

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL SESSION OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2.15pm on Tuesday 28 July 2020

by Zoom

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

Present: The Revd Philip Brooks (The United Reformed Church in the UK); Dr Deesha Chadha (Hindu Forum of Britain); Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and FCF Moderator); Ms Siriol Davies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Together in England); Major David Evans (Salvation Army); Ms Sophie Gregory (National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is); Minister David Hopkins (Spiritualists' National Union); Mr Rajnish Kashyap (Hindu Council (UK)); Ms Sabira Lakha (World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League); the Revd Dr Reynaldo Leao-Nato (Methodist Church in Britain); Mr John Marder (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)); Rabbi David Mason (Board of Deputies of British Jews and FCF Moderator); Mr Manhar Mehta (Jain Network); Mr Dapo Ogunrinde (Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)); Ms Smita Oza (BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha UK); Ms Tracey Prior (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints); Ms Sabina Riaz (Muslim Council of Britain); 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); Mr Anthony Silkoff (Board of Deputies of British Jews); Mr Robin Taylor (Pagan Federation); Professor Dr Paul Weller (Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain); and Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations).

Observer: Mr Narendra Waghela (IFN Co-Chair membership categories other than NFCRB).

Apologies: Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; Druid Network; and Islamic Cultural Centre.

Moderator apologies: Minister David Bruton; Mr Hassan Joudi; and Mr Neil Pitchford.

In attendance: Mr Ashley Beck [for Agenda Items 1 to 3]; Mrs Hannah Cassidy; Dr Harriet Crabtree; and Dr David Hampshire (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

The Revd Mark Burleigh (Network for Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care in Health) [for Agenda Item 4]

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. Bishop Jonathan Clark, in the chair, welcomed those present.
2. A period of silence was observed, keeping in mind particularly, those whose health had been affected by COVID-19, mentally or physically.
3. Bishop Clark explained that his fellow Co-Moderator, Malcolm Deboo, had asked him to chair the whole meeting on this occasion, as the Co-Moderator more comfortable with the Zoom environment.
4. Bishop Clark explained that screenshots of the meeting might be used by IFN on social media. Anyone wishing not to be included within these, should let the IFN office know. He also reminded members that 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). He noted that the Zoom 'chat' function could be used for posting any links to resources; any points of substance should be made verbally, especially as some people were participating by phone and could not see Chat comments.
5. Apologies were noted.

INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION

[Paragraphs 6 to 10]

The Revd Mark Burleigh joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 4: COVID-19 and faith communities

a) Recent developments

11. Bishop Clark said that COVID-19 was very much a present reality, especially for those in local lockdowns. Most agencies were expecting it to get worse again, especially in Autumn and Winter.

Places of worship, weddings and funerals

12. In discussion the following points were made:
 - Hindu temples were opening gradually, starting with a few hours each day. The majority of temples had implemented the safety and hygiene procedures. Some worshippers were still apprehensive about coming to the temples.
 - The Hindu Council (UK) was not aware of any weddings taking place in temples so far.

- The Muslim Council of Britain had produced guidelines on re-opening mosques and holding congregational worship. These were being followed by many mosques and it was positive that they had sought guidance quite quickly. Eid would be taking place at the end of the week. Some mosques had been approaching their local authorities and, where permission had been given, they would be holding Eid celebrations outdoors. Mosques in Cambridge and London were hiring rugby grounds to make sure there was enough space for everyone. This was, though, putting a stretch on finances. Some local authorities had refused permission for outdoor celebrations. Where there was not an outdoor option, mosques would be holding multiple prayer sessions so that everyone could attend at least one congregational prayer at a safe social distance. Support and ideas from other faith communities had been useful. Posting information on Facebook and Instagram had been working well.
- The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha temple in London had re-opened earlier in the month. It had been using a registration system that allowed members to register for worship. The main prayer hall was closed. Members were able to visit for a few hours, 6 days a week. Saturdays were generally reserved for visitors from out of London. It had provided prasad and not had any issues with that, as everyone was adhering to the rules. It was providing daily updates via webcast, which were watched by thousands of people. Local communities were also getting together virtually. The Head priest at the temple was urging everyone to follow the guidelines. It had extensive structures and its welfare department had been able to address a lot of issues and to provide help locally. The temple also had good relationships with local hospitals which its volunteers had helped during the pandemic. They were continuing to support affected families.
- There was a gradual reopening of churches, some more swiftly than others. Clergy were keen to return to their places of worship. The Church of England had recently done a national survey about worship. This had indicated that about two thirds of Anglicans wanted to return to worship in churches and the remaining third was enjoying worshipping through digital means and would like to have that continue as a major part of their worshipping life. It could prove challenging to provide both. That might be the case for other faith communities as well.
- The Salvation Army had kept most of its buildings closed except where they were running foodbanks or other community services. Its worship was still online and would continue to be for the foreseeable future, especially with a second peak in the virus expected. The organisation covered all four nations of the UK and was keeping that in mind. Buildings were likely to reopen in September at the earliest.
- Jain temples had re-opened for limited numbers and people were content to wait patiently outside to enter when it was safe to do so. Jains would be marking the festival of Paryushan on 15 August. Programmes had been put together for people to participate online. Jain temples were finding that there were more people taking part in online worship than they would usually have had in the temples.

COVID-19 and BAME communities

13. Dr Crabtree drew attention to the background information which noted that Professor Kevin Fenton was currently providing sessions to update interested bodies on the report's recommendations and follow up. He had not been invited to give a presentation to the FCF because it was understood that these were of approximately an hour's duration. However, it was being highlighted in case individual faith communities would like to invite him to give a presentation.

Access to food during COVID-19

14. Dr Crabtree said that IFN would be in touch with the British Red Cross about the food parcels point in their recent report. It would also be important to go back to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about this, in case there was a second peak with shielding again required and the same issues arose about parcel contents.

Action: IFN to be in touch with British Red Cross and MHCLG about food parcels.

COVID-19 Day of remembrance

15. No comments were offered.

Charities and COVID-19

16. No reflections were offered.

Faith-based charities and recovery from COVID-19

17. No comments were offered.

b) Health and spiritual care

18. Bishop Clark welcomed the Revd Mark Burleigh, Chair of the Network for Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care in Health (NPSRCH) and Head of Chaplaincy at Leicester's hospitals.

19. The Revd Mark Burleigh thanked IFN for the invitation to speak to the FCF. He offered the following points:

- NPSRCH had existed in one form or another for 23 years since a consultation in 1997 that had looked at the need for chaplaincy to be more diverse in religious terms.
- Diversity within chaplaincy was still an issue. NPSRCH had recently published a report about equality in healthcare chaplaincy. There was still a need for minority religious groups to be more represented in chaplaincy in an equitable way and also for non-religious pastoral carers to be represented, because many patients did not want to speak with a religious chaplain but might want to speak with someone else.
- Despite the local lockdown, there had not been a surge of new COVID-19 admissions in hospitals in Leicester. It seemed the surge in cases had mainly been among working age and younger people who had not required hospitalisation. There had been a high prevalence of COVID-19 in BAME communities. Door to door tests were taking place.
- The real peak for the chaplaincy team had been in April. It was very rare normally for a patient to die while a chaplain was visiting but he had experienced this twice on one day in April.
- In hospitals around the UK many of the chaplains from minority religious groups were either volunteers or 'bank chaplains'. So when chaplaincy teams said they were diverse, this was not always in an equitable way because minority

community chaplains were not employed in the same way as, say, Christian chaplains.

- In mid-March one of the first actions taken by the NHS was to stop visiting of patients by families but it also suspended all volunteering in hospitals. There were approximately 90 volunteers in the chaplaincy teams across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, including community health as well as acute hospitals. So that was a sudden drop in the support available. The chaplaincy team in Leicester had paid chaplains from the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian communities and also paid non-religious chaplains, but in many hospitals the volunteer chaplains from minority religious groups were not able to visit. They were only able to provide support through, for example, iPads and phones.
- NPSRCH had tried to encourage minority chaplaincy to be included and not forgotten in the response. For example, it had worked with the teams setting up the Nightingale Hospitals to ensure the chaplaincy teams in those hospitals were diverse. (The background note to the Agenda had included a link to an article by the BBC about the chaplaincy team at the Nightingale Hospital in London.)
- Within minority faith communities there had been some frustration because the access they had had through chaplaincy teams had been cut off. Many hospitals had also not been allowing visiting religious leaders to attend.
- Volunteering was still suspended. In the Leicestershire Hospitals Trust they were currently exploring allowing volunteers to return to the charity shops and to meeting/greeting roles. The chaplaincy team had also submitted the role of Friday Prayer leader for the Muslim community as a volunteer role that could restart when Leicester came out of lockdown and this had been agreed. There were three Muslim chaplains, two of whom were male but, because prayers had to be held socially distanced, there needed to be five or six slots of ten minute prayers. As he understood it, within the Islamic faith, it was not normal for one person to lead the same prayers twice, so different leaders were needed for each set of prayers.
- Chaplains had also provided increased support for NHS staff, who had been under huge pressure, not just from COVID itself but also from teams being split apart and jobs being moved to other sites while they were away. They were the heroes.

20. Bishop Clark thanked the Revd Burleigh for his presentation, which had given a good insight into the key issues that COVID-19 had, in particular, highlighted in chaplaincy.

21. In discussion the following questions and comments were raised. Responses from Mr Burleigh are in italics.

- Most Jain chaplains were volunteers and therefore not allowed to visit patients in hospital. Instead they had prepared some brief prayer material for patients, which was distributed throughout the chaplaincy system. They had also used WhatsApp voice calls to pray with and for patients, with hospital staff holding a phone near the ear of the patient.
- It was not just patients with COVID-19 who could not be visited by family and friends. How was response to that issue developing? *Nationally the position varied. The initial situation, where no one was allowed at all, had softened. The majority of hospitals were allowing access to chaplains. He had not been kept away from patients, except in a few rare individual circumstances where other methods of communication had been used. He had visited patients on COVID-19 wards, children's ED, ED and ITU in full PPE. The chaplains had all been guided by the staff and if it was not safe enough, they had done what they could at a distance. The Muslim chaplain had a beard so had to use a full hood not just*

a face mask. Some family had decided not to visit loved ones because of the need to isolate for 14 days, or had chosen for just one family member to come so that the rest of the family could still meet up to share grief and comfort one another. People seemed to be taking a risk-based approach to visiting. Staff were trying to do what they could on non-COVID wards to enable electronic communication or visiting in exceptional circumstances. For example, they had arranged for a wife to stand outside a doorway with the door open to her husband's ground floor ward while he was inside. Most people were cautious rather than adventurous. Some of the circumstances people had had to face had been harrowing. Chaplains had been there for them.

- The Muslim Council of Britain was happy to liaise with NPSRCH about any needs for Muslims and to provide support and help for any individual chaplains. There were Muslim representatives on NPSRCH. He could put MCB in touch with them outside the meeting.
- Was NPSRCH UK or England based and how did it engage institutionally with communities? Some chaplaincy bodies were UK based and some were England based. NPSRCH was England focused and liaised with NHS England.
- The Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha had been providing materials remotely for patients in hospitals. Three months after a Buddhist person had died there was usually a celebration held for them. Appointments were now being made at the London Vihara for immediate family members to attend and celebrate the lives of their loved ones.

22. Dr Crabtree said that as the FCF was aware, there had been a disproportionate and painful impact on BAME communities with higher levels of cases and deaths. The recent stakeholder report from Public Health England had included ways that faith communities could help in taking the recommendations forward. The potential role of faith communities was strongly flagged up in the report's recommendations. From what Mr Burleigh had said, there seemed to be a difficult situation in the Covid-19 context where there was both higher impact on BAME communities but less minority faith chaplaincy support available. Mr Burleigh said that this was true. In situations where there was no paid chaplaincy from a particular religious faith, where there were people in the hospital from that faith needing end of life care, there was a deficit in provision for them.

23. Bishop Clark thanked the Revd Burleigh again for his presentation.

24. Dr Crabtree said that IFN would be happy to circulate, with the meeting minutes, a paragraph with more detail about NPSRCH

Action: Paragraph with more detail about NPSRCH to be circulated with meeting minutes.

The Revd Burleigh left the meeting.

Rabbi David Mason joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Faith communities, climate change and the environment

25. Bishop Clark noted that climate change continued to be a great threat to humanity, greater than the pandemic. He welcomed Rabbi David Mason, Rabbi at Muswell Hill Synagogue (United Synagogue) and FCF Moderator from the Jewish community.

26. Rabbi David Mason thanked IFN for the invitation to speak to the FCF. He offered the following points:

- Early in the Bible it said that Adam was put in the garden to work the garden and to maintain it. In the story of creation there was already a model for looking after the world. This was mandated within Biblical texts. There was now an opportunity because of what scientists were calling the 'anthropause', this human pause created by lockdown, to look at what type of world people wanted to live in. He had personally reduced his carbon footprint by taking part in meetings online rather than travelling to them. He was also growing food in his garden. No one had been unchanged by the lockdown.
- There had over the years been a number of Jewish green initiatives, for example an eco-farm called Sadeh. He was involved with an initiative called EcoSynagogue, which was based on the Eco Church model. It was exciting for a number of reasons.
- It was cross-communal and the Chief Rabbi was very supportive of it. Sometimes there was a resistance to cross-communal organisations working in the Jewish community, but this had a lot of support. It was now supported by the Board of Deputies of British Jews - it worked from its office and its social media footprint was supported by that. It moved away from a 'them and us' preaching model about the climate and was more akin to being on a journey together. The journey was important because, as was said in the Ethics of the Fathers, 'The work is not there to be completed, but neither are you free to desist from it'. Everyone could be part of the journey.
- EcoSynagogue was currently being developed to become better and more workable for the Jewish community. The idea was that each synagogue or community assessed itself and how it worked, for example, what would be efficient use of energy and lighting and waste disposal. There was usually a Kiddush after synagogue on Saturday. That could often lead to food waste and his synagogue had introduced a policy to reduce the waste. Synagogues were also trying to stop using single-use plastics. This had to be weighed against using more hot water for washing up instead. The policies were based on the survey that EcoSynagogue had done, which was available on its website.
- Changes were being made with the support of the whole community, rather than forcing them upon anyone. The leadership of the community was also behind it. Each synagogue had a Green Team. EcoSynagogue networked them together and brought in experts to provide advice, such as the Head of the London Wildlife Trust who had spoken to them about how to bring nature onto synagogue land in urban areas, such as by putting up bird boxes and planting flowers around car parks. This had led to taking part in the Great Butterfly Count! Becoming aware of these issues led people to be more sensitive to the world around them.
- There were spin-off campaigns from the movement. Every synagogue was on its own journey but there might be one campaign about, for instance, reducing plastic. That might also include encouraging local kosher shops to use less plastic bags.
- The first ever Green Shabbat had taken place in early July, in London Climate Action Week. It had been held online with some very interesting speakers. They would try to do this each year from now. They had placed op-ed articles in Jewish media and other media to increase its profile.
- There were many opportunities for incorporating environmental themes. The Jewish New Year was said to be the anniversary of the creation of the world. If it

was the birthday of the world, it was a great opportunity to promote looking after the world.

- Another positive aspect of EcoSynagogue was that it was grassroots. It was not the same as Extinction Rebellion, which was a laudable campaigning organisation. EcoSynagogue involved individuals within communities.
- EcoSynagogue was looking to create an advisory board of people who were experts in energy efficiency and climate science to provide advice on the best way to move forward. They were looking for rabbis across the community to take this up in their sermons and their promoting of educational awareness across the community.

27. Bishop Clark thanked Rabbi Mason for his presentation and his enthusiasm and joy in the work he was doing.

28. Dr Crabtree commented that the re-opening of places of worship was providing an opportunity for communities to think about environmental issues in relation to these. A number of faith community bodies had been encouraging places of worship to think about this.

29. In discussion the following questions and comments were made. Responses from Rabbi Mason are in italics.

- One member, who gave classes to Hindu children locally, had found that they had been asking a lot more questions since the classes had moved online. Hindus looked at many aspects of nature, including rivers and mountains, as deities, and there had been some very fruitful and powerful discussions with the children about this. For example, they had talked about why trees should not be cut down on a mountain slope and why rivers should be kept clean. The River Ganga in India was now very clean and the dolphins had returned. The children had been learning why the ancients had equated nature with the divine. Older members of the community had been less interested.
- Holding online meetings reduced the carbon footprint from people travelling. A lot of people would usually travel to FCF meetings. Perhaps there could be a mixed economy of online and face to face meetings going forward.
- Some of the mosques within Leicester were holding evening classes and Islamic schools online, which was much more eco-friendly and attendance was higher. In 2019 during Ramadan there had been a big drive to reduce single-use plastic with mosques asking worshippers to bring refillable bottles. This had worked well and there had been a lot less waste. It would be good for these faith climate initiatives to be more publicised to encourage other faith groups to look at their eco-footprint as well. Dr Crabtree said that Faiths for the Climate had many different faith communities involved in it. IFN had included information about this in its e-bulletins and on social media. A number of people who attended FCF meetings had a particular interest in this area. IFN would be happy to continue highlighting initiatives.
- It was very good to hear such enthusiasm for green issues and about grassroots transformation. Sometimes it was difficult to separate faith from politics. Did Rabbi Mason have any ideas on how to press government to bring bigger governmental action and how to work across faiths together? *EcoSynagogue was not involved with politics. That was more the focus of Extinction Rebellion. Perhaps Inter Faith Week could have the environment as a theme one year. Voices could then be brought together towards local MPs and Government.*

Dr Crabtree said that Scottish Interfaith Week had a theme each year but Inter Faith Week did not, as groups liked to do different activities within its aims. However, last year environmental activities had increased more than any other type of activity and this had been actively drawn to people's attention. The fact that COP26 had been postponed might have a bearing on what was done this year. IFN had been in conversation with Faith for the Climate and a number of others about there being more emphasis on the environment and climate change. IFN would continue to encourage. Given IFN's nature as a linking body with its particular aims it was not in a position to lobby Government on this issue. It did, however, provide encouragement to initiatives such as Faiths for the Climate which was leading in this area with faith communities and made sure environmental issues were regularly on the agenda at meetings such as this one. It could bring this back as an item at one of the major meetings in the next year or so.

- There had been conversation in the past about the best pattern for FCF meetings. The current situation gave an opportunity to think about what was best done in person, for example more informal dialogue and sharing appropriate food and drink and what could be done online, such as more focused business-orientated discussions. This would be good for all faith communities and IFN to consider with climate in mind. *Climate and environmental consciousness needed to be at the front of decision making, so that 'for the environment's sake' became part of the decision. IFN meetings were generally business meetings. Networking was very important and there could perhaps be one or two networking meetings but attending online meetings was much easier and reduced the need for travel.*
- The Methodist Church had several buildings and so there were issues relating to carbon emissions to consider, including fossil fuels, electricity, solar panels and so forth. Was there a possibility that IFN could engage with Government about guidance and support for buildings to move from fossil fuel to electricity and from there to solar panels?
- A mixed economy for IFN meetings in the future would be helpful. It was very carbon intensive when so many people travelled to meetings. The Network of Buddhist Organisations had an arm called Eco-Dharma which worked closely with Faith for the Climate. They had recently been working on a project looking at ways of capacity building in the smaller minority faiths, including Buddhism. There had been a lot of interest among Buddhists and the focus of Buddhist Action Month had been climate action. Lockdown had unfortunately thwarted some of the momentum because a lot of the work had been around Extinction Rebellion, meditating in banks and so forth. They had managed to keep the momentum going by holding regular online meetings, looking at different aspects of green space and climate action and hoped to hit the ground running when normality returned. Normal had now changed, in some ways for the better for the climate and in some ways for worse for the climate. It was important not to 'preach' about climate change but rather to put issues into the context of existing beliefs, like the example given about Jewish New Year being the world's birthday.
- Eco Church and Eco Diocese were also good initiatives. Faith communities were all heading in the same direction. It was a very good opportunity for all faiths to demonstrate their commitment to working together.
- As part of the Government's investment plan for emerging from COVID-19, there had been a commitment to funding for Green Homes Grants for private homes and also funding for public buildings. The definition of a public building might not include places of worship. Perhaps conversation about this could be opened up because places of worship provided many services to the wider community.

Dr Crabtree said that the letter from IFN's Co-Chairs to Danny Kruger MP, in response to his enquiry into how charities can support COVID-19 recovery, (which was provided at Annex C to the background note), included comment about the use of spaces. It would be challenging for faith communities to make changes to buildings in a context where their resources were dwindling. However, it might be a time when, because Government was interested in the use of spaces, there might be grants for improvements which had an ecological aspect. She would try to find out what the position was on faith community buildings in regard to the Government's financial commitment on sustainability.

30. Bishop Clark thanked Rabbi Mason again for his presentation.

Action: IFN to look into the position on faith community buildings in regard to the Government's financial commitment on sustainability.

Agenda Item 6: Any Other Business

20. Dr Crabtree drew attention to the information in the background note about the commemorations for VJ Day on 15 August. In advance of this the Royal British Legion was creating a digital map of the Commonwealth African and Asian nations from WW2, together with Nepal, that were part of the war effort in the Asia-Pacific. The map would allow members of the public to leave their Remembrance messages next to a country. Further information would be circulated.

Action: Further information about the VJ Day 75 map to be circulated.

21. Dr Crabtree said that, very sadly, online hatred continued to be an issue. This had most recently been triggered in relation to the artist known as Wiley, who had put out Antisemitic tweets, to which there had been responses from the Chief Rabbi and others. There were also ongoing concerns from within other communities about attacks on individuals or particular organisations. The FCF was likely to be coming back to such issues of online hatred and bigotry. This was noted.

Action: Online hatred to be discussed at a future FCF meeting.

Agenda Item 7: Date of next meeting

22. A date for the next meeting would be circulated in due course.

1 September 2020

The points below were made on Chat. Not all meeting participants could see the chat feed as some were participating by telephone. Comments of the kind described by the Chair at Paragraph 4 are included here as an annex 'for information'.

Under Agenda Item 4 on COVID-19 and faith communities

Places of worship, weddings and funerals

- Baptist congregations within the Baptist Union make their own individual church decisions, within the law, on how, when and to what extent to re-open/resume previous activities. The Baptist Union, like many church and other faith national bodies has issued guidelines for congregations to take into account at: <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=257881>