides a real focus, drawing in people in a way that some of the urban inter faith organisations are not able to do. It has a

different sort of dynamic. I think a lot of it is to do with being able to put people in touch with each other and about sharing resources. With the present difficulty in funding the English Regional Faiths Forums, it is not as easy to do that as it has been over the last few years. But there are still other ways, I think, of sharing resources and putting people from different types of communities in touch with each other so that they can share their stories with one another.

Katharina Müller: A really quick and quite personal point on the question about young people. My home parish is in quite a poor, disadvantaged area of East London. I have been part of the group that prepares young people for confirmation and I have been blown away by how reflective these young people are and how hopeful and full of energy. Again, they asked really good questions, so that I paused for a minute and wanted to be back doing the theology exam at university because that seemed easier than their questions! I wonder whether once again we, as people of faith, don't do a good enough PR job? When we can get to young people and they engage with religious communities, they do a lot to help our communities. But the hope that I saw in these candidates for confirmation also showed how much we do for them. So I wonder whether it is a question of our getting our message across – the advantages we can and do offer the young people in our midst.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you very much indeed for all these reflections. Before we draw this section of the meeting to a close, I will ask Harriet to comment very briefly on the resources issue that a couple of people mentioned.

Dr Harriet Crabtree: I mentioned earlier today that the IFN office hopes to undertake a survey to look with the national faith communities at their patterns of inter faith engagement. This project has been developed in conversation with the faith communities in membership of IFN. It is necessarily subject to

funding, but if it can be done, this will provide one way of drawing in good resources.

There is a challenge in terms of listing resources because such lists can quickly go out of date. It can be preferable if links can be put to sites that faith communities themselves keep up to date. What we are hoping to do is to develop IFN's website to incorporate much more linkage to the sort of resources that Ruth Jacobs was asking about, working with the faith communities to achieve this. And, of course, it is not just the national faith communities that produce resources. Many of the national inter faith organisations, local inter faith groups and educational bodies produce important resources too. If you would like to help us in this work of expanding our website and putting good links on to it, then please contact Paresch Solanki or Ashley Beck about it.

Capacity building to broaden engagement

Bharti Tailor

General Secretary, Hindu Forum of Britain

Bishop Alastair Redfern: In our final contribution this morning, Bharti Tailor, General Secretary of the Hindu Forum of Britain, will give us some input about capacity building in order to broaden our ability to engage and the fruits this can bring.

Bharti Tailor: I am going to focus my presentation on one particular project for broadening inter faith engagement, but I would first like to recap on a couple of initiatives that have already been mentioned. Firstly, in 2009 the Hindu Forum asked each of our Vice-Presidents and also Trustees to engage at regional level and a number of them are now involved in regional inter faith forums. Secondly, for Inter Faith Week in 2010, we produced a leaflet called *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means “The world is one family”, with quotes from our scriptures, with a view to getting Hindus to engage in inter faith work at local level. We also noticed a gap last year around the involvement of individuals and it is on that the rest of my presentation will focus.

One of the key issues we wanted to tackle was the fact that there are very few Hindu women who take part in inter faith activities. This was highlighted for me when a local project in Harrow, an area which has quite a high Hindu population, held an event in June of last year. They could not get a local Hindu to go along – not even one. Eventually I went myself as the only Hindu representative taking part in their local dialogue on inter faith issues. Also last year, in July 2010, there was an inter faith training day in East London, organised specifically for women, which had to be

cancelled because there were not enough people to justify running the course. A minimum number, maybe six people or so, were needed in order to run the course but they did not have them. That set me thinking. I knew there was a need within my own community. I had already had the experience in Harrow which I mentioned and now having booked to go on the East London course because I wanted to see what it was all about, it had been cancelled. I thought that perhaps, for Inter Faith Week, this was a problem I had to tackle.

So I did a little bit of research by just speaking to people, in particular Hindu ladies in Harrow, to ask about inter faith and so on. One of the comments I had was that inter faith is this mysterious activity that this lady had heard about – an activity that the men speak about. But she did not know how to break into it – it seemed like a closed shop. So she was particularly interested in coming on a course that might teach her how to break into inter faith work. In my own experience, what had made the difference for me was the fact that I was willing and able to put in the time to go to events. Of course, there are other issues involved as well. We found that women were not confident about what to expect at an inter faith event, even if they had been very much involved with their denomination or faith group. If they had never ventured outside of it, they were not quite sure how they would be received in another community, how to behave in an inter faith setting and whether they would be accepted as they were. So those were some of the concerns that were raised.

After these initial conversations, I canvassed views on what would be the best time to meet. The women who responded from the Hindu community said that it would be a Saturday, which was another issue for us, because then we could not invite Jewish women to join us. So we were hoping that perhaps we could do one session or course on a Saturday and then explore the possibility of doing another on an evening or another day of the week. But it was clear to me that on Saturdays they would be willing to come and take part in inter faith training. They were pleased with the suggestion that we should meet in a neutral place, because although we were exploring how Hindu women might take part in inter faith activity, some of the denominations with which we were working did not even go to each other's Hindu place of worship. So there was a need to get over some internal barriers. I am sure that, within your own faith traditions, there will be those who do not go to each other's places of worship either. It was also handy to have a neutral venue because then ladies of other faiths were also more willing to come. However, one lady did turn up who was very disappointed because it was not a temple as she had been hoping to visit one. So there is always an exception!

We then found a trainer, and having found a venue and set dates for the course, we circulated details of it to those who had responded to my initial questionnaire. While it was advertised among Hindu women's groups, information was also circulated to other faith groups as well. We specifically tried to target, as I said earlier, those groups who do not normally take part in inter faith, or even intra faith, dialogue. The reason for making sure that women of other faiths were invited to be part of the group was that from the outset, I wanted this group to be interacting with one another and did not want the training to be just for Hindus. I wanted the Hindu women to experience, for the two days of the course, what it was like to work with other faiths.

Eventually women from three faith groups came together – Hindu, Jain and Muslim. It was interesting that they did not want to come on their own. So we had a mother and daughter, sisters, aunts and nieces, people coming along in twos and threes, or people from the same temple coming together. They did not want to come on their own. They were more confident in coming if somebody else from their tradition was coming with them or if other family members were coming. That was a learning point for me – always advertise that two or three people can come together. Do not ask just for one, because it is not likely to happen. For some it was the first experience of sitting together with people of other faiths in that kind of setting and of dialoguing with them, working together in groups and sharing meals. So this was their first inter faith interaction.

25% of those who had booked did not turn up on the day. So maybe some had nerves. But, as I said, some groups do not work on an *intra* faith basis either. Of those that did turn up, about 60% completed the course, which meant they came on both days. They had to do at least two thirds of the course. If they only came on one day, or half a day, that did not count. They had to complete all the sessions and, as I said, quite a few of them did so.

The learning process was both formal and informal. I have mentioned some of the informal contexts such as sharing meals. It was important to think through what kind of more formal learning style would be appropriate. Some of these ladies were housewives, some were very young mothers; and some had not been in formal education for a long time. But some of them were graduates. So we had the whole range of educational backgrounds. But we needed to refresh some points for all of them. One of the most popular exercises was the drawing of 'anger volcanos' – looking at what might set people off. How you deal with people who always put their hand up and always want to answer questions. Role play was quite

interesting – asking a group of women who are used to running households and saying “You have to put together a team to make a cup of tea and then demonstrate how that is done”. They were asked to adopt different styles and work on that – so you had the ‘authoritative’ team and the ‘laissez-faire’ team. Other topics were presentation skills and event planning. Towards the end of the two day course, they had to plan an event.

We talked informally about rituals and food preferences in terms of food. The Hindu ladies said “We start our cooking even at home with a prayer”. The Muslim group said “Oh, we do that too” and then the Jain group said “So do we”. So they immediately realised that while they might come from different faith traditions, the rituals were similar in some cases. Food preferences was an eye-opener for me, although I try and keep up with all the different faith traditions. We had provided a traditional Hindu vegetarian meal, but some of the Hindu ladies, when it was lunchtime, came up to me very quietly and said that they were going home for their meal. I said “Why? We have a meal, it has no onions and no garlic. Please stay!”. But one said, “We never eat cooked food which we have not cooked ourselves”. One of the ladies had cut up the fruit which I had bought; another said “We would only accept fruit if it was whole and that is the same with nuts”. They said “You should provide a basket of nuts in their shells with a nutcracker, otherwise we will not eat them”. So it was also a learning experience for me, and I made these changes on the second day of the course. Everyone had a learning experience on this kind of course. The learning, of course, will vary depending on which denominations are represented and what their needs might be.

They discussed prayer styles with each other as well. The Muslim ladies went off for their prayer, which led quite naturally to a discussion looking at similarities and differences in prayer practice. Some of the ladies were from the same cultural and ethnic background, but from different religions. If

they had lived in India, they would have mixed naturally, but in Britain they are living in distinct communities of only their own faith, not mixing. So they brought different perspectives to the discussion but learned to see the ‘other’ as human. Before they sat down together in that room, for some of them it was a case of ‘the other’ being different people. But if you are in one room together for six hours a day, then you gain a new perspective.

What were the outcomes from the course? We had three or four groups. One said that they wanted to organise visits to other places of worship and have people of other faiths come to the group. Some said they wanted to set up an ‘Inter Faith Olympics’. In the case of the group whose members said that they wanted to visit places of worship of other faiths, one of the first trips was to a synagogue, and children came with some of the ladies who took part in the training.



Another group picked up on information that the Tony Blair Faith Foundation put round about Solidaritea, having teas in their homes. This initiative suits the ladies because many of them are housewives. They invited ladies of other faiths into one of their homes and this photo shows them sat around a dining table discussing the Millennium Development Goals. To come within a few months from just being housewives to discussing Millennium Development Goals and deciding what they wanted to do to help meet those was a great step forward.



This next photo shows them learning about other faiths. I did a short presentation for them about other faiths both within the UK and worldwide, so they are looking at some figures on the screen there. So any opportunity we get to meet, I try to use it to expand their horizons a little bit more.



These women, who are now inter faith facilitators, have taken part in other events. One of them attended a conference organised by the South East England Faiths Forum. She was confident enough to go provided that a member of our inter faith team was going to be there as well. My hope is that in the future I can get her to join that Forum, which would be a huge step.

The latest event, which took place on 9 July, was a conference about organ donation, with an inter faith element. We had spiritual leaders from the Jain and Hindu traditions sitting together answering questions on organ donation and two of the inter faith facilitators were involved too and are on the steering group for this project. You can see them in this photo. So they were meeting with GPs and consultants and engaging at a level which last

year they would never have imagined that they would be able to do.

This project has been very successful in north west London and I would now like to roll it out further afield and need some help with funding to do that.



Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you very much indeed. I do not know whether I will be able to make a cup of tea again, with all those options that you have given us! Now we shall be given guidance on this afternoon's programme of workshops and then there is lunch provided for us.

Workshop Feedback

Bishop Alastair Redfern: We are now going to move into this afternoon's plenary session, which has two parts. There will be a very brief report from each of the workshops. Then we shall have some reflections on the importance of faith communities nationally and locally from a small panel and an opportunity for other contributions and questions as well. So, first of all, reports from the workshops.

Workshop 1

Bhupinder Singh (Editor, SikhSpirit.com): Workshop 1 was on 'Resources for inter faith engagement'. We thought that the rise in the use of social media in inter faith relations is inevitable.

But while it is important to use that media as a tool for communication, it is just as important to continue developing personal connections, because it is those connections that lead to good inter faith relations. Also, it is essential for national organisations to support local groups.

Workshop 2

Taki Jaffer (Portsmouth Interfaith Forum): Workshop 2 was on 'Local members and national faith communities – mutual support and engagement'. Our key driver with regard to national engagement is; "Local groups have excellent good practices; national groups need to be told of these good practices and the best way for the best bits to get through is face to face meetings".

Workshop 3

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Scottish Interfaith Council): Workshop 3 was on 'Increasing the involvement of young people'. Participants decided to turn the workshop upside down! Our key point is what faith communities might learn from young people and the way they handle a multiplicity of identities, living in a multi faith society. So we put the emphasis on how the older generation running faith communities might move towards young people, rather than necessarily considering how they move towards us.

Workshop 4

Dr Phil Henry (Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby): Workshop 4 was on the 'Near Neighbours' project and the inter faith work of the Church of England. Our key point in relation to the Near Neighbours programme is about the uniqueness of a new way of working, as yet untried. One should give some time and patience to this method of working, being aware of the fact that the infrastructure used to develop and deliver the project, the Church Urban Fund, has real credibility, as has the Church of England. Whilst we may feel that we would all like to have some access to this funding, we should see it as a pilot that may well, if successful, develop more broadly and be one around which we could all engage. We must be aware of, and conscious of, the ethos of opportunity, the friendship and richness of the commitment that people are making on the ground that would make this programme, hopefully, something that we could all badge and engage with into the future. Let us hope so.

Workshop 5

Rapporteur (unidentified): Workshop 5 was on 'Special days and weeks'. We noted that it is a commandment in all our faith traditions to give of ourselves in some way. Special days and weeks provide us with the opportunity to do so and enable us to open our doors and invite others to join us, as well as for us to join others to fulfil our spiritual and practical tasks together.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you for those reports. There will be further notes about the workshops included in the record of the day so that we can all share in the fruits of the very good discussions that people have had.

Workshop 6

Steve Burak (Camden Faith Communities Partnership): Workshop 6 was on 'Patterns of consultation and engagement'. We have a strong desire to be open-hearted and inclusive, but recognise that we have to deal with a range of different contexts where our decisions will have practical consequences which we have to take into account. So there are two aspects – the need for open-heartedness but then the context too – where we have to consider the practical consequences in the situation in which we are.

Workshop 7

Amy Willshire (Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum): Workshop 7 was on 'Encouraging inter faith understanding through education'. We talked about the current context in which RE finds itself, with some people questioning its importance as it is not in the list of subjects for the new English Baccalaureate. Our key point was the need for us to be clear on what the purpose of RE is. It is not just to teach about religions and learn about festivals, but to learn about how to engage with other people, how to understand one another better and how to live together. We need to be stressing that point so that other people can understand why RE is so important.

Reflections on the importance of faith communities, nationally and locally, encouraging engagement of their members in projects to deepen inter faith understanding and cooperation

Bishop Alastair Redfern: We now invite three people to offer some reflections, and there is some slight adjustment to the membership of the panel, as Harriet will explain.

Dr Harriet Crabtree: Sadly, Bob Fyffe, Secretary General of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, has had to go to the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. He had a bad fall and injured his leg, so he is unable to be with us. [Good wishes were sent to him for his recovery.] We are however very pleased to say that in his place on the panel, we have Jyoti Mehta of the Jain community.

Saleem Kidwai OBE Inter-faith Council for Wales, Muslim Council of Wales and Muslim Council of Britain

I am very grateful to have the chance to speak to you. When I am in London, I usually say to people, "There is life beyond London!", but now I can say "There is life beyond England too, you know!".

I would like to talk about a journey which we have started in Wales which has had a tremendous impact on grass roots communities. The story begins about two and a half years ago, when the Christian and Muslim communities came together. They were told by people at the grass roots that they do not get an opportunity to talk to each other and share their experiences and knowledge with each other. So the Churches in Wales and the Muslim Council of Wales came together and thought "Why do we not start a programme to encourage and facilitate this activity?" But we thought that, while Christians are the biggest faith community in Wales and the next largest are the Muslims, there is another very big community, which is the 'non-faith' community, the secular community. So we formed a partnership between the Church in Wales, the Muslim Council of Wales, and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and we brought people from our various backgrounds to ten meetings which we held over a period of two years. At each meeting, the minimum people present were about 80 and the maximum about 120.

We had the first session in Carmarthen, a small town in west Wales. There were about 85–90 people there, and the topic was ‘Fear, Religion and Democracy’. We wanted to explore the fears which people have and where religion comes into this, and what people think about democracy and citizenship. The meeting started at 10.00 am and was officially supposed to finish at 4.00 pm, but it lasted until 5.30 pm. The responses from everybody after the meeting showed that people wanted to talk frankly, openly and honestly, without worrying about political correctness. Believe you me, they had that opportunity, because people were very open. What came out very clearly was that the Muslims were afraid to talk to Christians because they thought that they might convert them and the Christians were frightened to talk to Muslims because they were thinking of changing them. But what both really wanted was to know about each other. That is what started our journey. The other sessions were in Newport and Cardiff. The outcome of them was remarkable.

Since these sessions, about 15 to 20 churches have invited Muslims into their churches and about 10 to 12 mosques have invited Christians into their mosques. This was a remarkable change of attitude and culture for both the Muslims and the Christians. In the last two years there have been about four or five installations of new priests in various churches around Cardiff, Newport and Swansea to which Muslims have been invited and large numbers of Muslims did go to these and the churches were full. That is a sign of the community being engaged in action rather than just words.

In the last two years, we have had about eighty schools from Cardiff and the surrounding areas – about seven thousand students – who have visited the mosque. We regularly have people coming from various backgrounds and different faith communities, not only sitting there in the mosque, but observing the rituals of the prayers and asking about these. At lunch times at the ten joint sessions I mentioned, we

would perform our prayers while others were present and we explained to them why and how Muslims pray and afterwards, when the Christians prayed, we would sit with them. This created understanding and deepened our relationships. The whole aim was to understand each other, to value each other, and to respect each other. One word which we try not to use in Wales is ‘tolerating’. What we try to do is *accept* each other. Acceptance is more positive than tolerance. We feel that in our part of the world we have accepted that we have differences, because to say there is no difference between different religions is a fallacy. We believe there are differences but that we have to accept these and even value them. Then, and only then, can we work on our similarities. If we accept these principles of accepting and valuing one another, then we can move forward. That is what we have done.

As a result of those sessions, about ten or twelve ladies’ groups have been formed in churches and in the Muslim community which have started working together in partnership. That is something very unique because, as was mentioned earlier today, ladies can be conservative and not go out beyond their own community. But this is what we have achieved in a very short time, breaking barriers and moving forward. This work has made such an impact on local communities that it is becoming an accepted part of the action.

What we are trying to do now is move forward through organising activities together, such as charity functions in which we collect money for all the groups together. We are going into nursing homes to visit together. We are involved in activities through which it can be seen by others that our communities are working together. This interaction is what is needed more than ever before – through inter faith work at local level, regional level and national level. It was local people who did all this – what we did was to facilitate it, because they had a lack of resources and the Churches in Wales and the Muslim Council in Wales could bring those resources together and give

them the facilities they needed. I am very pleased that we have achieved so much and hope that this work will continue.

Dr Indarjit Singh CBE
Director, Network of Sikh
Organisations
Vice-Chair, Inter Faith
Network for the UK

Thank you for this opportunity. First of all, just reflecting on some of this afternoon's discussion in our seminar, I want to give you a two word reminder of the danger of ignorance about different religions: George Bush. Seriously, first of all my congratulations to the wonderful speakers we have had today. It has been a treat to listen to them – and of course, thanks to Harriet and all those in the Inter Faith Network office who have done so much work in putting today together.

I want to talk about basics. I want to start with an old Himalayan story about a man who was walking in the wilderness when in the distance he saw a terrifying beast rushing towards him. Naturally, he turned and ran as fast as he could, but looking back, he saw the beast gaining on him. He looked again after a while, and although the beast was gaining, he was relieved to find it was not a beast, but a man. Nevertheless, he carried on running, and still the man was gaining on him. He turned again and again. Finally, he realised that the man was not just a man, but was his own brother.

Today, in this age of globalisation, different religions and communities, which at a distance at one time seemed so scary and inferior, have today become our near neighbours. As we meet and get to know them and understand different religions and cultures, we realise that they are not all that different, and today's meeting is the kind that assists in that. We all share the same hopes, fears and aspirations, as we have learned today.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, reminded us of much the same point when referring to the divide between Hindus and Muslims in his time. He wrote 'The culture and dress of different communities should not blind us to the fact that we are all equal members of the same one human family.' Sadly, Sikhs, who were pioneers in inter faith understanding and well ahead of the field at one time, have fallen back in recent years. We are a bit like the proverbial hare, who compared to others in our race with the tortoise, have fallen asleep, taking an extended nap and have let the tortoise inch ahead. But I hope we get out of that soon!

A meeting in London which Harriet and I and others attended yesterday reminded me of the importance of the dialogue at a national level. The meeting had been called after the formal winding up of the Faith Communities Consultative Council, the body which used to meet under the last Government, chaired by a Minister. Under the new Government, yesterday's meeting was noting its formal winding up. But speaker after speaker emphasised the importance of such a dialogue and the Minister left, scratching his head and promising to think about the points that had been made.

We have heard today some excellent examples of the work being done by local inter faith groups in breaking down barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding between communities. But we all need to do much more to remove the ignorance of sister communities on which prejudice festers and thrives, sometimes resulting in irrational and very real hatred, and even inexplicable violence. We have reached a stage in which we can rejoice in commonalities between different religions and cultures. We now need to turn our attention much more to what are apparent impediments. It is very important that we talk about those as well. We need to talk about them in order to extend our understanding of different communities and the possibilities of co-operative working. I could go on to expand on some of these

points, but time does not allow. Thank you again for listening to me.

Jyoti Mehta Institute of Jainology

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Now Jyoti Mehta is here. Thank you for your willingness to speak at short notice.

Jyoti Mehta: For those who do not know me, I am from the Jain community and I guess I am standing here as the ‘young person’ – although I do not really know for how long I am going to be classed as ‘young’ as I am actually a lot older than I look! Possibly I will be here when I am forty and still be ‘the young person’ because I still look sixteen!

How did I end up here? Why did I get involved with inter faith activities? The answer to that is that I was at Bristol University. Bristol is a cool city, with lots of bars and clubs and a lot going on. Yet I found myself in the multi faith chaplaincy. At the time, it was actually just a Christian chaplaincy, but it became a multi faith chaplaincy. The reason I was there was because the coffee was good. Yes, that is true! I would tell my friends, who were not necessarily religious or from any faith community, “Guess what? If you want the best coffee, the chaplaincy is the place to go – and the coffee is free!” So we found ourselves there more and more. There was actually a Fair Trade Foundation at the university, so they wanted to have a Fair Trade café but could not find a venue for it. So the chaplaincy said “We have got some space, why don’t you hold your café there?” So once a week, my friends and I went there for a budget lunch. By doing this, the chaplaincy opened itself up to people who would not usually go there. That was a really powerful step, because I got to speak to people who were from various backgrounds, religious and non religious. The vibes of such a place – you know how you feel this when you go to many places of worship – are of something warm and comforting, of something homely. So I found myself in the chaplaincy more and more. As I was there, I

made friends with other people, so my friendships extended from there. Initially, we would talk about the weather and what else was going on in university. But when I had made friends with them, I could feel like, “You know what? I can talk to you now”. Then I would ask them the deep questions about their religion which I would never had a chance to do before. As I said, I am a Jain and they had probably never met a Jain before. So they really appreciated the opportunity to find out about this obscure small religion! So it was a two way process.

Some of my Jewish friends who I met there invited me, very movingly, to one of their *shabbat* meals; I was just so touched by that gesture of friendship. That gesture is why I have remained in inter faith activities, because of the friendship I saw there. For me, friendship is what underpins living out spirituality and religion. So the reason I am here now, and the reason I got hooked in the first place, is because I made really good friends, and I continue to do so today.

The other point I want to make is that there is a misconception that if you get involved in inter faith activities and meet people from different religions, then you have got to be an expert on your own religion. I am not an expert. I am still learning. But actually, what inter faith forums have provided for me is a learning opportunity, because sometimes people ask me questions which I have never even contemplated – really challenging questions. I do not need to blag or try to make myself out to be an expert. What I actually say sometimes is, “You know what? That is a really good question. I am going to take that away with me, do my reading, do my research and ask some people, then I will come back to you with an answer”. So that way I have learned not just about other religions but about my own religion too, through getting involved in inter faith conversation. This is so powerful.

That is where everybody sitting in this room comes in. Because I would say I am the sum total of all the education I have had at school,

with the work of RE educators and SACREs, in the Jain education that I received in local Jain schools in my community; in national Jain organisations which provide a lot of resources, and from other national bodies which provide resources on their religions to which I turn when I research before I engage in very deep dialogue with people from other faiths. So I would say that all of us are kind of a sum total of all these levels that we have experienced, our education, local, regional and national activity, and of course, the learning we have had in our own homes from our parents and grandparents.

So I end by saying that I am a sum total of all that, which can be really powerful. I know that everybody in this room has contributed massively in all their different ways to promoting good relations and inter faith dialogue. That is really what individuals can do. But that is because you have had the backing of all these levels of support. In many ways, you personify all the levels of education and learning which have come your way.

Some of you may know my Dad, Nitin Mehta, who likes to organise vegetarian rallies – I know, it is crazy – they have not always had a massive crowd! But you know, one of the best things my Dad has taught me is that it is not about the numbers. If one person comes and they leave inspired, it has been a good day. So that is what I am going to leave with you now. Any opportunity to inspire anyone, even if it might just be one person, is worth it. So you do not need to come back and say “A thousand people have converted to the inter faith cause”. Just one person can do a lot.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you very much for those three super contributions. We have a few minutes now for any comments you would like to offer on our theme of the national and the local working together, learning from each other and supporting each other.

Closing plenary discussion

Taki Jaffer (Portsmouth Interfaith Forum):

Today the conversations have been around funding issues. Wherever you turn, whenever you talk to someone, they are suffering from some form of funding problem. I think that part of the role of the Inter Faith Network must be for it to try, through its resources, to see what funding streams are available directly and specifically for local inter faith work. I thought each local authority had a duty to fund their local inter faith body. I am speaking on behalf of Portsmouth Interfaith Forum, and we have not received a penny from our local authority. So how do these two facts match up together? It is part of the role of the Inter Faith Network to advise us on how to challenge our local authorities to achieve the funding we are supposed to have.

Dr Phil Henry (Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby):

I am going to do a bit of canvassing here! I am the Director of the Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby. How many in the room know about our directory, *Religions in the UK*? Could you just show hands? Wonderful, thank you. We are in discussions at the moment about the possibility of a fifth edition of the Directory. We have some thoughts about how that might happen and are thinking about it as an online resource. If that were to be the plan, how many people would appreciate that? Could I have a show of hands? (*A number of people raised their hands.*) That is not to say that a hard copy version with the necessary textual information will not be available. It will, but we are thinking about how we can update the listings for the future. Thank you very much for that.

Malcolm Deboo (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe):

I just want to second what Jyoti Mehta said about her university experience of engaging with members of other faiths. Although she said it in a humorous way, I agree that it is very pertinent how lasting

friendships can be developed across the faiths. This should not be underestimated, and I can speak of a similar experience, with the element of sharing food also being very important in that context.

Alan Rainer (London Society of Jews and Christians):

I would just like to say that, as members of all our faiths, we have to ask the fundamental question, “What is a human being?” We are not money making machines. We are spiritual beings and our call is universally to be holy – holy to our one God that we all share. That is our mission, to bring joy to the world, because we have that faith.

The Revd Festus Tete-Djawu (Council of African and Afro Caribbean Churches UK):

The workshop I attended was looking at Religious Education in schools. What are we doing about the fact that RE is being attacked? This is of concern to me and to very many others.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: The Network’s Executive Committee is very aware of that concern. Perhaps Brian Gates, a very articulate advocate of the case for RE, might wish to comment on that.

Professor Brian Gates: A day like this is a reminder, if we need one, of just how special faith is as a resource for our individual actings and ways of being with each other, both as individuals and as communities. The Government clearly says that communities matter and that education matters. The Secretary of State for Education and the Minister of State for Schools both say that they want Religious Education to continue. It is there by statute, they say. The evidence, however, that has been presented to them from the different member organisations of the RE Council and from the RE Council itself, from faith community interests and leaders, from academic and professional associations

says “The current provision for RE is already patchy. Your proposals for educational reform are going to make that patchiness even worse. What are you going to do to prevent that further deterioration?” The answer that we have consistently received from Government is “There is nothing to worry about. The law will remain”.

In practice we know from the feedback that we have had from secondary schools that the situation is deteriorating in terms of the options that are available for 14–15 year old pupils at GCSE level and in terms of the staffing base that is there in the schools. Because if RE is not being given a priority, the schools do not need the teachers. We know as well that university courses for primary teacher education are not finding time to give attention to Religious Education. This is exceedingly worrying.

I would ask you – whether it is within your power as individuals in relation to your MP or organisationally in terms of a local faith group, a regional inter faith body, or a national organisation – to communicate directly with Secretary of State Michael Gove or indeed David Cameron as Prime Minister. Please ask them what they are doing to maintain Religious Education as the priority it has been in public education in this country for over a century. That is what is under threat. It is our responsibility as individuals and as members of our different groups and communities to try and hold the coalition Government to the mark on this priority. I hope that the kind of ingenuity which has been evident within the room in all that we have heard from the various presentations can be brought to bear by each and every one of us as we try to ram this point home, even before the summer Parliamentary recess.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: I wonder if Warwick Hawkins would like to offer any comments?

Warwick Hawkins (Department for Communities and Local Government): I have been very encouraged by the evidence that I

have heard at the conference today, of people beginning to think in very ingenious ways of how they might be able to link up effectively together and share resources and expertise. This is more important than it has ever been, because, as you know, we are in a very austere economic climate. We are also in a situation where the current Government is not one that has overarching strategies and ideologies with funding schemes attached, which has been the case in the past. All of us, even we civil servants, are having to think in various innovative ways. However, the Government has been able to make a targeted investment in the ‘Near Neighbours’ project and that is because, in the Church of England, there is an existing infrastructure to take it forward. This is an example of a faith community which is taking ownership itself and is actively working in local communities to bring people of faith together in order to fix local issues and problems. That is the kind of model in which the Government is keen to invest. The project only covers four hub areas, but if it is a success, then in three years time, who knows, it may be possible to expand on that. But that, I think, is the kind of model which we are looking at.

So, what can the Government do over and above its investment in ‘Near Neighbours’? We are there to help in the sharing of good practice. We are very happy for Ministers to go round endorsing the excellent activities that are happening and visiting them and mentioning them in their speeches and, in that way, helping share the examples of good practice. There will be support for Inter Faith Week this year, whether or not that is only in terms of my time and others in my team. Whether we shall be able to do more remains to be seen. We hope to be able to continue to support the work of the Inter Faith Network and of the Faith Based Regeneration Network and we will have decisions on that, I hope, very soon. I had hoped to be able to give you news on this today but I am not in that position yet. Our Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, is particularly interested in the concept of Mitzvah, or selfless acts, a concept

which is present in all faith traditions, and has asked us to find innovative ways of spreading that kind of idea out into the wider community. So we will be turning our attention to that in the coming months. The linking of schools is another step that we know is going to be taken forward and encouraged. So there are some specific areas of work for us. But I should end by emphasising the point that the onus is now on you. If the Government spots where faith communities are taking ownership of some work and doing it well, then we will see if there are ways in which we are able to support it. But the era of top-down schemes and strategies is, I think, over.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you very much. We do appreciate the time you have given us today and your engagement with us.

The Revd Festus Tete-Djawu: Could Warwick Hawkins please answer Brian Gates' question about what is to happen to RE? Religious Education is very important in the context of the moral degradation that is happening now – knife crime and gun crime – and the concerns we have for our children.

Warwick Hawkins: I have a colleague in DfE who I shall be seeing early next week, and I will make known the strength of opinion here on the RE issue.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: The Religious Education issue is a very important one. You have heard from Brian Gates that many people are working on it at different levels. It is very good that there is a unanimous concern to which Warwick Hawkins will be able to witness. It is very important that this concern is expressed and heard. The National Meeting is not in a position to act on matters of this kind but we can go away from here empowered and inspired by what we have heard and the commitments to which we need to witness. I will ask Harriet if she has any closing observations to make.

Dr Harriet Crabtree: In the course of today there has been an astonishing range of positive suggestions, and of anxieties and challenges brought forward. After every National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network, one goes away with a basket full of these and thinks 'How can we rise to this?' It seems to me that the continuing process of sharing of information and of good practice is really important. We shall be working to ensure that the faith communities survey which I hope we can take forward in the forthcoming year can help gather in this information. It will be key in helping this process. So if you have reflections on how this gathering in of information can happen from local groups as well as through the national survey, it would be very good to have these, as we hope to pick up on the plans for the survey with the Faith Communities Forum in the autumn.

Co-Chairs' closing reflections

Dr Manazir Ahsan: Thank you very much for asking me to say a few words. We have all been moved and inspired today, listening to so many presentations from the different faith groups on how they engage in inter faith work, through the work of both national and local bodies. Although there are a number of problems and challenges, we have moved a long way. I am grateful that the Inter Faith Network has taken the initiative to bring people from different organisations and parts of the country together today.

Challenges and opportunities are, of course, part of our life. Whenever there are challenges, we try to turn these into opportunities and to see how we can benefit from them and make things better. Whenever I see people of different faiths, of different cultures, of different ethnicities coming together, I remember the simile of a garden, where different types of flowers are blossoming and giving the beauty of unity in diversity. We have learned this from our inter faith experiences and we have come a long way in this engagement, as the last three reflections from Saleem, Indarjit and Jyoti have shown in an eye-opening way. I did not know how much inter faith work is going on in Wales, where they have been able to organise the ladies and young people to come into the forefront of inter faith work. That is a real cause for celebration for all of us.

We need to increase our co-operation through the collaboration of both local and national bodies so that we can learn from each other's experiences and be enriched by this, finding out how we can make an impact on our communities and on wider society. People of faith may not be in the majority in our society, but when we come together, this can have a great impact. Both Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury have been reminding us constantly that we need to bring faith into the public square. That is the

responsibility of all of us jointly and there will be ways in which the Inter Faith Network can facilitate this.

I am pleased to note that today the number of member bodies in the Inter Faith Network has reached the 200 mark. This is a great achievement. I am also pleased to see that there is more dialogue in the academic field. I do not know how many of you saw the programme on the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) broadcast this week on BBC2. It was an excellent programme in which Muslims, Christians and Jews, scholars of different universities and centres, have collaborated together to present a very wonderful programme. The more we work together in different fields, the more we can do of benefit to ourselves and others. In this we have to gather our resources together in such a way that we can achieve our goals. The more united we are, the better it will be for all of us. I would like to thank you for giving so much of your time and valuable experiences, in sharing your thoughts and comments with us. I am sure that the Inter Faith Network will be richer through receiving all these suggestions and ideas, and hopefully we will be able to put some of them into practice.

Bishop Alastair Redfern: Thank you very much indeed. I want to finish with some thanks and just one or two thoughts for us. The thanks are to all of you for coming and showing to us that, together, we represent, as Dr Ahsan has said, an enormous range of experience, aspiration and potential. That is what makes this Network such a rich body, not just for us to participate in, but as a force for good in our culture and our society. We are in a challenging position at the moment as we await a message from Whitehall on future funding. We should record our thanks to Harriet and her colleagues, who are carrying on the work so well despite the tightness of

resources. We should record our appreciation of this commitment.

The AGM starts at four o'clock. But I just want to leave us with one thought. This day is called 'The Big Picture' and it is about the national and the local and their working together. There are two words which are very current in our society and in the Government's language: 'big' and 'local'. We have all heard about the 'Big Society' and we have all heard about the Localism Bill. We live in a world of deregulation and many of the structures and the ethos that held matters together in the past are dissolving. So the human heart calls for something bigger to reconnect it. Besides a world of deregulation, we live in a world of pragmatism because for so many of us 'local' is just about surviving, intellectually, emotionally and economically. What faith brings to all this, and why the Inter Faith Network is so crucial, I think, for our society, is because 'big' for us as people of faith is not just about structures. . It is about a *deeper* connectedness between human beings at our very essence. That is what we are all here for and it is to that we must witness, together. A 'Big Society' needs to be a big connectivity of human beings made in the image of God for the glory of God. That is what we are about. That is the value that we need to add – without which the 'Big Society' will get nowhere at all. Similarly, 'localism' is not just about pragmatic projects to help people survive. Localism for us is not even about 'neighbours'; it is about *friends*. That is the value we add as people of faith, who both face to face and side by side are friends – more than just neighbours.

We have got a massive and vital contribution to make in the society in which we are set, where without what we bring, the notions of 'big society' and of 'localism' will be hollow and disappointing for many. So I think that is why we are here, that is why we need to be confident in our calling to work together and to witness to our faith. Thank you very much for coming.

Workshop notes

Note: The discussion points listed in each of these workshop notes are not conclusions agreed by the workshop as a whole, but points and suggestions made by individual participants.

Workshop 1

Resources for inter faith engagement

National faith community bodies have developed a range of materials to support the inter faith engagement of local members. Social networking and on-line resources are ever more important. How are national faith community bodies developing these kinds of resources – traditional and new – to support local practitioners?

Facilitator: Bhupinder Singh, Editor, SikhSpirit.com, IFN webmaster and consultant on multi media issues

Presenters: Celia Blackden, Inter Faith Officer, Churches Together in England

Dr Natubhai Shah, Jain Samaj Europe and Council of Dharmic Faiths

Bhupinder Singh welcomed participants to the workshop, which he introduced by emphasising the importance of the media and in particular the rise of social media, which is currently determining much of the agenda on the role of media resources in inter faith engagement. He invited Ms Celia Blackden to offer her opening presentation.

Celia Blackden explained that her work for Churches Together in England (CTE) on inter faith engagement had a particular focus on enabling collaboration in inter faith work between the different Churches. In this context, she wanted to see Christians working together and getting engaged in inter faith activities; this could only further help to deepen their faith.

Ms Blackden said that some key aspects of the concept of communication were:

- to enable people to deepen their faith and find the motives for and purpose of inter religious dialogue within their Christian faith;
- to inform, engage, encourage in Christian/Church collaboration in inter faith;
- to enable conversation and understanding between different Christian perspectives;

- to enable a better understanding of religions;
- to overcome fear (John 4.18 says “Love casts out fear”);
- to encourage a culture of dialogue, through information and personal testimonies, so as to emphasise the positive aspects of religions and circumstances; and
- to encourage trust in God who guides all things for the good of the human family, so that goodness may triumph in all.

She mentioned that she had produced various resources to help bring out the importance of inter faith work and had consulted on this with the different Christian denominations. She was passionate about reaching out to the uninitiated in inter faith activity. She noted that, for a CTE video which she had made for Inter Faith Week, she had managed to secure an interview with Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury. This had helped to increase the profile of her work at CTE. The resources that she mentioned can be found at www.churches-together.net/Group/Group.aspx?ID=83353.

Alongside her own material, Ms Blackden had also made use of the publications of CTE more widely and had brought with her some examples of its leaflets for workshop

participants to see. She also mentioned *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* – a new document on inter-religious dialogue produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

A list of the resources referred to by Ms Blackden is attached as an annex to this workshop note.

Bhupinder Singh thanked Ms Blackden for her reflections and asked Dr Natubhai Shah to offer his.

Dr Natubhai Shah said that most inter faith work was carried out by the volunteers. This had its advantages and disadvantages. Several faith and inter faith organisations in London had links with the Jains, but the inter faith work was at the bottom of list for many of the Jain Organisations, as they were short of volunteers and lacked adequate finance. To get people involved in any kind of inter faith work was very difficult for the Jain Organisations.

Dr Shah explained that he had come to the UK, to Leicester, in the late 1960s. Very few people in this country had then heard about the Jain religion. He stressed the importance of securing local support in any project if it is to be successful. He had begun to do inter faith work in his own area by getting small groups together, which was a good way for people to learn about Jainism. More than 2,000 people from abroad had come to Leicester for the inauguration of this first Jain temple in the world with facilities for all major Jain traditions for worship. Its first administrator was a Christian, setting an example of inter faith work in action.

Having physical premises for the Jain community meant that knowledge about Jainism spread and this helped in making links with other faith communities. The primary focus of Dr Shah's life was to make Jainism known to all people. He said that he had produced several leaflets to get the message across to the wider public. As part of

Inter Faith Week in 2010, he had produced a booklet, which was the first of its kind, about marriage in different faiths. He noted that getting people involved in inter faith work was a great challenge and having resources to reach those beyond your own community was crucial. It could be particularly difficult to get young people involved because, given their academic and job commitments, they could not spend time on week days; could only be involved at weekends. However, for inter faith work to succeed in the long term; it was essential for young people to get involved; it means meetings on weekends.

Mr Singh thanked Dr Shah for his reflections and invited wider discussion, in the course of which the following points were made:

- IFN's 'code', *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*, is an invaluable resource; it summarises the fundamentals of how to engage fruitfully with others and is relevant to work at both national and local level and to people of all faiths
- In inter faith work, especially in meetings, it is important for people to understand that no attempt is being made to convert people from one faith to another, especially as many people still fear this is the case.
- A faith-based approach is about good inter personal communication – being edifying and truthful.
- There are many different religious groups with which to engage. It is not always possible to engage with every group at once.
- It is challenging to draw into dialogue faith communities which are not yet involved in this.
- A better understanding is required of social media, for example, how and when to use blogs, and how this technology can

be utilised to help tackle relevant issues. The main problem for many people is a lack of time. Although modern technology should be making activity easier, many people simply do not have enough time even to log onto a website. Also, it is important to remember that although the internet is now seen as a necessary tool, there are many people who are not comfortable using it or who do not use it at all.

- Some 'third sector' groups have 'media surgeries' run by people who work in social media and are willing to help anyone needing assistance in making the best use of new technology.
- In the past, most inter faith contact was face to face. Now the human touch is missing. Much face to face dialogue has been replaced by telephones, then emails and now social media. It is important to be very careful in using the new media where there is no 'face to face' interaction. Without face to face dialogue, messages may not get through or may be misunderstood.
- Social media (and emails) can be dangerous when the way in which they are used presents ethical problems. But while there are dangers, there is a need for social media, like Facebook. It is possible to connect with so many more people through social media than by more conventional means. If utilised properly, it will also attract younger people to get involved in inter faith activity.
- The internet has now moved full circle. At first, it provided only a one way flow of information. Now with the social media dimension there is great potential for two-way interaction. The key to its successful use is whether the flow of comments are appropriately 'moderated'.
- It is essential for the national faith communities to use social media well as

part of engaging with their local communities and with each other.

- We need to make connections with people and the local is what really matters in this. In one gathering which a participant had attended, a lady talked about how she took the initiative to go to the local mosque and gurdwara in order to learn more about their faith, and more importantly, to connect with people. These small steps are valuable.
- Dialogue has to start with individuals.
- For inter faith work to be sustained, there needs to be a physical presence, a base which can act as a focal point for people to get interested and then engaged. Buildings help keep a community together.
- At the same time, it could be argued that there are too many places of worship and in some cases, where they are underused and difficult to maintain, the resources which their maintenance consumes might be used for better purposes.
- Joint action, working together is essential. People of faith need to pray and trust in God. If we keep talking to people, then God will open doors for us.

Annex to Note of Workshop 1

Examples of Resources for Inter Faith Engagement: Celia Blackden

1. The Inter Faith pages of Churches Together in England

A range of resources can be found in the inter faith section of the CTE website at: http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/43001/Churches_Together_in/Working_Together/Inter_faith/Inter_faith.aspx

2. Landmark document on Christian witness published

Five years' work has led to the release of "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct" by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance. This can be found at:
http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2011pdfs/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf

3. Anglican Communion i-book launched

The Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) has launched a valuable new resource to assist Anglicans and other Christians in their engagement with people of other faiths. "The resource... can grow and change to respond to new needs and new insights. It incorporates some video and audio resources, and we want to expand on these over the coming few months". The i-book, entitled *Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue – an Anglican theology of inter faith relations* can be found at:
http://www.aco.org/_books/

4. Baptist Union of Great Britain launches new inter faith resource

The Baptist Union of Great Britain Joppa Group (Joppa is the Baptist Interfaith Network for Christian Witness in a multi-faith society) has produced a new inter faith resource entitled *Good Neighbours – A Study Guide on Living in a Multi-Faith Society*. This can be found at:
<http://www.baptist.org.uk/resources/interfaith/good-neighbours-study-guide.pdf>

5. Meeting God in Friend and Stranger: A Catholic document on interreligious dialogue

Meeting God in Friend and Stranger by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales was launched in April 2010. It can be found at:

<http://www.cbcew.org.uk/document.doc?id=49>

6. Methodist resource published in 2010

Inter Faith Relations in the 21st Century, a Methodist Conference statement and motions supporting Inter Faith relations, can be found at:
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/if-conference-motions-supporting-if-0210.pdf>

7. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Connected

Earlier in 2011 CTBI launched Churches Together Connect, described as the interactive home of the churches in Britain and Ireland. Part of this is the Churches Inter Religious Network. See www.churchestogetherconnect.org

Workshop 2

Local members and national faith communities – mutual support and engagement

An opportunity for local practitioners to discuss ways in which national faith communities can further support their work and learn from local work.

Facilitator: Julian Bond, Director, Christian Muslim Forum

Presenters: Anula Beckett, Bristol Inter Faith Group and member, Religious Society of Friends

Taki Jaffer JP, Coordinator, Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum

Julian Bond welcomed everyone to the workshop and invited participants to introduce themselves. He then invited Anula Beckett and Taki Jaffer to offer their presentations.

Anula Beckett said that inter faith work in Bristol had been started by the Revd Marcus Braybrooke and Albert Polack in the 1960s. It continued to develop and grow thereafter. The present Bristol Inter Faith Group (BIFG) was established in 1990 and included many dedicated people from earlier times. Members of BIFG had come together because of their personal interest in religion and through their experiences, for example, of the Holocaust, or because of an academic interest. They had been very energetic in the early period. Meetings and talks had been held in different places of worship and members took part in celebrations of different faith communities. Over a period of ten years, 110 meetings had taken place, but due to lack of energy this momentum could not be sustained. Far less people were coming to BIFG's meetings these days. It had tried a variety of approaches to keep its work going and to involve more people but some members were feeling exhausted by the struggle this involved.

However, Ms Beckett explained that from 2010 BIFG had worked in partnership with Faithnetsouthwest, Bristol Multi Faith Forum

(which had been established in 2004), the Peirian Centre, which focuses on multicultural and human rights issues, and Bristol City Council's Equalities and Social Inclusion/Community Cohesion units. This resulted in some successful community projects which raised awareness of the variety and richness of faith communities in Bristol. It was very difficult to find the time and energy to maintain all the networking which was required, especially since most work continued to be undertaken on a voluntary basis. The priorities in taking the work forward needed to be education, funding and effective practice.

Connections with national organisations were valuable for local inter faith groups and vice versa.

Ms Beckett had prepared a note of points which she thought would be of interest and assistance to other local groups; as time was short, she was willing for this to be circulated. *[A copy of the full note on which Anula Beckett drew in her remarks is included as an Annex to this note].*

Taki Jaffer said that in Portsmouth faith communities and other service sectors (for example, the local authority, police and hospitals) were mutually supportive and problems which arose were dealt with efficiently, despite lack of funding, because of

the strategic links and partnerships which had been established.

Mr Jaffer said that the Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum had struck up key alliances with local officials, such as the coroner. Strong connections were in place to deal with any specific issues which had to be tackled. For example, a Muslim man had been killed on a rail track. According to Islamic law, burial needs to take place within 24 hours but in this case, the death had to be signed off by a transport official and this could have taken up to 2 weeks. So Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum had contacted the local coroner and the police and, by co-operating in this way, managed to get the body to the family as soon as possible. Although there were only 182 people in the local Sikh community, following the death of a Sikh elder, 700 people had wanted to attend his funeral service. How could the *gurdwara* accommodate that many people? The Forum had contacted local organisations which had offered car parking and space to allow the additional people to be accommodated.

Mr Jaffer said that local groups relied on national bodies for guidance on good practice. It is important to share this in order to raise awareness and so that everyone can benefit from being made aware of it. Meetings such as the present one, and good practice resources, were tremendously important.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Birmingham Inter Faith Council acts as a kind of hub for inter faith work in the city.
- Coventry has an inter faith group which does not engage with the 'public square' agenda and a multi-faith forum which does. These two groups complement each other in their work.
- Bristol Multi Faith Forum focuses on links with the local authority and other public bodies and services, while Bristol Inter

Faith Group focuses on face-to-face discussions, developing personal friendships and understanding. Many people in Bristol are only aware of one group rather than both and more dialogue between the two would be helpful.

- Where English Defence League demonstrations have taken place, different groups and organisations have worked together, for example, trade unions and faith communities, and with the local media.
- Local inter faith groups have interesting stories to tell! Media coverage is not easy to obtain. Newspapers do not seem to care about inter faith activities.
- Sitting down and talking about inter faith activity with people for ten minutes or so in, for example, a mosque can be more effective than distributing letters and leaflets.
- In Sandwell education is a big issue. Faith centres have an important role to play and organise inter faith events in the area. For example, there is a Faith Walk where people visit different places of worship together. On one they had an NHS marquee where people could get a free health check and lifestyle guidance. These kinds of events have an educational role. The Faith Walk was so successful that it has now become an annual event, come rain or shine!
- In Southall, there have been some problems over young people behaving badly. For example, on *Eid* and *Vaisakhi*, some teenage boys were driving cars around at high speed doing hand brake turns in the middle of the road. Members of the local community got fed up with this and contacted the police who then stopped every car being driven in this way. The boys concerned were taken to an interview room by the police and thought they were going to get a 'slap on the wrist'

but were greeted instead by local religious leaders who spoke with them. As a result, the boys' reckless driving stopped! This was made possible by a creative partnership between the police and local faith leaders.

- In Islington, there is a stress on the importance of the faiths working with the local authority and the police.
- Faith leaders need to think imaginatively about what can be done to reach members of the community and to engage with schoolchildren, for example, through distributing newsletters.
- To help with sharing of good practice, local groups need to keep national bodies informed about their events and projects and to flag up resources which they need.
- There needs to be co-operative working between the national and local level.
- Some smaller inter faith groups face challenges due to low numbers and inadequate funding.
- National linking gives additional profile to local work. Sometimes local inter faith groups are concerned that their work is not having an impact; being linked together at national level can give them encouragement when they see that this work is contributing to the national scene.
- Sharing good practice is very beneficial.
- Communication between and within faith communities at national and local level needs to be more effective.
- The flow of information is most reliable when this is face-to-face. National bodies should visit local communities. There is no need for an invitation – local groups are always ready to welcome visitors.

- Interaction is needed in both directions – national to local and local to national.

Annex to Note of Workshop 2

Local Experience of Inter Faith Work – Bristol Inter Faith Group Some personal reflections prepared by Anula Beckett

A few 'snapshots', drawn from experience in the Bristol area as a member and committee member of Bristol Inter Faith Group (BIFG), might help to illustrate our journey of inter faith encounter and cooperation from 1990–2011.

Snapshot 1

The first snapshot, taken in 1990 is of the newly established Bristol Inter Faith Group committee. It is a group of people from different faith communities some of whom are also professionals in RE. Not one of them is what one could call a representative of the community to which they belong. They have come together because their life experience, individual encounters and knowledge have brought them to this point. They believe in the importance of people of different faiths becoming friends and associates and learning about each other's deepest concerns, beliefs and values. Present in the group are a Muslim, a Jew, three Christians, a Sikh, a Hindu, a Baha'i, and a Buddhist. More than half were born into their faith community but the others have become members of their faith community through personal, spiritual seeking and self-realisation. Several have been in inter faith organisations before and first encountered 'inter faith enthusiasts' through membership of the World Congress of Faiths. (WCF marks its 75th anniversary this year and members such as Marcus Braybrooke and Albert Polack initiated inter faith work in Bristol in the 1960s). The 1990 snapshot thus included people with what one might call a long pedigree in inter faith

matters! Amongst the experiences that they brought to the work were painful memories such as that of Christian-Jewish misunderstanding in Europe and its most extreme expression in the Holocaust. Others had lost family members and possessions as a result of conflictual situations associated with post colonial turbulence in East Africa and the Indian subcontinent. Members of minority communities had also fled marginalisation and persecution in the Middle East. The Tibetan Buddhists were people who had become followers of the Dalai Lama, whose example of compassion and equanimity has inspired so many during his exile from Tibet.

Within a short space of time, the committee expanded to include Unitarians and devotees of Sri Chinmoy and Sai Baba and also local Brahma Kumaris. Importantly, a civic link was forged in 1993 when the Lord Mayor of Bristol was invited to attend the launch of BIFG's year-long programme to mark the centenary celebrations of the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. The celebratory year was entitled 'A Year of Inter-Religious Understanding and Co-operation'.

The combined efforts of these committee members and their fellow faith community members, from 1990–2000, gave rise to 11 meetings a year, 110 meetings in total. We met at different places of worship, co-hosted meetings with speakers, attended festivals, held inter faith discussions and walks, and shared food and friendship.

Snapshot 2

Snapshot 2 was in the early years of the new millennium. Following a number of disturbing events, not least the attack on the twin towers on 11th September 2001, funding had become available, for those in inter faith work, to employ a development worker. Also at last we had an office and proper postal address rather than the secretary's home. However there is some tension evident in the faces of committee members. The treasurer has thousands of pounds to manage, instead

of just subscriptions from individuals and affiliated faith communities. The on-going annual programme continues to be varied and interesting but now details of everything, such as attendance figures, strict accounting for every last penny and also detailed reports are necessary. It is a steep learning curve for all – consideration of charitable status or limited company legislation, management know-how and sharpening up our act has been 'good' for us but, also, a little painful and worrying. There are not so many different faiths included in the committee group – Unitarian, Christian, Quaker, Buddhist, Baha'i, and Jewish are present but some communities are reached by way of 'contacts' who cannot usually manage committee meetings eg Muslim, Sikh and Hindu. The development worker was funded for one year.

Snapshot 3

Subsequent successful funding applications achieved more grants so that, in 2010, BIFG worked in partnership with Faithnetsouthwest, Bristol Multi Faith Forum (a new organisation in Bristol established in 2004), the Peirian Centre, especially concerned with multicultural and human rights issues, and Bristol City Council's Equalities and Social inclusion/community cohesion units. Funding came from the Community Development Fund and the Church Urban Fund. A few BIFG committee members continued to plan the regular programme of inter faith meetings while 3 committee members held three key positions in an additional, new committee that organised a very successful festival entitled 'Bristol Celebrates'. It was a celebration of religious and cultural diversity open to people of all faiths or none. Hundreds of people attended the day-long programme of events which was held at a local City Academy.

Snapshot 4

2011 – the most recent snapshot (4) might be entitled ‘in transition’! Members of every faith community approached by the BIFG committee are still willing to participate in programme building, but it has become rather an effort. In the committee snapshot, and amongst the names listed on the back of our most recent programme, there are 3 Quakers, a Unitarian, a Roman Catholic and a Baha’i – who often cannot attend and has been trying to find a replacement for months! Our faithful Tibetan Buddhist member does all the background work of managing the website, and typesets all the programmes, but he does not want to be listed because he is not comfortable with recent ventures. Are we keeping to our original aims? At some time it must have been decided to omit all the ‘community contacts’ in all the other faiths but it is not clear when and why. In discussions there is some difference of opinion about the best way forward. In addition, some potential speakers and other participants for our programme may well require a proper fee as well as expenses. A multiplicity of events happening in the city draws inter faith ‘activists’ in a variety of directions. From being the concern of a small minority of people, sometimes viewed with suspicion, ‘inter faith’ has joined the mainstream. Every manner of activity gains more approval if people of different faiths can be encouraged to attend, and contribute a few minutes to, an often very moving or exciting occasion. These are heady times when all sorts of things are possible but is there energy enough and real commitment to go round. How do we strike a good balance between in-depth quiet work and the very necessary raising of awareness, in big public events, that religion and faith communities are here to stay. Also that religious diversity is a gift to share with one and all.

What does the future hold and what might our local inter faith group wish to share with national faith bodies about our particular experience in Bristol?

Models of good and effective practice

I am aware that, when BIFG was established in 1990, the ‘model’ we set up seemed perfectly suitable. However times change and we need to adapt. Has our model been too ‘western’? Are there effective other models that we should be trying that draw on the experience of different ways of working together? This might be something that national faith bodies could assist us with, together with local leaders and communities.

It is clear to me that, in Bristol, BIFG could benefit from conversations on this subject with the Bristol Multi Faith Forum (BMFF) and other inter faith organisations such as the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). At a national level, is the Inter Faith Network aware that other, older-established, groups have shared some of our experiences as the inter faith scene has changed? How best might we share these experiences and learn from them about good, effective and appropriate ways of working together?

Several other things that have come to mind fall into two categories – education and funding.

These may not directly impact on the future of BIFG and its development but might empower and enable more people of the different faith communities to participate in inter faith activities in Bristol.

Education

There is a need, at local level, for more people of all traditions who feel confident of their own teachings, practices, and abilities to share these with people of other faiths. Sometimes rulings within a tradition prevent any but the privileged from having direct

access to sacred texts, let alone being allowed to enter into rigorous discussion about them. At local level where people of different faiths would value inter faith dialogue, on particular matters, such dialogues are hampered or constrained because of limited knowledge of the respective parties. Meanwhile local leaders are often hard-pressed to attend inter faith meetings because their primary task is, understandably, to nurture their own congregations. *Are there key teachings and traditions that can facilitate inter faith understanding and co-operation? It would be helpful if our national faith bodies/leaders, could liaise with local leaders and seek out those teachings and traditions which encourage friendship, mutual respect and mutual learning across faith boundaries.*

The Network's booklet on 'Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths' is invaluable and must itself be based on teachings from within the traditions. However they are not listed. *These teachings and traditions, when identified and promoted, might encourage local leaders and local members to engage in, or even initiate, inter faith work.*

Another way in which national faith bodies, together with local leaders, might encourage local members in inter faith work is with certain *controversial issues*. These are realities which people of faith might have to deal with. Too often the general public first hear of these things by way of banner headlines in tabloid newspapers. People of faith can feel undermined and misrepresented and might find guidance helpful. *One is the matter of mission and conversion, others are controversies around marriage and family relationships.*

Could national bodies engage in in-depth and sensitive study, or commission such research, so that there is better understanding of the issues involved. What are the real, religious teachings on these matters? Also what present day insights and needs, in our multi faith and multi-ethnic society, could be beneficially

discussed at national and local level? Authoritative teachings, wisdom and insight are key components of inter faith work at all levels. Local members could draw on this when they are engaged in dialogue with fellow practitioners and members of other faith traditions. It would help them when challenged by their detractors.

Education and Funding

There are all too few faith, and inter faith, practitioners available at present to do such things as visiting schools and hospitals, attending advisory meetings, for such as the police, medical and social services, where knowledge of the needs of different faith people can be very beneficial in building a cohesive society based on mutual respect. *Could national bodies enter into discussion with national and local government, and other interested groups, to obtain funding for more adult education in things religious?*

Too often, tensions that arise are the result of ignorance and unintended insensitivity. At local level, a specific need might be recognised but it may take a national body to gain access to those in the civil / political arenas who are the 'shakers and movers' that can help to bring about change. Thus, for example – *Could national bodies help to achieve negotiated agreements on secondment and paid leave to enable people of different faiths to attend such things as SACRE meetings and local government consultations?* Too often, it is simply not possible for people to participate because of practical reasons. Several BIFG members have attended local SACRE meetings. The new agreed syllabus for RE for our area is excellent so, in future, there should be more young people well-equipped to engage in faith and inter faith activity. This we celebrate but – *could national faith bodies alert government to the very real need for more teachers of religion in schools so that this new syllabus can be successfully delivered?*

In some faith communities there is an urgent need for more English-speaking religious

leaders at local level. Indeed there is a two-fold need at local level. Older members and women may have limited English, and although the mother tongue remains of great importance, younger members will, increasingly, have English as their first language. Our local inter faith group sometimes finds that some priests and imams are unable to participate fully because of language difficulties. *Could national bodies, in discussion with national and local government and other relevant bodies, work in partnership to support the training of more English - speaking religious leaders?*

Funding for local inter faith bodies

These are not times to be seeking funding but, in fact, quite large sums have been found for short-term or 'one-off' projects. We have learnt from these experiences but in BIFG we have found that a more steady, longer-term approach would be more helpful. Over many years, most of us have participated for the love of it but, nowadays, we have to be realistic about the cost of even basic needs. *We need steady, longer-term funding to develop sustained relationships and on-going inter faith programmes and initiatives. Can the 'national bodies' discuss with government, and other relevant bodies, how this can be done? Inter faith co-operation and understanding is a long-term commitment.* Local groups would hope to contribute their experience too and learn from good practice in financial matters.

Some closing thoughts and observations

Besides all these reflections and suggestions on inter faith concerns, it seems to me that all of us need to keep in mind, at all times, that INTRA faith work is also vital. Our inter faith activities are important but, for many communities, the first requirement is to look to the needs of their own people. Incessant change, often at a very fast pace and precipitated by events beyond our control, can be difficult to manage in our everyday lives. The fundamental building blocks of society and culture, and the encouragement

to live a life of integrity, honesty, compassion and service, are already central concerns in each faith community. This is the primary need and focus but that can, and often does, include the realisation that we are here to learn from each other and co-operate in honouring and cherishing God's creation and manifestation in all its glorious variety.

All of us, national bodies, local leaders, everyone who is a member or attender of a faith community, or inter faith organisation, need to be confident that the religions and faiths of the world have something special to offer in all creative and positive human endeavours. Many of us have learnt patience and forbearance and that worthwhile things require effort and long-term involvement. This is a journey of love and hope, in the pursuit of wisdom and understanding, despite difficulties and disappointments along the way.

It seems that our national bodies, and we at local level, need to work together to convince government, secular society at large, and even investigative journalists and evolutionary biologists, that there is something intrinsically valuable in religious faith and action- most of us are not mad or bad!

Workshop 3

Increasing involvement of young people in inter faith engagement

How are national faith communities helping encourage their local members to draw more young people into work promoting inter faith understanding and cooperation?

Facilitator: Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Glasgow Sikh community, Scottish Inter Faith Council, Co-Chair, Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network

Presenters: Stephen Shashoua, Director, Three Faiths Forum

Imam Qari Asim, Leeds Makkah Masjid, British Muslim Forum and Chair, Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) Youth Committee.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar welcomed everyone and introduced herself and the two speakers Stephen Shashoua, and Imam Qari Asim.

Stephen Shashoua described briefly the work of the Three Faiths Forum (3FF). He explained that it delivered programmes that reached 10,000 schoolchildren per year in and around London. He noted that people sometimes say that young people are ‘the future’. He contested this strongly. Calling them ‘the future’ disregarded their presence *now* in dialogue and engagement. Also, young people were too often talked *to* – not *with*. Any programme that was developed for young people should involve them from the outset.

Mr Shashoua said that it was important to incentivise programmes for young people: developing their skills, and offering them a fun creative outlet. For example, 3FF worked with traditional Muslim girls’ schools on a ‘faith and fashion’ programme. It was important to be explicit about what was offered to young people: that the activities were good for their CV and good for them now.

Often young people were used as publicity because they looked good in brochures. They were not, though, usually given a seat at the table. This meant that they became, in effect, the ‘other.’ Mr Shashoua emphasised the need

to adapt to meet young people’s needs and wants. They had a right to take ownership in their own communities and to have a voice. By explicit and targeted work within communities young people can be engaged with, and drawn into, inter faith work.

Imam Qari Asim described a study that had been carried out by the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB). This had asked young British Muslims how mosques could better engage with them. Around three quarters of young Muslims interviewed had felt that their mosques should take part in more inter faith activities, second only to organising more recreational activities. This had led mosques and national Muslim organisations to reassess how much young Muslims cared about this issue. As a result, many changes had been implemented in mosques in cities such as Newcastle, Leeds and Nottingham to engage young people better.

Imam Asim emphasised that young British Muslims had complex, multifaceted identities. Interaction with other young people gave them an ability to explain these to them. If this was organised by older people it felt too ‘top-down’. Young people wanted to explore issues common to their age group.

Mosques should provide more educational activities about Islam and also about the faiths of others in order to help young Muslims understand other faiths better. Mosques were trying to address these concerns. Organisations like MINAB and the British Muslim Forum had organised spiritual retreats for young people, not just focusing on Islam but involving inter faith dialogue too. There had also been inter faith cricket and football matches organised around the UK.

The following points were made in the subsequent discussion:

- Inter faith work with and by young people should link to RE and RE teachers in schools.
- If the inter faith agenda were to be set by people under the age of 25 rather than those over 55 it would be more action based. It would also have greater recognition of, and acceptance of, more complex communities as younger people have many more parts to their identity than previous generations.
- Young British Muslims feel a sense of pressure in today's society. They often feel that they have to answer for the actions of a few and as a result feel less secure and comfortable talking about themselves in public. Young people from other faith communities, such as Sikhs and Hindus, have gone through this as well.
- Inter faith work with young people in future should be concentrated on collective action, authentic honest discussion, tackling controversial issues head on, and on creating safe spaces for them in the urban environment.
- Young people prefer activity based inter faith engagement. In a football match you have to achieve a particular goal and that gets young people working together and talking about society in general. It is the activity that can lead to the dialogue.
- The media focus on Islam makes it more difficult for young people of non-Abrahamic faiths to have their voices heard. While the Abrahamic faiths often have a high profile in working with young people, it is important to seek ways to engage with young people of all faiths.
- It is difficult to get to know someone if you stay in your 'comfort zone'.
- It can be misleading and constraining to involve young people on the basis that they are 'representing' their faith. In such an approach, the breadth of young people's identity gets lost.
- When young people (14–15) came to a local SACRE and were asked about their religion they all said 'My parents are...' rather than 'I am...'. This demonstrates their desire not to be defined in terms of one dimension of their own identity – even if this is a very important one.
- Most young people are not confident in speaking about their own religion, let alone about the faith of others. Even if young people have taken GCSE RE, much of the content of this may be forgotten in a few years. At the Young Jains convention in 2010 university graduates attended a workshop on 'Sin and Suffering' in other religions, but they needed a background briefing on the topic before they could engage properly.
- Forcing young people to talk about their faith can be counterproductive. Often only the adults who are present take something of value away from this. Young people do not usually have the theological 'know how' about their own religions to do so. They are themselves first and their religious identity is one part of this. It is important to speak with them in a language that they understand and in a space that they understand. This requires a significant investment of time and effort.

- Many local authorities have a carefully structured youth SACRE or a Youth Council which works on inter faith dialogue. It is worth people finding out what is going on in a local area because inter faith groups cannot pick up on everything that is happening.
- Young people need a space in which to engage and to be able to ask questions openly. But there are many problems over resourcing this, including in the HE setting.
- Multi faith chaplaincies, as well as multi-faith prayer rooms, are good spaces for inter faith engagement. Chaplains are also an excellent source of information and advice.
- During retreats organised by the Scottish Inter Faith Council, young people go away for a weekend and have a goal to achieve by the end of their time together, for example, planning an event for young people. The safe space and the goal-focused nature of the retreat allows them to have deep discussions on their own terms.
- The Scottish Inter Faith Council Youth Steering Committee and the European Inter Faith Youth Network have examined the scriptural and theological basis of attitudes to climate change. Environmental sustainability is one of the eight Millennium development goals. The global Religions for Peace Youth Network led an 'Arms Down' campaign which gathered 18 million signatures on a petition to the UN. This allowed them to build up a world-wide network of people who have been drawn into inter faith engagement.

Workshop 4

‘Near Neighbours’ and the inter faith work of the Church of England

The Government has provided funding to the Church Urban Fund for a major Church of England project called “Near Neighbours” which has an important inter faith dimension. What does the project involve and where does it fit into the overall inter faith work of the Church of England?

Facilitator: Dorab Mistry, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Presenter: The Revd Dr Toby Howarth, National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser for the Church of England

Dorab Mistry welcomed participants to the workshop and they each introduced themselves.

The Revd Dr Toby Howarth provided a hand-out with some key statistics which is attached at the end of this workshop. He began with a brief overview of the Church of England, explaining that it has a particular historic role, with a wide reach through parishes across England and with 43 dioceses in England and in Europe.

Dr Howarth noted that his previous role had been as Inter Faith Adviser for the Diocese of Birmingham. The Revd Dr Roger Hooker had been appointed in the 1980s as the Diocese of Birmingham’s first Inter Faith Adviser, originally paid by the Church Missionary Society and then by the Diocese. At that time it was likely that any Diocesan Inter Faith Adviser would also be serving as a parish priest. Dr Hooker had died in 1999 and Toby Howarth had then become a full time Inter Faith Adviser for Birmingham in succession to him.

The Church of England had always been involved in work to promote good inter faith relations, particularly at local level. It was important to acknowledge the crucial local level. People working at this local level needed expertise and resources. Formerly, those who had been involved in mission work

overseas were considered to be the ‘experts’ because, for example, they spoke Urdu and therefore could facilitate the use of a church hall by Muslims. But the Church of England had begun to realise as time went by that as the newer faith communities became settled in the UK, there was a need for home-grown resources. Those involved in inter faith work on behalf of the Churches began to look, for example, at how to read the Bible in multi faith contexts. Biblical scholars had been asked to write resources on how to read the Old Testament in multi faith contexts. The Anglican Communion Office, Church House and Lambeth Palace had all been involved in producing inter faith resources, such as the Anglican Communion’s booklet *Generous Love*.

Under the leadership of Dr Howarth’s predecessor, Canon Guy Wilkinson, the local inter faith work of the Church of England had coalesced into its Presence and Engagement project. The idea behind this was to make the Church’s inter faith work more mainstream – to resource the whole Church in its core mission, particularly those local churches in new multi faith environments which were looking to the Church nationally for resources to help them.

Part of the Presence and Engagement project involved listening to local churches and encouraging them to become confident,

humble disciples of Jesus. The more churches became confident in themselves and their own Christian identity, the more they became capable of reaching out to others. Part of the project also involved a mapping exercise using data from the 2001 Census. Four centres were involved in this work of helping with religious literacy and building the confidence of local churches: the Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre in Birmingham; the Bradford Centre for Dialogue and Diversity; the St Philip's Centre in Leicester; and the Contextual Theology Centre in East London.

In 2010 the Church of England had applied for funding from the new Coalition Government for a project called 'Near Neighbours' and was given a grant of £5million by the Department for Communities and Local Government across a three year period. This new project is being run by the Church Urban Fund (CUF) and the money delivered through CUF across the four areas already served by the Presence and Engagement centres: the north of England (Bradford, Burnley and Oldham); Leicester; areas of East London; and areas of Birmingham, all of them diverse multi-faith areas. The project would provide seed money (i) to bring people together at the grassroots to get to know one another and become friends, leading them (ii) to come together to carry out initiatives for the local community to combat social injustice and deprivation. It was important to remember that inter faith work did not exist in a vacuum but in particular local contexts.

There were three levels to the Near Neighbours project. Firstly, grants between £250 and £5,000 were being made available to grassroots groups, both multi faith and Christian ecumenical. These grants were for small projects, such as setting up an allotment programme. The money could also be used to help, for example, a church and a mosque which wanted to work together in building a relationship between their communities. It was envisaged that there would be a very quick turnaround on funding applications and the aim was that money should be

released to a group within two weeks of an application being received. The grant making process would be facilitated by coordinators in each of the four centres. The idea was to encourage and enhance current projects and also to develop new ways of working together.

Secondly, the Near Neighbours project would be working with four existing bilateral inter faith organisations: the Christian Muslim Forum, the Council of Christians and Jews, the Hindu Christian Forum and The Feast. These organisations would be using their national resources to help local communities. Dr Howarth explained that The Feast was an organisation based in Birmingham and working with secondary school age young people to build relationships between young Christians and Muslims. They took part in activities such as a weekend away during which they learnt to kayak and then spent the evening round a log fire discussing in a safe space what it meant for them to be people of God. A group from Beirut had now set up a meeting in Istanbul with staff from The Feast to learn from their work.

Thirdly, the Near Neighbours project would be working with the Nehemiah Foundation, an organisation which trains and supports people and organisations committed to transforming and improving their local communities. The facilitators from the Foundation would be paid an annual stipend of £20,000. Their role was to ensure that the various one-off projects were joined up and kept going. They would be living in local areas and listening to the needs of the local people. They would not be prescribing the work to be done but would be there to facilitate it.

The Near Neighbours project represented a new way of working – not least for Government in funding through a faith community in this way. The Church of England saw itself as a critical friend of Government. It had its own ethos and operated on its own terms, rather than on the Government's, and used its own terminology

– such as ‘presence and engagement’ rather than ‘community cohesion’.

The Church of England would be accountable for the way in which the money was spent and the New Economics Foundation would be establishing benchmarking research in the four localities so that they could measure the impact. Although the money was being channeled by the Government through one faith community, at the point of delivery the recipients would be multi faith. If the Near Neighbours project was a success then other organisations could ask the Government for funding to do similar work on the basis of their own ethos.

There then followed a question and answer session in which Dr Howarth responded to a number of queries on the Near Neighbours project:

Q: When will the funding be available?

A: The funding will be spent from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014.

Q: Are the four chosen areas just pilots or are they the only places under consideration?

A: It is hoped that the four chosen areas will turn out to be pilots and that in due course the project will be rolled out more widely. When the proposal was discussed at the Church of England’s General Synod concerns were expressed on behalf of some geographical areas that they had not been included. But £5 million divided between four areas across three years is not actually a great deal of money overall.

Q: Is there a danger of trying to require other faiths and denominations to fit the mould of the Church of England? What underlying vision of the common good is informing the project?

A: The project is upfront about being a Church of England one. Other

communities and denominations can choose to launch similar schemes.

Q: Some, in particular Jewish and Muslim communities, would see it as inappropriate for state money to be used for processes during which there is interpreting of sacred scripture. There are, for example, *Shari’a* sensitivities. Scriptural Reasoning has drafted some guidelines on the study of Abrahamic texts which bear on this. More generally it is open to question whether the Muslim community would view Government funding as *halal* or not. Would the Church of England be open to conversation about this?

A: A wider question is whether the money is being used for mission purposes. This is a largely an ethical issue. The Government’s funding is being used to work for the common good, but communities can choose instead to raise their own money. Certainly a conversation could be held on these issues.

Q: Is it the case that the Church Urban Fund will be setting up a Faiths Advisory Panel to listen to the voices of other faith communities? It is very important for their views to be heard.

A: Yes. There is a multi faith advisory group and there is certainly no desire to offend other communities.

Q: Palestinian Christians in the West Bank have felt betrayed by Western Christians as there has been no support for them. Why would Lambeth Palace not discuss this?

A: The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Westminster would be co-chairing a conference the following week about the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

Q: Will the ‘nitty gritty’ be addressed in the course of this work? It is often avoided in dialogue.

A: Yes, it will. Indeed the project arose from a Christian way of looking at society, from the 'nitty gritty'.

Q: Given the rapid turnaround on the grant funding, will support be available if there are problems regarding the ethos of projects?

A: Support will be provided by the bilateral organisations, such as the Hindu Christian Forum and the Christian Muslim Forum.

Q: Do the bilateral organisations have the training and skills to provide this support?

A: The facilitators and supporters will not have all the answers but they will know who to ask. For instance, the Christian Muslim Forum will be able to put a group in touch with a Muslim leader to help them. Also, the Presence and Engagement centres all have access to key people and expertise in their areas and can step in to help at any time.

Q: Will the project help to introduce young people to inter faith dialogue and activity?

A: Yes. Some funding is being given to the Feast, which works solely with young people, to produce resources and ideas such as weekend activities for working with young people, and guidance on such issues as child protection.

Q: Should applications be made to the individual bilateral inter faith organisation or to the Church Urban Fund?

A: The Church Urban Fund already has an infrastructure in place and will be distributing the grants. It would initially be best to approach local faith leaders and the local Presence and Engagement centre which could then help in preparing the application to be sent to the Church Urban Fund.

Q: Is there a website available with information on the project?

A: Yes – to be found at www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours.

Q: When the Community Development Foundation was responsible for distributing the Faiths in Action funding, a breakdown was produced showing to whom the funding had been given. Will the Church Urban Fund be doing the same?

A: Yes.

Q: Will funding be available for work more widely in Europe?

A: The project is directed at helping local communities in England.

In the course of general discussion, the following comments were also offered:

- The Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies has carried out some research on relations between Hindus and Christians. This involved listening to people on the ground and finding out Hindus' and Christians' perceptions of one another. It has taken several years to complete this. There is due to be a Hindu-Christian meeting shortly to discuss the Near Neighbours project. The research report, *Bridges and Barriers to Hindu Christian Relations*, showed where the real needs lie and pointers from it are being used to establish possible projects for Near Neighbours funding. This research is an excellent example of helpful Government funding and of academic research leading to a powerful conversation.
- The Government has not been criticised as much as might have been anticipated over its funding of the Near Neighbours project. Rather than having tick boxes and targets and strategies, the current Government is pragmatic and is

supporting the work already being done by faith communities. The Government has taken a risk in providing the funding. The project appealed to it because the Church Urban Fund and the Church of England are institutions with an infrastructure already in place which the Government could empower to do more. The main downside to the project is that it is currently only taking place in four areas. It would have been good to spread it throughout the UK but unfortunately that was not financially possible. The Government might invest more in the project in three years' time when its impact is known. Measuring the impact of the project also made it attractive to Government.

- The New Economics Foundation, which will be measuring the impact of the project, is not a pushover organisation and is in general critical of the 'Big Society'. The impact of the project will be hard to measure and could be affected to some degree by situations overseas.
- A certain level of pragmatism is needed on the part of people of faith regarding these policy developments. It will be important not to lose the potential richness of faith-sharing and witness involved in this project.
- It would be good to build a relationship between the Near Neighbours' small grants programme and each area's local Community Foundation. The Community Foundations exist to match philanthropists with those seeking funding and the two grant programmes could learn from one another.
- One goes to a room to listen to God. Scriptural study should not be conducted with Government funding.
- There has been a great deal of interest in the Near Neighbours project in the Leicester area and many applications for

funding have been received by the St Philip's Centre. These include, for example, a project helping two Muslim women (whose project's other funding has been cut) to bring together isolated women who have suffered from domestic violence; and a project whereby a local vicar will go into schools to help children from different faith backgrounds work together. The local authority in Leicester has asked to meet with the St Philip's Centre in order to try to co-operate with it on this kind of work because the Near Neighbours project has more grant money to distribute locally for these kinds of work than does the authority itself. Another local authority has some 'Big Society' funding and wants to add to it. The St Philip's Centre would be working closely with the Leicester Council of Faiths. The Church Urban Fund plans to accept applications from late August and coordinators are currently being inducted. There is both risk and freedom attached to the funding but the project is a new and exciting one and presented a great opportunity.

- A church and a mosque which are situated opposite each other, but have not so far connected theologically, have got together to put in a joint bid to set up a youth club. As a result, interesting conversations have emerged about what could be done together – and also what could not. The relationship has moved beyond being about difference and now focuses on what both want to do to help the young people.

Annex to Note of Workshop 4

Notes circulated by the The Revd Dr Toby Howarth, National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser for the Church of England

1. The Inter Faith work of the Church of England
 - a. Parishes, schools and chaplaincies. Out

of some 16,000 parishes in 43 dioceses, 900 in 35 dioceses where 10% of their population is of Faith communities other than Christian and 600 where 10% are from any one or 25% from any combination of Faith communities. 4,700 C of E schools. Nearly 20,000 clergy and 1,600 chaplains.

iii. Nehemiah Foundation

e. A new way of working with government

b. Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers

c. National Support

2. “Presence and Engagement”
(www.presenceandengagement.org.uk)

a. Complementary to the church’s inter faith work: resources for parishes

b. 2001 Census mapping, listening exercises and task group

c. Theological, training and support resources

d. The four regional ‘Presence and Engagement’ Centres in Bradford, Leicester, Birmingham and London

3. “Near Neighbours” (www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours)

a. Visions and ethos

b. Implementation and structure: administered by the Church Urban Fund, ecumenical and multi faith at the point of delivery

c. Four Areas: building on the work of the four P&E Centres

d. Three levels of work

i. Small grants

ii. Bilateral and national resource agencies (Christian Muslim Forum, Hindu Christian Forum, Council of Christians and Jews, ‘The Feast’;)

Workshop 5

Special Days and Weeks

How are national and local faith communities using opportunities such as Inter Faith Week, Mitzvah Day, Sewa Day, One World Week and the Big Lunch to widen the circle of inter faith engagement and cooperation?

Facilitator: Edwin Graham, Baha’i community and Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum

Presenters: Dr Narayan Rao, Chair, Hindu Council (UK) and member, Sandwell Multi-Faith Network

Laura Marks, Founder and Chair, Mitzvah Day

Edwin Graham welcomed all those present, and asked everyone to introduce themselves. He then invited Laura Marks, founder and Chair of Mitzvah Day, to make her presentation.

Laura Marks began by showing a short film about Mitzvah Day which introduced the Day and some of the many projects which had taken place since it began. It also looked forward to Mitzvah Day 2011. The video can be watched here:
<http://www.mitzvahday.org.uk/all-about-us/mitzvah-day-video.html>.

Ms Marks explained that Mitzvah Day ran projects around three strands: poverty, the environment and acts of loving kindness (*gemilut hasadim*). It had begun to involve people from other faiths beyond the Jewish community, and would be trying to focus more on this. It helped build communities locally, so it was important that other faith members joined in too.

The Day was particularly helpful because, although it was only a single day, it helped create habits and relationships which were longer lasting. The Day got people to think about, and be enthusiastic about, social action. This then stayed on people’s agenda throughout the year, and there were a number of examples of Mitzvah Day projects which had gone on to seed longer-term projects.

‘Mitzvah’ also means ‘command’ as well as ‘good deed’. All of our faiths command us to be involved in social action or to do good deeds, it is not simply ‘a good idea’. Mitzvah Day is ‘positively in-your-face Jewish’. This is why a name was chosen that is easily identifiable as Jewish. It sends a strong message, as does Sewa Day, that it is faith which commands us to do this.

Edwin Graham thanked Laura Marks for her presentation, and asked Dr Narayan Rao to give his presentation.

Dr Narayan Rao opened by noting that the theme of ‘special Days and Weeks’ could be extended to include religious festivals which, alongside other special Days and Weeks, could provide a helpful focus for inter faith work.

Speaking from a local context, Dr Rao noted that Inter Faith Week had provided opportunities to engage with local authorities. It had also provided an opportunity for local schools to be taken to the Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple in Tivendale, and to engage with members of that community and others from the Hindu Council (UK). The school children had had opportunities to make a postcard on the theme of ‘all faiths’ and ‘inter faith’. Some of the children had come up with the idea of light, which is important in different ways for members of all faiths. All faith traditions had festivals traditionally associated with light or at which light plays a significant celebratory

role (such as Christmas, Diwali, Hanukah and Vaisakhi). One of the drawings from the day was used by the Temple as the main image on greeting cards which they produced and sent to various friends of the Temple. The Temple also runs a 'festival of lights', which is open to people of all backgrounds, but involves children from different faiths walking with candles and laying them together to symbolise world peace. Another Temple activity was an annual Canal Walk, beginning with prayers from faith leaders representing all the major faith traditions and ending with a health check-up and advice on healthy food.

Dr Rao explained that Sewa Day has similar aims to Mitzvah Day, but is led by the Hindu Community. 'Sewa' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'Service'. Sewa Day offered people a chance to give back to the local communities and make a difference. Each event organised was based on one of these guiding principles:

- To relieve hardship and poverty
- To bring a little joy where none exists
- To help the environment.

In the previous year, people from many faiths in Birmingham had marked the Day by helping to clear an area in Acorn Forest.

Dr Rao noted that special Days and Weeks enabled local and national activists to take part together, and this helped to widen the circle of inter faith participation and provide some publicity and legitimacy for the work. Relationships were built when people came together as participants rather than as guests. These special Days and Weeks provided a focus for, and helped to raise the profile of, work that was going on in local communities.

Asked how special Days and Weeks might be used to help broaden participation in inter faith activity; and how one got schools involved when their curricula were so full, Dr Rao said that building long-term relationships

with head teachers and demonstrating how much children enjoy their experiences of visiting places of worship were key to success. He also noted that Inter Faith Week had helped to draw in many organisations and groups, such as businesses and public service organisations, which would never normally think of becoming involved in inter faith work.

Laura Marks suggested that there were two different models for organising inter faith events: those events where all faiths worked together to lead and run the event jointly; and those where one faith community took the lead and ran the event, but invited others to become involved, either as guests or participants. It could be logistically difficult to run the first kind of event owing to the full schedules of many faith leaders, both locally and at more senior levels. Mitzvah Day was 'Jewish-led', but others were also invited to take part in it, especially as the underlying value of social action was shared by people of many faiths. Many local churches invited other members of the community to take part in harvest festivals for similar reasons. Although that festival is a Christian one, the principle of gathering food to give to those in need was one that could be shared by people of many faiths. In response to a question as to whether there was a danger that a single faith-led day could be used or viewed as being part of a proselytising exercise, she said that she attended many Christian-led events, and had never yet felt as if anyone was trying to convert her.

Dr Narayan Rao said that Sandwell Multi-Faith Network used to run a music festival event, as music is something all faiths have in common. Now that the Multi-Faith Network has a smaller operating budget, many of the faith groups in the area had begun to host their own music-based inter faith events. This illustrated the viability of single faith-led inter faith events.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- Special Days and Weeks remind us what we should be doing every day. We begin from a point of faith and out of that comes commitment and involvement.
- When one faith group hosts an event, but invites others in, this can be a great way for people to get to know and learn about other faiths. Mitzvah Day is very inspiring. The principle of “Let’s have inter faith, but come to my house and do it” seemed very appealing and is a helpful image.
- There are imperatives in all of our faith traditions to give and serve. Special Days and Weeks give us an excuse to open our doors and to receive visitors, and to go out and serve our communities together.
- Some faiths have a missionary dimension which may include elements of both putting faith into practice and of sharing that faith with others. Where members of these faiths are involved in ‘good deed’ projects, it is important that it is clear that this is not about proselytism but, rather, comes from an impulse for selfless service arising from teachings in the faith in question. Good works – without strings attached – are intrinsic to many faiths.
- People who are used to working in inter faith contexts generally understand proselytising in such contexts as a ‘no-go’ area.
- Engagement can be more effective when all parties join together in the planning. However, the people involved often have limited time available, especially as many are volunteers who are also employed full time and involved in their own faith community in addition to their involvement in inter faith activity.
- The timing of Mitzvah Day at the start of Inter Faith Week was perfect, and it gave an obvious lead-in for people of other faiths to join in a Jewish-led day.
- Holocaust Memorial Day has been an important ‘special Day’ in Bedford. However, it can be hard to participate in all of the many special Days and Weeks as volunteer time is limited.
- There are so many different special Days and Weeks now – not all inter faith focused – that it can be difficult to engage with all of them. However, those which draw many groups together are ideal because they help to share the organisational load.
- Inter faith-led Days and Weeks can be helpful too, as we can join together and make it happen. There are times when it is helpful for us to come together in this way, and where neutral space can be necessary.
- Faith-based volunteering is not just about volunteering *per se* but *about putting faith into practice*. We should not permit these Days to be co-opted such that they cease to be ‘faith-based’ under the guise of widening participation: the cause of our involvement, for all of us, is faith.
- At Christmas, many Jews also help out in the community and do good deeds. Because many businesses and charities are closed at Christmas, but Jews place no special significance on the holiday, it gives them an opportunity and time to do something positive.
- Inter Faith Week events focus both on service and on philosophical, dialogical elements of inter faith relations.
- Service-based projects enable more people to participate meaningfully.
- It is important to ask what Inter Faith Week is for: is it a Week for people who do inter faith work? Or is it for widening participation in inter faith activity and raising awareness?

- It is common to see the same faces at every inter faith event and it is important to reach out to new people. It would be helpful if people went out into shopping malls and ran exhibitions to show what faith communities do for the benefit of society and local communities. The public know that people of faith worship, but not always of the good works they do.
- Displays were erected in the museum in Leeds for Inter Faith Week, and school pupils from rural areas were brought in to view these as part of delivering their RE curriculum. In addition to schoolchildren, around 600 members of the public attended.
- A similar project took place in Leicester, in High Cross Shopping Centre. Participants were not allowed by the Centre to approach people directly, but many members of the public approached them with questions about what faith groups do, and they were permitted to respond. The shopping centre helped to fund this project.
- Bedford Council of Faiths runs a 'faith tour' for schools. It is fully booked, and demands a lot of resources, but the organisers are hoping to offer the tour more frequently.

Workshop 6

Patterns of consultation and engagement

An opportunity to discuss some of the varied ways in which faith communities engage with one another and with external bodies such as Government at national and local level. What are the patterns of engagement, including those with religious groups beyond the nine faith traditions formally linked by the Inter Faith Network for the UK? How does context shape the involvement in, and nature, of dialogue?

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

Opening reflections from: Alistair Beattie, Chief Executive, Faithnetsouthwest

Sister Isabel Smyth OBE, Convener, Scottish Inter Faith Council

Dr Harriet Crabtree welcomed participants to the workshop. It would be exploring two strands of patterns of consultation and engagement: the way in which local authorities and other public bodies engaged with religious groups (where there was no standard pattern for this); and the way in which those faith communities in direct membership of the Inter Faith Network for the UK engaged with other religious groups, of which there was a large variety, including ancient religious traditions and new religious movements (NRMs), as well as groups which were self-defined in a way which was contested by the community of which they saw themselves a part. She invited Alistair Beattie and Sister Isabel Smyth to offer their opening presentations.

Alistair Beattie said that he was the Chief Executive of Faithnetsouthwest, which had now taken over functions previously undertaken by the South West Council of Faiths. This inter faith body for the South West region had helped in the setting up of local inter faith groups and in the promotion of multi-faith engagement. It had two forms of membership:

- a) Full membership: faith fora and inter faith groups with a strategic role in promoting the representation of faith communities

and organisations to public bodies and appropriate networks and partnerships (which should cover a local authority area, or at least a substantial part of one), and the nine main nationally recognised faith groups, ie Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian.

- b) Associate membership: public bodies, voluntary and community organisations and faith groups not included in the nine nationally recognised faith groups were eligible to be non-voting members, (subject to their agreeing the code of the Inter Faith Network which has been adopted by Faithnetsouthwest). The Board of Faithnetsouthwest decides whether to give full membership to any faith community or organisation applying for this.

Faithnetsouthwest did not seek to be prescriptive about the range of engagement in local inter faith groups in its region, and in some cases they covered both 'faith' and 'non religious belief'. Some might restrict their involvement to religious groups with a significant presence in the particular area they covered. Faithnetsouthwest had also worked with the Wrekin Trust and the Foundation for Holistic Spirituality, which

included a variety of 'New Age' and New Religious Movement (NRM) groups among their members as well as people who were on a spiritual journey but were not affiliated to a particular religious tradition or institution. They might, for example, be lapsed members of a particular tradition who now had a different self-understanding.

He said that Faithnetsouthwest had found very helpful IFN's Code of Conduct on building good relations with people of different faiths and beliefs. There were, of course, varying views within individual faith communities. Sometimes, in the face of a complex pattern of religious diversity and the different perspectives on this, a way had to be found to get round an impasse over patterns of membership through having a variety of patterns of engagement. He mentioned that Pagan groups were active in South Gloucestershire, Devon and elsewhere in the South West. One of the reasons why the South West Council of Faiths had ground to a halt was because some people from the Christian Churches were not willing to sit round a table with Pagans. Faithnetsouthwest had adopted a more inclusive approach.

Sister Isabel Smyth said that the Scottish Inter Faith Council (SIFC) had been set up in 1995. One of the reasons for the formation of SIFC was the reconvening of a Scottish Parliament. At that stage, SIFC had direct membership from the Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Brahma Kumari communities. It did not have representatives of the Jain and Zoroastrian communities as these did not have a significant number of members in Scotland. SIFC had encouraged the engagement of faith groups with the Scottish Government and other public bodies. However, the Government was now engaging with faith groups directly rather than through an inter faith organisation. It had set up a Faith Liaison Advisory Group bringing together representatives of those communities which had a Parliamentary Officer but this was likely to be widened to other faith communities in the future.

There had been difficulties in securing participation and engagement in the work of SIFC and problems had been experienced over its pattern of membership. Soon after it came into being, the Pagan Federation had applied for membership. It had eventually been agreed to admit them as observers, with a view to a decision being reached within two years on the issue of membership, about which there had been disagreement. However, it was ten years before the issue was resolved, with a decision that the Pagan Federation should *not* become a member body. Some major faith groupings within SIFC had said that if the Pagan Federation were to become full members, then they would withdraw from its work. There were arguments about whether the Pagan Federation really fell into the same category as other faith groups already within membership of SIFC, and how far its membership application was in the interests of inter faith dialogue and how far in pursuit of 'recognition' for the Pagan tradition. The Pagan Federation had been mentioned in a publication of SIFC, which had been used as evidence by the Federation that it was within the agreed circle of dialogue. The Catholic Church in Scotland was one of the bodies which had made it clear that it would withdraw if the Pagan Federation was admitted to full membership. In the Vatican, there was a Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Relations and a separate body which dealt with new religious movements, because these relationships were not seen as being on the same basis, and so it was thought that conversations should take place within different frameworks.

Under the recent restructuring which is taking place, SIFC membership will be restricted to Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh, but there was also a category of 'Associate' membership which will be open to other organisations, including inter faith and educational bodies. There is also a 'Friends of SIFC' open to membership on an individual basis. SIFC had received legal advice that these arrangements were

compatible with equalities legislation. Clearly these new arrangements did not satisfy those who wanted a fully inclusive approach, but without some compromise on this issue, SIFC would not have been able to continue. There might or might not be modifications to these arrangements in future years.

Dr Harriet Crabtree thanked Alistair Beattie and Sister Isabel Smyth for their presentations. They offered an insight into how patterns of engagement were being addressed in two different contexts. The presentations illustrated well some of the challenges in reaching decisions about patterns of membership and the importance of factors such as whether a body was being set up for purposes of dialogue or consultation with public bodies. Other factors could be questions to do with the self-definition of particular groups. Within an organisation's constitutional arrangements, there might be different levels of membership or association, but there was, of course, always a risk that these would be criticised on the grounds of establishing 'second class citizens'. What had also emerged strongly from the presentations was the need, where problems of membership arose, to find some basis on which inter faith work could move forward rather than coming to a standstill.

In response to a question, Dr Crabtree said that Humanists, or those who considered themselves to be atheist or spiritual but not religious, were involved in some local inter faith organisations, as were Pagans.

There followed a general discussion in which the following points were made:

- When what is now the Devon Faith and Belief Forum was formed, the pattern of membership (following that established by the Southampton Inter Faith Council with which the Forum's convenor had previously been involved) initially followed that of the Inter Faith Network. A Humanist had then said that Humanists were entitled to membership in terms of equality legislation and that the local authority should ensure that they were part of the range of groups being consulted by it, as they had a part to play within society, and the local County Council had agreed with this argument.
- In the Swansea Inter Faith Group, which was no longer in existence, many of the active members had been from outside the major world faiths. One of those most active in its work had undertaken work on contemporary spirituality and had helped to form a Holistic Spiritual Alliance on the basis of shared values, which had participated in the work of the Swansea group on this basis. A key issue in addressing membership issues was whether membership is for organisations and/or individuals.
- In the early 1970s, in response to the 'Rivers of Blood' speech by Enoch Powell, local Christian clergy had taken an initiative to form an inter faith group in Wolverhampton. The Anglican Bishop of Lichfield had convened a conference to discuss how to shape a cohesive multi-racial society. The initiative taken in response to this had initially developed among Christians, but had then become wider and embraced clergy and people of other faiths as well. There is no reason for us to hate other people – God created the differences between us. We have to love one another. There is no reason to suppose that the qualities which we have are missing from those either of other faiths or from Humanists.
- The central issue is to define the purpose of inter faith activity. It was through learning about other faiths as a result of an interest in theology that the speaker became involved with the work of the East of England Faiths Agency with the aim of promoting interaction between Government and faith communities, for example, through training for the police

and helping hospitals to find chaplains. A polytheistic nature worship pre-dated Christianity and was an ancient spiritual tradition. The speaker, herself a Pagan, had been involved for twenty years in chaplaincy work and had become involved in local inter faith work as well as with EEFA. EEFA opens itself to any faith community which accepts basic human rights. It works at the grass roots, not on the basis of having organisations as members, but making use of a database of individuals and groups who are interested in being involved in its work. Its purposes are to engage with Government, to learn about each other and to contribute to community cohesion. On this basis it sees no reason to maintain an exclusivist approach.

- Within the Quaker tradition, there is a common history, a common testimony and common pursuit of truth and peace. Quakers do not take decisions through voting but seeking consensus. Nonetheless, there can be difficulties in arguments within the Quaker tradition between Christians and non-universalists. The approach of Article 17² of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union is one of equality of status between churches, religious associations or communities and philosophical and non-confessional organisations. The Article requires European institutions to consult 'with these churches and organisations'. So at European level there is a recognition of the need to deal with both religions and non-religious groups. Currently in the Middle East, religious and secular people are struggling together to secure their human rights.
- Inter faith work is about people engaging in dialogue and conversation. There need to be places where this can happen. We

can move together, overcoming our doubts about one another. However, where there are arguments about the admission of a particular group then this can cause years of internal conflict.

- There is not one single 'inter faith' context but many different ones: inter faith dialogue; multi faith consultations; and joint work on projects. It can be an overwhelming burden for an organisation if it is seeking to serve multiple purposes which cannot in practice be carried out by the same organisation. There can be a conflict between those who believe in the need for structures and patterns of organisation on the one hand and others who wish to work in a more informal way – often one which aims to be more inclusive. The key question is how to maximise the good which can be achieved in this situation. There may be different timescales for developing different organisational patterns and there can be times of impasse where nonetheless, dialogue can be maintained while some new way forward emerges. Giving birth to a new approach requires a great deal of trust and energy.
- There is Pagan representation on the SACRE in the Glastonbury area, where there is now a Pilgrimage Reception Centre staffed by members of the mainstream Churches along with Pagans and followers of contemporary spiritualities. The Centre helps pilgrims to Glastonbury to get in touch with those for whom they are seeking.
- The Birmingham Council of Faiths is facilitating different inter faith initiatives in different areas of the city and their character needs to depend on the background of those who are involved. Inter faith work has to be carried forward

² Article 17 of the Treaty reads:

1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations

in the context of seeking to educate people and to deal with expectations. The context is crucial.

- A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (popularly known as the 'Mormons') noted that they had not been accepted by several local faith groups on the basis that local Christians were not ready to work with them. However, there have been shifts in the patterns of participation and in Loughborough, for example, the Council of Faiths has a Druid as its Chair. It is important for everyone to be able to come together to share what is important to them, such as the role of the family.
- The open sharing of different perspectives in this workshop and the degree of open heartedness was very impressive. Clearly it was difficult to be patient, but it was important to stick with difficult issues over membership and engagement. If our belief system is about love and care for all creatures, then a way through will be found. We are now in the context of how things are in 2011, but no doubt changes lie ahead for us.
- As a result of personal contact with Vietnamese and Chinese people in Birmingham, it became clear that they were fearful of involvement because their values and methods of organising did not fit with Western patterns. There is a need to be willing to go to them and other groups like them rather than waiting for them to join our existing organisations which have not been structured in the ways they would do so.
- Leicester Council of Faiths has seen many issues relating to membership arise over the last 25 years, involving Pagans, Ahmadiyyas and others. There has been a willingness to have some groups as observers. But inclusivity is a difficult goal to achieve.
- The impact of international conflicts can affect the context in which we find ourselves.
- The development of personal relationships and trust are crucial in taking forward inter faith work.

Workshop 7

Encouraging inter faith understanding through education

How are faith communities – at national and local level – helping deepen inter faith understanding through supporting development of Religious Education in schools and in other ways?

Facilitator: Professor Brian Gates, Chair, Religious Education Council for England and Wales

Presenters: Guy Hordern MBE, Chairman, Birmingham SACRE

Dr Girdari Lal Bhan, Vice-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)

Professor Brian Gates introduced himself, Guy Hordern and Dr Girdari Lal Bhan and invited everyone to introduce themselves to the group.

Guy Hordern said that religious faith was a very important factor in the life of Birmingham. A faith map had been created that identified over 1000 places of worship in the city, and their number was growing. In this context, good teaching of Religious Education (RE) was vitally important in schools. RE was legally required to be taught according to a syllabus agreed by the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) and Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) on which faith communities were required to be represented. Collective worship was also mandatory. SACREs were made up of representatives drawn from four groups: the Church of England; other Christian denominations and local faith communities; teachers; and representatives of the local authority. Each of these groups had an important contribution to make.

In Birmingham there had been a two year syllabus review, the recommendations of which had at that time yet to be agreed. The key issue to address was how to deepen religious understanding through the work of RE. Mr Hordern emphasised that for a great number of young people RE is the primary source of learning about faiths. It helps build religious literacy.

Dr Girdari Bhan addressed the question of education in general, saying that it was more than the basic learning of facts. The education of the whole person was involved and this was vital to building a cohesive society. RE in the UK used to be a model for the rest of the world, although he thought that it had perhaps recently become over-preoccupied with issues of human rights. Portrayal of religion and RE by the media tends to be unfair, partly because some people still demonstrate intolerance or bigotry over teaching about different faiths.

Dr Bhan emphasised the need to reach a point where people accepted and respected, rather than 'tolerated', those of different religions and beliefs. Was it really the case that people at local level felt comfortable, and interacted, with their neighbour who held a faith/belief different to their own? RE had a crucial part to play, but the full development of good inter faith relations at a national, regional and local level was also required.

The work of NASACRE and its member SACREs was of tremendous importance in many ways, but how school assemblies operated and what was said in them perhaps made a greater impact on the minds of the youth.

The following points were made in the subsequent discussion:

- It is important to demonstrate the relevance of RE to the current questions that affect society, for example the problems of knife and gun crime and the marginalisation of certain religious groups from the cultural mainstream. RE needs to address these current issues.
- The Government's current focus on maths/science to the exclusion of RE is worrying and is beginning to have a negative effect in schools. For example, Warwick University has had to close its highly successful RE teacher training programme, and some schools are no longer following a proper RE syllabus.
- A strong RE department in a Church of England school in Dagenham with a multi-faith intake has played a crucial role with good links to the Christian Union and Islamic Society. RE is a key factor in there being no racism in the school despite local tensions. Before the introduction of the E-Bac, RE was one of the fastest growing subjects in the school.
- During 2010 Bolton Inter Faith Council arranged visits of 14,000 children to places of worship. The feedback on these was overwhelmingly positive, but there needs to be a better working relationship with local schools, although Bolton Young Interfaith Ambassadors already speak at assemblies in some local schools.
- In Northern Ireland (NI) there are no SACREs and RE is still undergoing the transition from 'confessional' RE to 'educational' RE. The process itself of drawing up agreed syllabi is crucial. Some groups feel they have been left out of the process, and it was as a result of this that the NI Inter Faith Forum was created.
- It is crucial to be clear about what RE is *for* in order to present this clearly to wider society.
- There is a high cost to *not* educating children which affects all of society, contributing to high unemployment and family breakdown. There are 2.5 million children on the poverty line and education is needed at all levels.
- With different faith communities in a school (Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh in the case of the contributor's example) the children learn from each other and see how the communities can interact well together. This is an important part of their education.
- A locally agreed syllabus is not a 'cure' for all ignorance about faith issues and there are questions as to whether it accurately reflects the views of minority faith communities.
- The case still needs to be made more effectively for why faith is important. It has a huge amount to contribute to society.
- When working in the public sector it is useful to have discussions which are not just set in a religious framework. For example, a Royal College of Physicians seminar looking at medical care and attitudes at the end of life secured good engagement from both faith community participants and medical staff.
- Young people respond better to RE teaching that focuses on values, such as trustworthiness. It is through this that RE can help address the kind of current issues which had been mentioned earlier.
- A number of people on Hounslow SACRE asked why there were no Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist RE teachers. The thought that if people of these backgrounds were recruited as RE teachers, that could be a helpful step.
- Some head teachers need to be more sensitive to the needs of people of faith

and with schools moving away from local authority control this issue needs revisiting.

- RE teachers are a tremendous resource. However, there are many schools which still do not take RE seriously.
- Some teachers may not have any formal training in different religions and may simply pick up bits and pieces about them in schools. This does not lead to a good level of religious literacy.
- Many children who grow up within a faith community have little or no communication with others. RE gives children an opportunity to mix.
- Faith communities are faced with the challenge of engaging with the modern world and how to share their faith with all ages in a digital era. RE and schools more generally are in the middle of this and are arguably best placed to address the concerns both of faith communities and of parents. While the Prime Minister has said that RE is important, the Government has yet to take action in support of it. What can be done to stop the diminishing of RE's role in schools?
- It would be a good idea to promote inter faith dialogue and engagement directly in schools, as this would allow education about the need for good inter faith relations and how to encourage these.
- Parents in the home need to be the first teachers of faith to their children, so that schools can then successfully promote inter faith understanding.
- RE needs to address the whole of the human person.

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The Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) was founded in 1987 to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground” and to promote good relations between people of different faiths in this country.

IFN links 200 member bodies including: national representative bodies of the Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national, regional, local and other inter faith bodies; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith relations. It works with its member bodies and other agencies to help make the UK a place marked by mutual understanding and respect between people of different religions where all can practise their faith with integrity. It seeks to increase the opportunities for people of all ages to learn more about the importance of good inter faith relations. IFN:

- runs a helpline and publishes resources to help people working to promote good inter faith relations
- links, shares good practice between, and supports with advice and information the growing pattern of inter faith initiatives in the UK at national, regional and local levels
- provides a trusted neutral, non-denominational framework for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern, reflecting on both the distinctive aspects and the common ground of their individual traditions
- in cooperation with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish national inter faith linking bodies and Regional Faith Forums in England, fosters local inter faith co-operation and offers advice on patterns of local inter faith initiatives suitable to a particular local area as well as helpful contacts
- assists member organisations and other agencies, such as local authorities and other public bodies, to help strengthen their inter faith programmes and good practice
- fosters joint working by the faith communities on social issues
- arranges seminars and conferences and carries out research to pursue particular issues in greater depth, such as building good relations on campus, and developing bilateral dialogues

The Inter Faith Network’s way of working is firmly based on the principle that dialogue and cooperation on social action can only prosper if they are rooted in respectful relationships which do not blur or undermine the distinctiveness of different religious traditions. In its work, it proceeds by consensus wherever possible and not making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation.

Further information about the Network can be found on its website: www.interfaith.org.uk or by writing to its office.

Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2011–12

Faith Community Representative Bodies

Baha'i Community of the UK
 BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
 Board of Deputies of British Jews
 British Muslim Forum
 Buddhist Society
 Churches' Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland
 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)
 General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
 Hindu Council (UK)
 Hindu Forum of Britain
 Islamic Cultural Centre
 Jain Samaj Europe
 Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
 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)
 Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
 Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB
 Triratna Buddhist Community
 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
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 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 of Abrahamic Faiths

Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum

Scottish Inter Faith Council
 Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru

East of England Faiths Council
 faithnetsouthwest
 Faiths Forum for the East Midlands
 North East Regional Faiths Network
 Northwest Forum of Faiths
 South East England Faith Forum
 West Midlands Faiths Forum

Alif Aleph UK
 Children of Abraham (Imams and Rabbis Council of the United Kingdom)
 Christian Muslim Forum
 Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
 Coexist Foundation
 Coexistence Trust
 Council of Christians and Jews
 Council of Dharmic Faiths
 East of England Faiths Agency
 Interfaith Action (INTERACT)
 Interfaith Alliance UK
 International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
 International Interfaith Centre
 Joseph Interfaith Foundation
 Lokahi Foundation
 London Society of Jews and Christians
 Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme
 Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
 Religions for Peace (UK)
 Scriptural Reasoning
 Society for Dialogue and Action
 St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
 St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society
 Three Faiths Forum
 Tony Blair Faith Foundation
 United Religions Initiative (UK)
 Westminster Interfaith
 Women's Interfaith Network
 World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group
 Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum
 Barnet Multi-Faith Forum
 Bedford Council of Faiths

Birmingham Council of Faiths	Medway Inter Faith Action Forum
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Forum	Merseyside Council of Faiths
Blackpool Faith Forum	Middlesbrough Council of Faiths
Bolton Interfaith Council	Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society	Milton Keynes Council of Faiths
Bradford District Faiths Forum	Moseley Inter Faith Group
Brent Interfaith	Newcastle Council of Faiths
Brent Multi-Faith Forum	Newham Association of Faiths
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group	Newham Faith Sector Forum
Bristol Inter Faith Group	North Herts Faith Forum
Bristol Multi-Faith Forum	North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council
Buckinghamshire Forum of Faiths	North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths
Building Bridges in Burnley	Inter-faith North/West (Northern Ireland)
Muslim-Christian Forum (Bury)	Northampton Inter Faith Forum
Calderdale Interfaith Council	Norwich InterFaith Link
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group	Nottingham Inter Faith Council
Camden Faith Communities Partnership	Oldham Inter Faith Forum
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action	Oxford Round Table of Religions
Cardiff Interfaith Association	Building Bridges Pendle - Interfaith Community Project
Cheltenham Inter Faith	Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Cleveland and Tees Valley Inter Faith Group	Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum	Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum
Crawley Interfaith Network	Preston Faith Forum
Faiths Together in Croydon	Reading Inter-Faith Group
Cumbria Interfaith Forum	Redbridge Faith Forum
Sharing of Faiths (Dacorum)	Rochdale Multi Faith Partnership
Forum of Faiths for Derby	Rossendale Faith Partnership
Devon Faith and Belief Forum	Rugby Inter Faith Forum
Doncaster Interfaith	Sandwell Multi-Faith Network
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network	Sheffield Inter Faith
Eastbourne Faiths Forum	South London Inter Faith Group
Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum	South Shropshire Interfaith Forum
Exeter Faith and Belief Group	Southampton Council of Faiths
Gateshead Inter Faith Forum	Southwark Multi Faith Forum
Greenwich Multi-Faith Forum	Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Hampshire Interfaith Network	Faiths United (Tameside)
Harrow Inter Faith Council	Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Group
Hastings and District Interfaith Forum	Torbay Interfaith Forum
Hillingdon Inter Faith Network	Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum
Horsham Interfaith Forum	Valleys Faith Forum
Hounslow Friends of Faith	Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum
Huddersfield Inter Faith Council	Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network
Hull and East Riding Interfaith	Warrington Council of Faiths
Inter Faith Isle of Man	Warwick District Faiths Forum
Islington Faiths Forum	Watford Inter Faith Association
Keighley Interfaith Group	Wellingborough Inter Faith Group
Kingston Inter Faith Forum	Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group
Kirklees Faiths Forum	Westminster Faith Exchange
Faiths Together in Lambeth	West Wiltshire Inter Faith Group
Lancashire Forum of Faiths	Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group
Faith in Lancaster	Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum
Learning Together, Living in Harmony (Aylesbury)	Wisbech Interfaith Forum
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship	Wolverhampton Inter Faith and Regeneration Network
Leeds Faiths Forum	Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum
Leicester Council of Faiths	Wycombe Sharing of Faiths
Liverpool Faith Network	York Interfaith Group
Loughborough Council of Faiths	
Luton Council of Faiths	
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Note: List of members as at 04.12

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