

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2.30pm on Thursday 12 May 2022

by Zoom

Co-Moderators: The Revd Canon Hilary Barber and Mr Malcolm Deboo.

Present: Ervad Yazad Bhadha (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe); Minister David Bruton (Spiritualists' National Union and FCF Moderator); Mrs Gurdeep Kaur Chadha (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)); Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and FCF Moderator); Mr Peter Colwell (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland); Ms Siriol Davies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Together in England); Major Samuel Edgar (Salvation Army); Major David Evans (Salvation Army); Ms Prudence Jones (Pagan Federation); Mr Rajnish Kashyap (Hindu Council (UK)); Mr John Marder (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)); Mr Paras Meisher (Jain Network); the Revd Dr John Parry (United Reformed Church in the UK); Ms Trupti Patel (Hindu Forum of Britain); Mr Neil Pitchford (Druid Network and FCF Moderator); Ms Tracey Prior (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints); Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala (Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB and FCF Moderator); Mr Vinay Shah (Institute of Jainology and FCF Moderator); Dr Vinaya Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)); Mr Umesh Sharma (Hindu Council (UK)); Mr Elliot Vanstone (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales); and Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations)).

Apologies: Inter-Faith Council for Wales; Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain; and Muslim Council of Britain.

Moderator apologies: Mr Hassan Joudi.

In attendance: Mr Ashley Beck; Mrs Hannah Cassidy; and Dr Harriet Crabtree (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

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 Revd Canon Hilary Barber, in the chair, welcomed those present.
2. Apologies were noted.
3. A period of silence was observed, keeping in mind all those working for inter faith understanding and cooperation and also Dr Natubhai Shah MBE, an IFN Trustee, who had sadly died in early March. At the February meeting of the FCF, Dr Shah had given a presentation on the new Jain Centre in London and its planned multi faith space. Dr Shah, who was 89, had played a leading role within the Jain community. He had also been a pioneer and strong supporter of inter faith activity, involved in IFN's work since its earliest days. He had died shortly before IFN's National Meeting and a short remembrance of him had been offered at that by IFN's Executive Director.
4. Canon Barber explained, for the benefit of new members, that the FCF 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 requested a closed session). Minutes would follow the usual style.

Agenda Item 2: COVID-19 and faith communities

6. Canon Barber drew attention to the information in the background note and invited members to note any key developments since the lifting of most COVID-19 restrictions.
7. In discussion the following points were made:
 - Services had been resuming at Sikh gurdwaras, but with limited attendance. Finances were slowly beginning to recover but there were still difficulties. The service of providing langar was beginning to get back to normal.
 - More people had been returning to visit the London Buddhist Vihara for worship and meditation now that restrictions had mostly been lifted. Guided meditation was still being offered online, but people had been gradually starting to return to in-person attendance. Buddha Day and Children's Buddha Day would shortly be celebrated and it was expected that many people would attend.
 - It had been a pleasure to be invited to attend some inter faith iftars in person during Ramadan and it was good that Muslims had been able to hold these together again and to invite guests. [member from a Christian organisation]
 - Members of the Jain community had begun to meet again in person for worship and social gatherings. Over 500 people had attended the One Jain [Institute of Jainology] AGM.
 - Children were returning to participate in language classes at Hindu temples and activities for senior citizens had resumed, as people were beginning to feel more comfortable with this. This was good to see.

Agenda Item 3: Responding to rising cost of living and impacts of poverty in the UK

8. Canon Barber explained that in the light of members' interest in hearing more about different faith perspectives, the FCF Agenda usually included 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.
9. He invited Ms Tracey Prior of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to offer a reflection about the bases for responding to those in need and working for social justice within the Latter-day Saints tradition.
10. Ms Prior thanked IFN for inviting her to offer reflections. A copy of her reflections is at Annex A to these minutes. Canon Barber thanked Ms Prior.
11. Canon Barber drew attention to the information in the Background Note and invited members to discuss their organisations' perspectives on these issues and how they were responding, as individual communities and together at national level.
12. In discussion the following points were made:
 - It was good to hear Ms Prior's reflections and to hear how other faith communities were addressing problems that affected all faiths. Everyone was facing challenging times coming out of the pandemic and dealing with the current economic difficulties. The member would be taking some of Ms Prior's points back to his own community.
 - One member had been a panellist for a Scottish and Southern Electricity Network (SSEN) event. They were also part of a group which met 3 or 4 times a year and one of the issues that had recently come up was the cost of fuel. The energy company had started a few schemes to assist people. Anyone within the UK could register for assistance, even if not a customer of SSEN.
 - During the pandemic, Sewa Day (SD) and Hindu temples had worked together. It was still very important to offer bereavement support, especially for those who had lost the main breadwinner in their family. Some families were very proud and would not accept monetary help or food parcels. The temples were working out how to help those families. SD and the temples helped people no matter what their faith. Greater Manchester was an example of places where temples were working with churches and others. People often did not want to talk about mental health issues, but these were also very important and they needed support. Faith leaders also needed to support one another.

Agenda Item 4: Faith communities and refugee response

13. Canon Barber drew attention to the information in the Background Note and invited members to share news and reflections on faith communities and refugee response.
14. In discussion the following points were made. A response from the Executive Director is in italics.
 - War was terrible and many people were suffering and displaced. Those who were risking their lives to help the injured and refugees were to be admired. Khalsa Aid and the United Sikhs were at the borders of countries with Ukraine and had set up shelter provisions, medical aid and hot food facilities. They were providing shoes for those refugees who had walked a long way. One Sikh refugee had walked for miles to the border carrying on his head sacred texts from the Odessa

gurdwara. These texts were now temporarily being housed at the Sikh National Museum in Derby until they could be returned to the Odessa gurdwara.

- The Salvation Army was relatively new in Eastern Europe but it had been assisting with humanitarian programmes and finding housing for those fleeing Ukraine, in countries bordering it, including Moldova and Poland. The small Salvation Army in Romania had been able to do very good work, partly due to generous financial support from the general public. There was so much sympathy for Ukraine. It was important to reach out to those in need as well as to call out the wickedness of the war. The Salvation Army had raised a lot of money for supporting people affected by the war in Ukraine. It had been agreed that any surplus not used for this would be used in the UK. It was inspiring to see the help that was being given.
- It was heart-warming to hear the stories of what different faiths were doing to support refugees. The Churches Refugee Network had been developing various resources. It was extremely disappointing and angering that the Nationality and Borders Act had been passed into law, as it clearly did not meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Also, many believed that the Rwanda scheme was unworkable, expensive and profoundly immoral.

There had been an usually high amount of joint work by FCF member bodies in regard to the Nationality and Borders Act. This had been particularly around concerns related to people who had a second country that they could be deported to in certain circumstances (and about proposed removal of the right to seek asylum in the first country reached). Perspectives on specifics might differ but handling of response to refugees and asylum seekers had come to the fore more strongly perhaps than at any other point in IFN's history. That had been illustrated to some degree last year by the points made by Lord Singh of Wimbledon and also by the statement made by the FCF: 'A call for safe, humane and dignified treatment of refugees and those seeking asylum'.

- Refugees coming to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) temple were welcomed, regardless of their faith. Recently young people from VHP (UK) had been drawing together supplies to take to the Ukrainian borders, particularly for orphaned children.
- The Hindu Council (UK) and the National Council for Hindu Temples had been working with the Mohan Foundation and had put together a 30-tonne container of easy-to-prepare food, medical equipment, toiletries. It would be going to Ukraine the following day.
- The Hindu Council (UK), Hindu Forum of Britain, National Council of Hindu Temples (UK) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK) were all part of the Hindu Environmental Task Force. Through that route a lot of youngsters, as part of Sewa projects, were doing wonderful work to help children affected. The efforts of so many volunteers had to be openly acknowledged.
- It was good to hear that faith groups were doing so many different things to welcome and support refugees. The latest figures from the Government's 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme showed that 70% of the Ukrainian refugees who had come to the UK were female and educated. Questions had been raised at a recent roundtable about how different organisations could help them to find employment. Consideration was also being given to how to relocate refugees to other parts of the country if their initial potential sponsors did not turn out to be a suitable match. There were a lot of Hindu temples which had a lot of space. They could get together with another community and share resources. Faith communities could also help with finding suitable education for children and supporting mental health.
- The Pagan Federation was not doing anything nationally to respond to refugees but a lot of Pagans were involved locally, particularly through local inter faith

groups, helping Ukrainians from all backgrounds. In Cambridge, for instance, they were providing bicycles and IT equipment. The current situation had been a salutary reminder of the troubled history of Eastern Europe. In Russia over the last 10 to 15 years Pagans had been quite persecuted by the Government through various intermediaries. There was no news so far of any Ukrainian refugees that were Pagan, but they would liaise with the Pagan Federation International to see if there was any need for pastoral support.

Agenda Item 5: Inter faith engagement of faith communities, including plans for marking Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee

15. Canon Barber drew attention to the extract from the latest e-bulletin, at Annex A, with information about the marking of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and invited members to discuss and to share any plans for marking the Platinum Jubilee.
16. Dr Crabtree said that in the last few days details had been emerging of various events. Quite a number of faith communities would be taking part in beacon lighting and there were local examples of inter faith activities, such as Newcastle Council of Faiths holding at Platinum Jubilee tea at a local synagogue.
17. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from the Executive Director are in italics.
 - Halifax Minster (where the Co-Moderator is based) would be hosting a civic service with a strong inter faith element. This would include Christian music and prayers, Sikh drummers, Annapurna dance company, Muslim call to prayer, Calderdale Interfaith Council was playing a leading role in organising this.
 - There was a lot of tree planting going on in the Hindu community for the Queen's Green Canopy. This was in containers at present, as it was not yet planting season again. HCUK and HFB were working together on this, and also on the Big Jubilee Lunch, with Hindu temples across the UK. It was hoped that there would be lots of intergenerational events.
 - Hindu temples would be providing lunches on different days during the week, dedicated to the Queen's service across the last 70 years.
 - The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe was organising a high tea event for the Jubilee. They would be inviting people from different faith communities.
 - A good deal of what the churches were involved in for the Jubilee could be seen at www.ctbi.org.uk/celebrate-the-queens-platinum-jubilee.
18. Canon Barber then invited members to offer updates on any other inter faith engagement.
19. In discussion the following points were made:
 - A service had recently been held at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the 1222 Synod of Oxford. That Synod had brought in a number of antisemitic measures to the medieval church in England, that had led to the expulsion of many Jews during the century that followed.

Agenda Item 6: Issues of current interest and concern

20. Canon Barber, resuming the Chair, 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. None had been notified. In keeping with the FCF's decision about the nature of minutes, this section of the minute would be made public (unless the FCF requested a closed session for all or part of it).

21. In discussion the following points were made:

- Hindus in the UK were upset by anti-Hindu and anti-India sentiment that was being put on social media by certain faith communities. The community was trying to combat that, but it was a peaceful community and it was difficult to keep up. A lot of young people from the Hindu community were saying that they were being harassed because they were Hindu. People in this country had to realise that everyone had to live together. The anti-Hindu sentiment, and calling them fascists, had to stop. Other faith communities needed to help by educating their congregations and dispelling such myths.
- One FCF member said that they had recently had a very good conversation with a Hindu on an underground train, and the importance of hospitality was a key point that had emerged from the conversation. Sharing a meal with someone from another faith, was a good way to break down barriers. People were all human beings. They might hold different doctrinal beliefs, but they could get on if they made an effort. There were too many insular castles. People needed come out from the battlements. The more that was done, the more the values of faiths would become evident.
- Sikhs were upset that they were sometimes referred to in the media as Kalistanis. That should not happen.
- One issue of great concern was the problems that had arisen about the border between Northern Ireland and Britain, as a result of Brexit, and the propensity for difficulties that might arise. It was important to pray for a good solution for everyone.
- There was a need to check material in the media and also to be mindful that some incidents overseas had an impact on inter faith relations in this country.

Note: it was agreed to treat some discussion in this section relating to an overseas matter as 'closed' and that the discussion arising from it (verbal and in the Chat), not be included in the minutes.

Mr Malcolm Deboo joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 7: Religion and media

22. Canon Barber drew attention to the information in the Background Note and to the draft Note on Faith Communities and Media Coverage at Annex B. He underlined that the draft was currently not for wider circulation. He invited members to offer any points on the draft Note.
23. Dr Crabtree said that it might be helpful for her to speak with her Religion Media Centre (RMC) contact about the Note after the FCF had offered any points and before it was put back to the Board for agreement. The Note was, of course, from the perspective of the faith communities, and the RMC had chosen not to be involved in creating a joint note, so it would just be put to the RMC to double check.

24. In discussion the following points were made:
- The Note was very useful and thanks were due to the Executive Director for the time and effort put into producing it.
 - The Note was very helpful. All faith communities would have experienced times when media coverage had not gone as well as hoped. Any material to broaden understanding was very useful. It would be helpful to be able to circulate it more widely when it had been finalised.
 - The Note was good and helpful.
25. The FCF agreed that it was content with the note, subject to any significant points raised by the Executive Director's contact at the RMC.

Action: Executive Director to speak with her contact at the RMC about the draft Note on Faith Communities and Media Coverage.

INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION

[Paragraphs 26 to 42]

Close of meeting

43. Canon Barber thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions. The date for the next FCF meeting would be circulated in due course.

12 July 2022

Reflection about the bases for responding to those in need and working for social justice within the Latter-day Saints tradition – Tracey Prior

Thank you. I'm grateful for this opportunity to introduce today's topic through the lens of my faith.

As has been said, I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and I self-define as a Christian. In the New Testament Mark said: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. This is the first Commandment. And the second is like, namely this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other Commandment greater than these."

In our faith tradition, all people are considered to be brothers and sisters and children of God and we are required to help each other. As no doubt do many of you, we pay a 10% tithe which goes to support many activities. We also have a very active welfare programme which we are stepping up this year. We fast once a month and pay a fast offering that is at least equivalent to the meals that we would have eaten in that period. In this way we take on someone else's hunger for a day and given them our food. The local clergy administer funds to those in their area who find themselves in immediate need. Most often it is in the form of shopping for food or paying a bill. This is how a local faith leader will look after the local membership when it comes to administering for immediate need.

We also make humanitarian offerings to Latter-day Saints Charities, which is the humanitarian arm of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Its purpose is to relieve suffering, foster self-reliance and provide opportunities for service. It provides money and goods and feet on the ground where needed. There is a website which is a gift to the community and is gradually growing in the UK. It's a volunteering site called 'Just Serve'.

I currently sit on a recently formed emergency response council for the care of the poor and needy in the UK. We partner with faiths and charities and we monitor need as it comes in and try to respond appropriately. Of course, there is never complete balance in this type of activity because, with a finite amount of resources, whenever you are giving to one cause you are denying another. This year we have made extra money available over and above the normal fast offering for local units to respond to extra need as it arises, because we have been seeing extra need with regard to refugees from Ukraine, to other refugees and general local needs. Local leaders have been asked this year to look more closely at need and to take more time to look out for people.

We believe that faith and work go hand in hand and that we are saved by grace but after we have done as much as we possibly can to help our fellows. We all know that the impacts of increasing poverty and the rising cost of living are going to impact all of us in some way. Through the wonderful work of inter faith we are now in a position as faith groups to be able to work together when needed. We respect each other and have greater trust, helped by inter faith engagement.

Our Church is a small cog (150,000 members in the UK) in a large machine, as are all faith groups. That machine is geared up to help the poor and needy. This year we know that we need to be more organised and more purposeful in our efforts. We can do more.

So let us look at our common goals this year and combine our efforts to reach as many people as we can. As we plan and develop our networks and logistics, we can be more organised, more aligned and more effective. We can work together for the common good.