

## THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

### MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2.30pm on Monday 26 April 2021

by Zoom

**Co-Moderators:** The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark; and Mr Malcolm Deboo.

**Present:** Dr Desmond Biddulph CBE (Buddhist Society); the Revd Philip Brooks ( United Reformed Church in the UK; Minister David Bruton (Spiritualists' National Union); Imam Irfan Chishti (Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board); Ms Siriol Davies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Together in England); Major Samuel Edgar (Salvation Army UK); Ms Prudence Jones (Pagan Federation); Mr Hassan Joudi (Muslim Council of Britain and FCF Moderator); Dr Karishma Koka (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe); Ms Sabira Lakha (World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League); the Revd Dr Reynaldo Leao-Nato (Methodist Church in Britain); the Revd Jan Nowotnik (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales); Ms Trupti Patel (Hindu Forum of Britain); Ms Tracey Prior (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints); Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala (Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB and FCF Moderator); Dr Natubhai Shah MBE (Jain Network); Mr Vinay Shah (Institute of Jainology and FCF Moderator); Dr Vinaya Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK) and FCF Moderator); Dr Maureen Sier (Interfaith Scotland); Mr Anthony Silkoff (Board of Deputies of British Jews); Professor Dr Paul Weller (Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain); Mr Karl Wightman (National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is); and Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations).

**Apologies:** BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha; Druid Network; Hindu Council (UK); Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK); and Network of Sikh Organisations (UK).

**Moderator apologies:** Mr Mohinder Singh Chana; Mr Neil Pitchford; and Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg.

**In attendance:** Mrs Hannah Cassidy; Dr Harriet Crabtree; and Dr David Hampshire (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

Dr Shanon Shah (Faith for the Climate) [for Agenda Item 3]

#### **FCF ToRs and nature of minutes**

A copy of the Terms of Reference of the Faith Communities Forum of IFN (FCF) is at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/about/governance>.

The minutes of the main sessions of the meeting of the FCF are made available beyond the FCF on the basis agreed by it in May 2017. The minutes follow FCF's agreed style: namely, points made by individuals are noted in the minutes and have the status of views of the individual who is present on behalf of their member organisation; any points agreed by the meeting are clearly identified as such. Comments are unattributed except where

from the Chair or where the Executive Director or another staff member has been asked to give input or to provide a point of information, or in particular contexts where the contributor has explicitly asked that their identity be noted. Within FCF meetings there is a chance for all bodies to contribute. Contributors carry responsibility for the accuracy of their contributions. Views expressed by contributors are not endorsed by IFN.

### **Agenda Item 1: Welcome and apologies**

1. The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark, in the chair, welcomed those present.
2. A period of silence was observed, keeping in mind all those working for inter faith understanding and cooperation particularly in the context of COVID-19 and all suffering from COVID-19, keeping in mind at this time those affected in India.
3. Bishop Clark said that his fellow Co-Moderator, Malcolm Deboo, had asked him to chair the whole meeting, as he was only able to join the meeting by telephone.
4. He explained, for the benefit of new members, that the Faith Communities Forum was a forum for member bodies of IFN in the category of national faith community representative body. It was a forum for discussion of current issues of interest and concern rather than a decision making body. It enabled sharing of views and good practice and networking.
5. Anyone wishing not to be included in screenshots of the meeting should indicate. In keeping with the FCF's decision about the nature of minutes, apart from IFN matters, the relevant section of the minutes would be available to the public (unless the FCF request a closed session). Minutes would follow the usual style.
6. Apologies were noted.

### **INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION**

[Paragraphs 7 and 8]

### **Agenda Item 3: Faiths, the environment and COP26**

*Dr Shanon Shah joined the meeting.*

9. Bishop Clark said that this was a very important topic for faith communities to discuss and to act upon. He drew attention to the information in the Background Note.
10. He explained that in the light of members' interest in hearing more about different faith perspectives, the FCF Agenda had regularly included, prior to the pandemic, a short reflection, relating to an Agenda theme, from a representative of a different faith community member body about its bases for engaging with that theme. This had not, for some while, been included due to the pattern of more frequent and shorter meetings with a strong focus on COVID-19 matters. However, it was planned to include it again more regularly.
11. He invited Minister David Bruton, President of the Spiritualists National Union, to offer a short opening reflection on Spiritualist bases for addressing climate change. A copy of Minister Bruton's reflection is at Annex A to these minutes.

12. Bishop Clark thanked Minister Bruton for his reflection. He noted that a number of those at the present meeting had attended a roundtable at lunchtime that day, which had been hosted by the Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, to discuss COP26. He welcomed Dr Shanon Shah, Director of Faith for the Climate.
13. Dr Shanon Shah thanked IFN for inviting him to speak to the meeting. He noted that Faith for the Climate's founder, Canon Giles Goddard, had attended the roundtable. Dr Shah offered the following points. A copy of his PowerPoint slides accompanies these minutes.
- The Faith for the Climate Network (FFTC) was founded in 2014 to help organise the Pilgrimage to Paris at the time of the UN Conference of the Parties on Climate Change in Paris, COP21. That COP led to the historic Paris agreement.
  - FFTC's events bring together bishops, rabbis, imams, priests and people of all faiths to provide thought leadership and to help equip faith communities to respond to the crisis of climate change.
  - Its first Interfaith Symposium was held at St John's Waterloo in 2016, where Canon Goddard is the vicar. Its second Symposium was held in February 2018 at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St John's Wood, at which Lord Deben, Chair of the Climate Change Committee, spoke. In June 2019, FFTC helped organise the faith and inter faith events which took place ahead of the Time is Now – the largest ever mass lobby of Parliament for the climate and nature. In late 2019, once it had been announced that the next COP (COP26) would be hosted in the UK, together with the Environmental Issues Network (EIN) of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, FFTC convened a working group of faith groups in the UK. Its focus is COP26, which was originally scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November last year, but has been postponed to November this year.
  - Building on these beginnings, FFTC's focus for the next two years is grassroots inter faith movement-building and mobilising around COP26, through the working group called Make COP Count (MCC). <https://makecopcount.org/>
  - MCC is chaired by FFTC, and deputy chaired by EIN. It also has close involvement of Scottish partners. Initially the group met every 2 months, but it now meets monthly. It has also set up a work collaboration space on Slack.
  - MCC has worked collaboratively from the beginning to establish Terms of Reference and some basic advocacy principles. It is always pleased to hear from faith groups which would like to get involved.
  - Over the months, through collective discussions and consensus, MCC has come up with some priority actions which cover policy advocacy, grassroots transformation, and hospitality / events at COP26.
  - Drawing on the broad advocacy principles, MCC developed concrete issues to focus on based on where it understands faith groups could have a distinctive role to play and could have an impact. These are in the areas of finance and global justice. There are two key 'asks':
    1. Stop funding climate breakdown by ending the use of public money for funding fossil fuels in the UK and overseas. Lots of groups have already been campaigning about overseas funding of fossil fuels and the Government finally changed its policy in December 2020, which was a big win for campaigners. The campaign was now being updated to focus on subsidies that still exist in the UK. The UK Government claims it has no fossil fuel subsidies, but the reporting on this is inconsistent and quite opaque. There are for example, some subsidies in the form of tax breaks, including for oil and gas extraction. The evidence shows that fossil fuel subsidies

disproportionately put poorer people at a disadvantage. This is an area where MCC can work with other civil society organisations to call for this to be addressed.

2. New and additional sources of finance for countries suffering loss and damage from climate change. Under the Paris Agreement, there are three pillars of climate action - mitigation (cutting emissions to avoid global heating as far as possible), adaptation (changing buildings, land use and so on so that people can live with the impacts of climate change), and loss and damage (where the impacts are so severe that the societies cannot adapt to them, such as sea level rises, severe hurricanes and droughts). Even though the Paris Agreement mentions the need to address loss and damage, there has been no progress on how it is funded. Crucially, this needs to be paid for by those who have been most responsible for the crisis, not those who are already struggling. A global fund of about \$75billion is needed. This does not need to be funded entirely by governments. This could be through measures such as a global aviation levy, or global fossil fuels tax, and debt cancellation for Global South nations. Until very recently, the UK government was reluctant to talk about this, but earlier this month COP President Designate Rt Hon Alok Sharma acknowledged this as one of the areas that needs action. Again, this was the result of campaigning by civil society groups, including faith groups.
- The MCC agreed that the G7 would be a crucial moment. There is no official process or mechanism that links the G7 with COP26, but it will be hosted this year by the UK Government in Cornwall and it plays a huge role in shaping political ambition and the political space that states enter for negotiations.
  - There is a need for leaders to come out of the G7 with key messages that people care about. This year it is about making financial commitments for ambitious action on a global recovery from the climate crisis, which is also interconnected with the Covid-19 and poverty crises worldwide.
  - MCC is encouraging people to take part in Christian Aid's campaign inviting people to send a postcard to the Prime minister. People cannot physically be at G7, but their voices can be heard in other ways. There is guidance on the Christian Aid website.
  - MCC has decided to support a number of on-the-ground actions. These are about building momentum through key moments and in different areas and communities in the UK. The analogy is a river flowing from G7 in Cornwall towards COP26 in Glasgow with tributaries flowing in, increasing the river's flow and energy. There are many other events and campaigns, which MCC considers to be necessary and important, but it has decided to focus on supporting and jointly promoting only some of these:
    1. Climate Sunday – This is an initiative led by CTBI, which encourages the holding of a climate-focused worship service any time before COP26, and culminates in a Nations Climate Sunday service on 5 September. A number of Churches have created downloadable resources for this initiative.
    2. Rise to the Moment – This is a relay from St Ives to Glasgow, organised by the Young Christian Climate Network. This is a relay rather than a full pilgrimage because of the restrictions on gathering in person. The relay enables people to take part in different ways.
    3. Faith and inter faith activities taking place during the Climate Coalition's Great Big Green Week – FFTC is a member of the Climate Coalition and the Coalition is a member of MCC. The Week will take place from 18 to 26 September and

includes lots of grassroots actions, such as sermons in places of worship and community stalls.

4. Inter faith movement-building workshops – These are run by FFTC. They were piloted last year in Leicester, Manchester, Leeds and Bradford. They are being reconvened and will shortly be held again in Sheffield and London. <https://faithfortheclimate.org.uk/publicevent/London-Interfaith-Workshops-Get-Ready-for-COP26-1271>
5. There are a number of ‘high level moments’ in the campaign. FFTC held a pre-meeting on 15 April for today’s faith leaders’ roundtable with Rt Hon Alok Sharma. Those invited included signatories to the Lambeth Declaration. An event is being held on 14 June in Parliament, led by Quakers in Britain, supported by FFTC. FFTC is happy to provide briefings for any faith group to use for their congregations and members or for interviews, press releases and statements. FFTC is a resource that can be drawn on.
  - FFTC has a monthly e-newsletter to which anyone can subscribe. It is also on Twitter (@fftcnetwork) and on Facebook (@faithfortheclimate).
  - FFTC has prepared a one-page briefing on its key ‘advocacy asks’ and will be preparing more resources to share. There is also a website under construction.
14. Bishop Clark thanked Dr Shah for his presentation and invited questions and comments. In discussion the following questions and comments were raised. Responses from Dr Shah are in italics.
  - In addition to the Christian resources being developed for Climate Sunday, are there parallel resources being developed for other faith traditions? *Yes, there are resources being developed at various stages of readiness. FFTC is working with four partner organisations that are Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. They are producing their own resources and organising events in the lead up to COP26. FFTC also has a good relationship with EcoSynagogue.*
  - Which Hindu partner organisation is working with FFTC? *Hindu Climate Action*
15. Dr Crabtree said that IFN would be circulating the notes of Dr Shah’s presentation and also his PowerPoint slides, which included a number of links.
16. Bishop Clark invited Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, to give a brief input about Interfaith Scotland’s preparations for COP26.
17. Dr Maureen Sier thanked IFN for the invitation to speak to the FCF. She offered the following points:
  - Interfaith Scotland decided to make climate change the focus of its work in 2021.
  - All its dialogue sessions this year have been around the climate emergency.
  - It has been working with faith-based coalitions to see how IfS can help to bring people together and to support faith-based work already taking place. One example would be the holding of four webinars with the International Liaison Committee to the UN.
  - IfS chairs the Glasgow Faith Based Working Group, which is a group of faith community representatives looking at how best to support the activities in Glasgow for COP26.
  - Each year Scottish Inter Faith Week (SIFW), on which IfS leads, has a theme. This year the theme is ‘Together for our Planet’, the same as that for COP26. The theme was launched on Earth Day earlier in the month. IfS is engaging with Scottish faith-based climate organisations about how to promote the Week and encourage people to hold events.

- This year SIFW has been brought forward to coincide with COP26. Each year it holds its launch event in partnership with a local inter faith group. This year's launch event will be held with Interfaith Glasgow and will be a prayer vigil on 31 October, held in line with COVID restrictions.
  - IfS provides the secretariat for the Religious Leaders Forum of Scotland. The Forum produced a Statement of Commitment from the faith leaders of Scotland, which was well received. There has recently been a meeting to discuss how the Lambeth Declaration could become a Glasgow Multifaith Declaration.
  - IfS has a publication called 'Our Sacred Earth' which is about how faith communities can become more eco-friendly. It also has a World Interfaith Harmony Grove of trees in the Highlands.
  - There is a lot of faith-based work going on around climate issues. Faith communities have really risen to the challenge. It feels as though there is a tidal wave of faith-based voices and it is a privilege to be a small part of that.
18. Bishop Clark thanked Dr Sier and invited those present to speak briefly about any of their own organisation's preparations for COP26.
19. One participant said that in March a webinar in a series that she had initiated had focussed on taking action so that people work on clean earth and good food which drives health, which in turn drives the economy and intellectual advancement (to mark the occasion of Prophet Zarathustra's Birthday). A further webinar was going to be held on 30 May entitled 'The Good Mind - Nurturing Nature - A Zoroastrian Perspective on Sustainable Development' and all were invited. It would be based on the embedded culture within the Zoroastrian faith whereby every event had a representation by all the elements at the prayer service and the concept of fellowship for the good of all was embedded into every action that was driven by the 'good mind'. The event would include reference to actions that had been taken around the world, including a successful reforestation project in Mumbai, India. Another participant noted that the Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB) was working with various bodies on environmental issues.
20. Dr Crabtree said that IFN had been highlighting for some time the work of faith communities on climate change and the environment. It had been glad to work with FFTC, for example on Inter Faith Week. The examples shown by Dr Shah for this presentation had been chosen in the context of focus on COP26. FFTC worked as part of its overall work with a wide range of faith traditions – Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Pagan, Spiritualist and others. It would be helpful if, when Dr Shah's presentation material was circulated to meeting participants, some specific suggestions could be circulated about how best faith communities could contribute. Sometimes communities had specific initiatives such as the Bhumi project, EcoSikh and EcoSynagogue.
21. Dr Shah said that the examples chosen for MCC were quite Abrahamic but they had been agreed upon through deliberation with other faiths, which were part of MCC. Strategic action was being taken and it was about speaking to Government more effectively. FFTC did a lot of multi faith and inter faith capacity building work and grassroots work, which did not relate to COP26. Some of this was at local level, for example in relation to the Cumbrian coal mine. FFTC would be happy to share more information about different projects. FFTC and also bigger organisations like Christian Aid would be happy to hear how they could provide space to other faith communities. He would be happy to receive any ideas.

22. Bishop Clark thanked Dr Shah again for his presentation. Saving the planet was key for all faith communities.

*Dr Shanon Shah left the meeting.*

23. Bishop Clark noted that the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee had launched a call for evidence for its inquiry to follow up on the proposals of Climate Assembly UK. The closing date for submissions was 10 May and a public evidence hearing with stakeholders and a Government Minister would follow. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1191/findings-of-the-report-of-climate-assembly-uk/>

#### **Agenda Item 4: COVID-19 and faith communities**

a) The vaccination roll out – faith community engagement

24. Bishop Clark said that, as the paper explained and as members were aware, faith communities had been playing a very important role in the vaccination roll out.

25. In discussion the following points were made:

- The vaccine take-up in the Hindu community was now quite high. HFB had produced a series of videos. Information about these had been tweeted, and IFN had been tagged in the Tweets. Gujarati and Hindi versions would be produced soon. The videos were for everyone, not just for the Hindu community, because it was important for everyone to be vaccinated.
- In the run up to Ramadan there had been some concerns over whether having a vaccination would invalidate the fast. There were differences of opinion in scholarly discussions, but the main view was that having a vaccination did not invalidate the fast. The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board had put out messages about this in many languages. As Ramadan drew near, local authority colleagues in Birmingham, Manchester and Rochdale had sensed that there was still some concern, so some post-dusk pop up vaccination clinics had been set up, which had been welcomed in those areas.
- Similar concerns had been raised by some members of the Hindu community about whether a vaccination would invalidate Navaratri fasting. Scholars had agreed that it would not invalidate the fast. On the contrary, doing something positive for your health, even when fasting, was actively encouraged.
- There had not been any difficulties with vaccination take-up in the Buddhist community.

b) Vaccination passports – an ethical and social issue

26. Bishop Clark said that, as some would be aware, a group of Church leaders, though not representatives of any of the mainline churches, had written a letter expressing some opposition to 'vaccination passports' on civil liberty and equality grounds. It would be interesting to hear responses from faith communities to the idea of 'vaccination passports'.

27. In discussion the following points were made:

- People from South Asian communities ran a lot of care homes. There was no necessity for staff to be vaccinated in care homes. One participant said there had



been an example of a care home resident dying after contracting COVID-19 from a staff member who had not been vaccinated for religious reasons. There should be legislation requiring care home staff to be vaccinated.

- It was puzzling that market forces in the private sector had not led to this requirement already. Some people might withdraw their relatives from care homes where staff were not vaccinated. In some industries there were already requirements, for example airline staff were required to have vaccinations to travel to certain countries, or would lose their jobs.
- To introduce compulsory vaccinations would raise legal issues across the whole of the UK and would challenge some long held legal principles. Not being able to keep a job and not being able to get a job were two different matters.

28. Dr Crabtree said that one issue that had come up anecdotally was about whether the use of 'vaccination passports' might become widespread and, if so, whether places of worship would find themselves needing to debate this. Faith communities had already had to consider sensitive issues when reopening places of worship, such as how to handle situations where people were exempt from wearing masks. Passports would raise a set of questions for faith communities. There were also civil liberty questions, and the question of whether passports would become mandatory by default through the number of places requiring them.

c) Other COVID-19 related matters

29. Bishop Clark drew attention to the information in the Background Note about safe use of places of worship.
30. No other issues were raised.

### **Agenda Item 5: Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities**

31. Bishop Clark drew attention to the information in the Background Note.
32. Dr Crabtree said that Peter Colwell, of CTBI, had hoped to be present at the meeting to speak about the 'Moment of Dishonour' webinar that CTBI had recently held in partnership with others, in response to the Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, but had been unexpectedly unable to attend. The webinar was referenced in the Background Note. Bishop Clark said that Mr Anthony Silkoff (Board of Deputies) and Mr Hassan Joudi (Muslim Council of Britain) would be giving short inputs about work of their organisations on this issue which were mentioned in the Background Note. He noted that the Church of England's response to the Report had been one of dismay. The Report did not reflect the communities the Church served and the realities of life in them for people from minority ethnic groups. The Church of England's Anti-Racism Taskforce had taken a different view from the Commission.
33. Mr Anthony Silkoff said that in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD) had established a Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community to look at the treatment of Black Jews, Jews of colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews in the community. It was chaired by Stephen Bush, Political Editor of the New Statesman, who was a mixed race Jew. The Commission's report had been launched the previous week and could be found at <https://www.bod.org.uk/bod-news/board-of-deputies-publishes-landmark-report-on->



[racial-inclusivity-in-the-jewish-community/](#). There had been positive coverage in Jewish newspapers and also in *The Guardian*. The report covered 17 different areas of life in the Jewish community and included 119 recommendations across those areas. A few examples:

- A lot of those who had responded to the consultation had said that their perception was that Jewish institutions, including the BoD, did not represent the full diversity of the Jewish community and that their interests were sometimes overlooked. The BoD asked whether specific spaces for ethnic minorities within the Jewish community would be desirable but respondents said that they wanted to participate in existing bodies, particularly the BoD.
- There were concerns about the lack of visibility and representation of Black Jews and Jews of colour in Jewish media. There were also concerns about hate speech.
- Security was the biggest area of concern overall. Security was essential to the preservation of the Jewish community in the UK. There was security at all Jewish synagogues and schools because of the threat of terrorism. However, that could be in conflict with creating a welcoming atmosphere and there had been heart-wrenching testimonies of Black Jews being racially profiled at Jewish buildings.
- Schools were another area where concerns were raised. Black Jews and Jews of Colour were proud and passionate about Jewish schools. Most Jewish children attended Jewish schools. However, there were concerns about the teaching of colonialism and slavery, Jewish studies not reflecting diversity, and racist incidents in schools.

The next step was to make sure that the recommendations were implemented.

34. Mr Hassan Joudi said that the murder of George Floyd had also been a spur for the Muslim Council of Britain to take further action. According to the last Census about 10% of Muslims in the UK had African and Afro-Caribbean heritage. Even though in many cases they were integrated with Muslim communities from non-Black, Asian or Arab heritage, they still found difficulties and challenges which were anti-Black within mosques, charities and society more generally. For some that had made it more difficult to go to places of worship. Others had become disengaged and preferred to set up their own institutions. In 2019 MCB had begun an initiative to see what more it could do to raise this up the agenda for the Muslim community. For many it was difficult to acknowledge that this was even an issue. The initiative had started as a conversation. MCB had held a series of conferences and symposiums, which were initially in person but had been online since COVID-19. More recently it had piloted some online e-learning modules. It was hoping to publish a report later this year. It had been a wide listening exercise and MCB had discovered a lot. It had established good links with bodies such as the Black Muslim Forum and others that were passionate about working constructively in this area. There were three key observations. Firstly, it was crucial when doing this work to partner with organisations which were perhaps not as diverse as they could be, but wanted to be and just did not know how. Secondly, it was important that this not be just a short term activity, but that it have sustainability and longevity. The situation was not going to change overnight; it was a marathon, not a sprint. And, thirdly, people of faith from African and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds were often a minority within a minority. It was therefore important to take time to listen to their experiences, even though it could be very difficult to hear these.

35. In discussion the following points were made:
- The Hindu Forum of Britain was working with Vishwa Hindu Parishad, OneJain and others on gathering comments to work towards a response to the Report.
  - The 'Moment of Dishonour' webinar had been held jointly by CTBI, The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum, which comprised individuals largely from across the Free Church Christian traditions. The Forum had published a response to the Sewell Report. (<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=284166>) The prime concerns were about people challenging the competence of the commissioners to question the validity and existence of institutional racism against the evidence base over many years; and the way in which the report would inevitably gloss over the impact of inheritance of slavery. It did not even discuss the issue of reparations, which was a live question. For example, the Jesuit order in North America had decided, in recognition of its own historical involvement in slavery, to invest a substantial amount of money in educational opportunities for descendants of slaves. The concept of institutional racism had been glossed over too easily, given the large evidence base.
36. Bishop Clark said that it was very helpful to hear about the projects happening in different faith communities.

#### **Agenda Item 6: Other current issues of interest or concern to faith communities**

37. Bishop Clark reminded members that this Agenda Item offered an opportunity to raise current issues of interest or concern to faith communities in the UK. Members had been asked to notify issues in advance.
38. One issue had been raised in advance, which was to draw attention to the Home Office "Protect Duty Consultation" and the potential impact on the operation of places of worship with a capacity of 100 persons or more. The response deadline was 2 July and information was at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protect-duty>. Dr Crabtree said that information about this consultation had been included in an IFN Circular on 2 March and in the most recent e-bulletin. Bishop Clark said that there was a danger that the regulations might be put in place on the basis of organisations having full time managers. That could mean that voluntary organisations, without full time employees, might have a high burden to bear in complying with the requirements.
39. No other issues were raised.

#### **Agenda Item 7: Inter faith engagement and joint work of faith communities**

40. Bishop Clark said that no information had been submitted in advance for this Agenda Item. No updates were offered at the meeting.

#### **INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION**

[Paragraphs 41 to 49]

**Agenda Item 10: Date of next meeting**

50. Bishop Clark thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions. He always learned from FCF meetings. He offered blessings to all those marking religious festivals.
51. The next meeting would be held on the afternoon of Tuesday 6 July.

8 June 2021

## **Reflections from Minister David Bruton, President of the Spiritualists' National Union, on Spiritualist bases for addressing climate change**

As our political masters turn their attention again to the climate emergency we all face and with the advent of Earth Day last week and the conference of world leaders buoyed by a more engaged President Biden we look forward to COP26 to be held in Glasgow in November this year. The conference is expected to commit to enhanced ambition and surely as people of faith we collectively have to step forward, to lead our respective communities and recognise the need for everyone to be involved for the greater good of the whole.

- From a Spiritualists' perspective, the emblem of our religion contains the words, Light, Nature and Truth. On the emblem, the word 'Nature' appears as writing on a book. Spiritualists have always sought to read and learn from the language of nature, and today we understand the vital need to listen and respond to what it has to say.
- In the grounds of our headquarters at Stansted Hall, Essex (next door to Stansted airport) the trees on the estate alone offset 18.5 cubic tons of CO<sub>2</sub> each year, and generate enough oxygen for almost 2,000 people. Many of the trees there are both historic and iconic, inspiring a respect for nature in so many people who visit our college there.
- Inside our buildings economy and ecology go hand in hand to preserve resources and limit our impact. Meat-free days encourage our students to reflect on the link between our plate and our planet.
- Moving further afield, we have limited our travelling. Meetings that have taken place online because of the pandemic will continue into the future, helping to reduce our footprint on the world.
- Our second principle - the Brotherhood of Man - reminds all Spiritualists that the whole of humanity is connected. Our fifth principle - Personal Responsibility - reminds us of our obligation to one another. Since we share the same Earth with each other, our actions to care for the environment and address climate change are infused with a spiritual love for humanity and the home that God has asked us to share with each other for a little while.
- As Spiritualists we feel similarly connected to our Pioneers. As we look into history to note their impact, we look to the future taking note of ours. In feeling connected to future generations we feel the responsibility to hand them our religion, and the good that it has done. With a spiritual love for them we feel the need to care for the planet today so that they too may call it home. We must be responsible now for their future and put a halt to the devastating environmental change we are experiencing and, in some cases, are part of.
- The wider family of our churches finds a love for nature that motivates care for the Earth and the life on it. Each week our hymns and songs make frequent reference to nature, reminding us that we are inseparable from it – it is, after all, a place where God resides. Our teachings urge us into action, centring our personal responsibility as spiritual and practical motivation.
- Increasingly, Spiritualists expect the principle of Personal Responsibility to be embodied in industry and business, and their choices and demands reflect the concerns of a planet under stress, and a rejection of harmful practices.
- There are some well-known words within Spiritualism: "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, whose body nature is, and God the soul." Through them we are given a lens to look at the life within us and the life around us. We feel connected to

God's presence within us, and recognise it in each one of us, in all life, and in the world around us.

- When these words are understood, to act responsibly and protectively towards nature becomes *second* nature. Taking action to limit and reverse the harm done by humanity to the climate and the environment is important on many levels, but when our motivations and actions embody the power and presence of God we are brought into a closer and deeper relationship with God, with each other and with our planet. Relationship and responsibility make us co-creators with God. Co-creators of a necessary future where our spirituality and our environment are fundamentally intertwined.
- It is perhaps because of this that our Pioneers gifted us with those three inseparable words.... Light, Nature and Truth.