

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

Minutes of Meeting of Member IFN Educational and Academic Bodies and National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations

from 2.15pm to 4.30pm on Monday 27 March 2023

via Zoom

Present: Mrs Charanjit AjitSingh (International Interfaith Centre); Mrs Barbara Butler (Christians Aware Faith Awareness); Ms Georgina Bye (Council of Christians and Jews); Dr David Capey (East of England Faiths Agency CIC); Mrs Cynthia Capey (East of England Faiths Agency CIC); Mr Iyadh Daoud (South East England Faiths Forum); Ms Lindy Diamond (Nisa Nashim); Mrs Sheila Gewolb (National Association of SACREs); Beverley Gibson (University of Lincoln Multi-Faith Chaplaincy); Ms Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal (Nisa Nashim); Mr Pejman Khojasteh (International Association for Religious Freedom, British Chapter); Imam Rashid Musa (University of Salford Faith Centre); the Revd Dr Alan Race (World Congress of Faiths); Mr Jim Robertson (North East Regional Faiths Network); Mr Mandip Singh (United Religions Initiative); Mr Martin Weightman (All Faiths Network); and Mr Phil Ybring (Faiths Forum for London).

In attendance: Dr Harriet Crabtree; Mr Ashley Beck; and Aled Vernon-Rees (Inter Faith Network for the UK)

Apologies: The ASHA Foundation; Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme; City, University of London Chaplaincy; Durham University Chaplaincy Network; Faculty of Humanities and Per

forming Arts at the University of Wales, Trinity St David; the Faith and Belief Forum; the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby; the Religious Education Council of England and Wales; Religions for Peace (UK), the St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society; and Wales Association of SACREs

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Context

1. Dr Harriet Crabtree welcomed participants.

Agenda Item 2: Apologies

2. Apologies were noted.

Agenda Item 3: Brief Round Table Discussions

3. All present introduced themselves briefly.

Agenda Item 3: Update on IFN

4. Mr Ashley Beck talked briefly about IFN's work and highlighted some of this.
5. The largest project that IFN had been involved in was Inter Faith Week, which took place each year in November. Inter Faith Week 2022 had been very

successful and the Week had had the highest ever number of both activities held and organisations taking part. The Week continued to be used as a context to try new things as well as to do tried and tested activities. One of the things that had marked the Week in recent years was messages of support and messages linked to themes of the Week from faith leaders. The 2022 theme had been 'religious literacy'.

6. IFN had also held its regular pattern of meetings, bringing together: local inter faith groups; national faith community representative bodies; and educational and academic bodies. IFN had held webinars such as one on the Inter Faith Buddies scheme, an initiative which had been piloted by IFN in 2020. It had also continued to work on publications which had been delayed by the pandemic such as a report on women's inter faith activity at the local level in the UK.
7. IFN had also been working toward its next two-year strategic plan and had been working on a theory of change process.

Agenda Item 5: Minutes of meeting on 7 September 2022

8. The minutes of the previous meeting on 7 September 2022 were agreed.

Agenda Item 6: the Coronation, the Big Help Out and 'Faith Walks'

9. Dr Crabtree highlighted the upcoming Big Help Out and Coronation Faith Walks. Much of the planning for these was in its final phases. She was aware that many of the participants present were planning events linked to the Coronation.
10. The Big Help Out would involve a wide range of events. IFN had recently sent a Circular about it. There was a programme of work involving faith communities and also a launch. On 8 May, there would be a day to kick off a programme to get more people involved in volunteering. The Big Help Out was linked to the Coronation of King Charles III but would stretch across a wider period of time, including Volunteers' Week and Thank You Day. It was a great opportunity for inter faith bodies and also educational bodies to reach out and encourage more people to volunteer with them and also to encourage their own members to volunteer to try new things. There was an app which could be downloaded from the app store. There was also going to be a 'Faith Activation Day' and many exciting things would be happening for that.
11. Participants were invited to share some of the events that they would be involved in for the Big Help Out.
12. Ms Georgina Bye said that the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) had been involved with some of the conversations about the Big Help Out and the 'Faith Activation Day'. For the latter, the Together Coalition had encouraged various sectors to get involved and use the Coronation as an opportunity to engage volunteers. CCJ had been encouraging branches of their organisation and others to add an element of social action to their events, whether that be a litter pick, planting projects or other local environmental projects. They already knew of a

few communities that would be holding events, as well as some inter faith teams and get-togethers around the period of the Coronation.

13. Mr Mandip Singh said that the United Religions Initiative (URI) had been focusing on homelessness and towards getting a longer food-based outreach project running in time for the Big Help Out. To achieve this, they were looking at harnessing existing organisations to distribute food which would be provided by gurdwaras. Following reports of school children not getting breakfast, it had also been looking at launching a project which supported schools in providing breakfast for school children in deprived areas.
14. Mr Philip Ybring said that the Faith & Belief Forum would shortly be holding an online briefing for faith communities and inter faith organisations. It would focus on what the Big Help Out was and how people could get involved. Speakers would include representatives from the Together Coalition and from a variety of different faith groups.
15. Dr Crabtree invited general reflections about the experiences of those bodies present of engaging with the planning for the Coronation and how that fitted with their work more generally.
16. Cynthia Capey said that the East of England Faiths Agency (EEFA) was planning to give the Royal Family a gift of its new game 'Staging Posts on the Journey of Life'. The game had taken three years for them to produce. They had drawn on prose and poetry from ancient and modern times, from a variety of cultures, to get people to reflect on their personal and British heritage. All the stages of the game had a Shakespeare quotation and a general question. They had already tried it in care homes, schools and dinner parties. Some questions were fun and others more serious.
17. Mr Jim Robertson, of the North East Regional Faith Network (NERFN), spoke about the Big Help Out's aim to address some of the underlying social issues in the UK. In his experience in the North-East of England, some of the inter faith groups were beginning to recognise the significant economic and social issues in the area. For example, the County Durham Faiths Network would be looking at its next meeting at the Living Wage and how that could be used as a tool to lessen widespread poverty and promote equality. Life expectancy was going down in areas of the North-East. Many faith groups in the North-East were affected by these underlying issues. It was important that these issues were recognised and acknowledged in activities happening to mark the Coronation.
18. Dr Crabtree said that from the events that had already been uploaded to the Big Help Out app, it looked as though there were some organisations dealing with serious issues that were looking for volunteers. She noted a concern that had been raised that some people would not be paid due to the Bank Holiday on 8 May and that volunteers with children might have to find childcare if they wanted to volunteer for the Big Help Out. However, it was important to note that one did not have to volunteer only on that day. It was possible to sign up for all sorts of things that happened on different days.

19. Mrs Barbara Butler commented that Christians Aware Faith Awareness (CFA) would be marking the Coronation by producing resources on reducing food waste.
20. Mr Philip Ybring encouraged everyone to spread the word about the Faith & Belief Forum's briefing on Thursday. It would be very helpful if everyone could share information with their contacts.
21. Dr Crabtree reflected on the launch of the Big Help Out which she and a colleague had attended earlier that week. She had been very struck by a number of the presentations by volunteers. Over the years, IFN had had a number of volunteers who had made an important contribution to its work. In fact IFN's founder director had been a volunteer. He had worked full time on a voluntary basis for 20 years. This was just one example of the important role that volunteers played in charities.

Agenda Item 7: Whistle-stop exchange of information on projects, key news, current concerns and interests

22. It was agreed that each participant would provide a brief update on the work of their organisation.

University of Salford Faith Centre (USFC)

23. Imam Rashid Musa said that:
 - USFC worked closely with Salford Inter Faith Forum, Bolton Inter Faith Council and the Faith Network for Manchester.
 - It had delegated one chaplain as a representative for the University at each neighbouring inter faith organisation. These representatives attended meetings to learn, share and develop joint programmes and events.
 - The organisation's main inter faith work was linked to Inter Faith Week. In previous years, it had organised faith panels and faith discussions on different faiths. These events had involved the chaplains at the University as well as students.
 - This academic year, it had also held two 'Faith Forums', the most recent one had been two weeks ago. This had been an ideal opportunity to host a 'Faith Forum' as three religious festivals were happening at the same time: Easter, Passover, and Ramadan.
 - It had also designed a one-year cultural study programme through which they hoped to develop student enthusiasm through local inter faith work. As part of this, local inter faith groups would visit the university to talk about their work and to raise awareness of important issues such as Islamophobia and Antisemitism. The programme would culminate in a multifaith trip to Jerusalem. The trip was subsidised and students would pay 10-15% of the costs. Part of the programme would also involve the Inter Faith Buddies scheme, in which he had recently participated. Students and staff would be able to participate in different aspects of the scheme.
 - One of the challenges of the trip would involve promoting positive dialogue and discussion on the trip. It had been working with the Forum on Discussion

on Israel and Palestine who were going to train the delegation on difficult dialogue.

24. Dr Crabtree asked whether most of the students were from the Abrahamic faith traditions. Imam Musa said that the student population was very diverse. They didn't have chaplains from every faith tradition, but had other advisors and associates who acted as points of references for faith and belief groups that weren't represented in the chaplaincy.

The National Association of Standing Advisory Committees for Religious Education (NASACRE)

25. Ms Sheila Gewolb said that:
- NASACRE would be having a face-to-face conference in central London for the first time in three years. Every SACRE body throughout England and Wales had been offered the opportunity to send two representatives.
 - It also had a briefing/newsletter that was sent out every few weeks. The participants in this meeting were welcome to give event details to add to the NASACRE briefing/newsletter.
 - SACREs were mandated by government to provide a locally agreed RE syllabus in every one of the 152 local educational authorities. The syllabus for all other subjects was a National one, except for RE. NASACRE existed to support the SACREs.
 - On the SACREs, the format comprised of representatives of the Church of England; all other faiths were welcome to have representatives. They also included local councillors and teachers' representative bodies.
 - You could see how you can become involved by visiting the NASACRE website.
26. She also noted that the RE Council had recently launched a big campaign in partnership with Culham St Gabriel's to recruit RE Teachers. There was such a dearth of people with the necessary knowledge to go out and talk about RE and this campaign was vital.
27. Dr Crabtree suggested that if any of the participants had newsletters or bulletins that they could add information about the RE Council's drive for RE teachers.
28. Cynthia Capey said that the Suffolk syllabus had recently been rewritten under the heading 'Where Do I Stand?'. This could get children more engaged in RE and was an improvement on the previous approach. Ms Gewolb agreed and added that NASACRE was focusing on recommendations from the RE Commission which suggested that they should be moving away from educating solely about recognised religious beliefs and towards looking at worldviews. Every young person had a view about the world, whether or not they had a faith and it was important to recognise this.

The University of Lincoln Multi-Faith Chaplaincy (ULMFC)

29. Ms Beverly Gibson said that:

- ULMFC worked closely with the Student Union at Lincoln University to celebrate religious festivals across campus.
- Its staff team had risen to 23 people and was very diverse. For example, it had recently recruited a Humanist advisor and an advisor from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- It had just organised the 'Faith Spring Festival' which had been very successful. This had included an arts exhibition and a performance from a Jewish band. It had been a great opportunity to celebrate differences and similarities across campus.
- It also organised 'Cosy Café' events and provided support within the community. For example, they gave out hygiene products to students who couldn't afford them.

The All Faiths Network (AFN)

30. Mr Martin Weightman said that:

- AFN had celebrated Inter Faith Week for the past five years by organising an event of music, song, dance, prayer or any cultural expression from a religious perspective. In previous years, this had been held at the Central Gurdwara in London and at the Church of Scientology. It was hoped that this would be developed into more than just a yearly event.
- It had also engaged in a range of inter faith work which primarily consisted of attending different religious events such as a peace symposium for the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.
- It had focused on issues of religious freedom and human rights. AFN was a part of the UK Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief (UKFFRB), a linking body which was composed of different groups concerned about religion or belief in the UK. He had attended a UKFFRB event at 10 Downing Street where he had launched a working group on religious discrimination in Europe.
- The End Islamophobia campaign had recently been launched at the V & A and he had given an interview at the launch.

Christians Aware Faith Awareness (CAFA)

31. Mrs Butler said that:

- CAFA published inter faith books and also had a series on meeting people of other faiths. Its latest book, which it was still finalising, focused on pioneers in inter faith work and life. This mainly focused on people from the Leicester and Leicestershire region, but also had a national focus.
- It also organised courses which would restart in the Spring. The first new one would focus on religion, art and meditation in a number of faiths, and would involve practical opportunities for painting and craft work.
- CAFA ran pilgrimages across the UK. These normally took place in September and involved: walking from place to place; meeting new people in the places; and sharing news and resources with them. Normally, the number of pilgrims

increased as they went from place to place as people at the places of worship joined the group.

- CAFA held webinars on inter faith issues and these normally took place in Inter Faith Week.
- It also had a women's group which normally met in person. Throughout the winter months, they had been meeting on Zoom. The group's composition was very diverse.
- CAFA had also participated in other general work such as tree planting; work in primary schools; and organisation of talks.

The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ)

32. Ms Georgina Bye said that:

- In the previous meeting she had shared that CCJ would be re-launching its Campus Leadership Programme. It now had ten student leaders at six campuses across the country from Scotland to Sussex. This week, participants would be finishing their training, before returning to campuses to run inter faith programmes.
- Some of these students had also spoken to the Inter Faith Network for the UK about their IFW events at Manchester University. They had established a weekly inter faith Lunch Club in Manchester which had really grown. This had meant that many students felt empowered and supported to lead on sharing their experiences, traditions and rituals.
- It had also organised an Israel Palestine Study Tour, where senior Christian and Jewish leaders were taken to visit Israel and Palestine together. It had been a very successful and powerful programme which produced some lovely reflections.
- CCJ was currently planning for its Poland Study Tour for Christian leaders. This was part of their broader work of promoting Holocaust education for Christian clergy.
- It had held a special Holocaust Memorial Day event where second and third generations of survivors were brought together with second and third generation descendants of Nazi perpetrators. They had then engaged in a facilitated conversation which had been very constructive.

East England Faiths Agency (EEFA)

33. Mrs Cynthia Capey said that:

- She was concerned with the way some chaplaincies on campus just focused on helping students from particular faiths rather than helping all students to explore. She wanted to see a democratic approach to chaplaincy where all chaplains worked together to help people of all faiths and beliefs. She had seen an example of this in a hospital context. A few years ago there had been an initiative in Inter Faith Week where Humanists and different faith participants were teamed up with buddies from a different background. She had been teamed up with somebody from Bradford Hospital who had been given the task of reframing the chaplaincy there. It had moved away from having one person in charge of the chaplaincy, become democratic and changed its name. The woman from Bradford hospital subsequently delivered a talk at an EEFA conference in Ipswich on 'chaplaincy for all'.

- During COVID, EEFA had started a network for faith and spirituality in Suffolk so that people could be connected online. This group had picked up about 180 people in two weeks. This included people who were not attached to religious communities, but saw themselves on spiritual journeys and wanted to be involved in inter faith work.

34. Dr David Capey added that he found the faith and spirituality network a very interesting experience. To date, they had 244 people on the list. He hoped that in the future these people would become more actively involved in inter faith work.

The Faith & Belief Forum (FBF)

35. Mr Philip Ybring said that:

- FBF had recently launched a new educational resource, called 'the Art of Q&A'. It was mainly for schools, but could also be used by youth workers, youth groups and other organisations. It focused on unlocking better conversations about sensitive questions on faith, belief and identity.
- It was also about to start recruiting for its latest ParliaMentors leadership programme for students across nine universities in England. This was for young people who had leadership ambitions and wanted to work with people from different faith and belief backgrounds to run social action projects.
- It would also be starting charity recruitment for its annual Interfaith Fun Run. The Run would not be taking place until September, but FBF wanted to enlist charities who would recruit runners who would represent their charity in the run and raise money. Details would be coming up soon.
- FBF had planned some walking together events which would take place in April. These were an opportunity for people from different faith and belief backgrounds to get together to walk and engage in conversation.
- It had also started offering Faith Inclusion Training and consultancy for workplaces.

The International Association for Religious Freedom, British Chapter (IARFBC)

36. Mr Pejman Khojatesh said that:

- IARFBC is the British Chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). Members attended some of the international organisation's events. Historically, IARF had a strong connection to the Unitarians and it would be holding a workshop on the subject of faith and reconciliation as part of the 2023 annual meeting of the General Assembly of Unitarian Free Christian Churches.
- IARFBC was organising an event in collaboration with the World Congress of Faiths to coincide with the International Day of Peace on 21 September. It had approached Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, to speak at the event. The proposal was for her to respond to a number of young people on the subject of 'freedom to believe' and also for her to report on the Government's progress on the FoRB commitments which had been established at the Interministerial Conference on freedom of belief held 16 months earlier.

North East Regional Faiths Network (NERFN)

37. Mr Jim Robertson said that:

- There had been a variety of events across Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham for special occasions such as Holocaust Memorial Day.
- Organisations related to NERFN had launched a variety of initiatives across the North-East. For example, when the Syrian and Afghan refugees had come to County Durham, the local council had asked other local authorities where they had been housing refugees. It had become clear that other councils had been housing refugees in the most disadvantaged areas. Durham Council had instead formed a humanitarian task force to look at how the different faith groups might respond constructively to help the refugee population. This had been very successful.
- County Durham had also held breakfast seminars which brought together officers, elected officials and church people. These events happened at County Hall and had different topics such as 'How do we nurture the prophetic voice of young people?'. They had also discussed topics such as honesty, integrity and public decision making.
- NERFN had hosted a series of 14 workshops which looked at the relationship between faith, health and wellbeing. That had involved the different faiths in each local area.
- Some of the people in the public sphere who had attended the seminars and workshops had said that they realised the important contribution that faiths could make in the public sphere. This was very positive as faith groups were rarely acknowledged or perceived in this way in the public sphere.

Nisa Nisham (NN)

38. Ms Lindy Diamond said that:

- NN had recently hosted an iftar in partnership with the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network. It had also been collaborating with them on a broader scale over the last six months, with events which had focused on refugees living in and around the Barnet area. They aimed to support refugees by creating a supportive and collaborative experience for them.
- NN had been hosting Zoom talks which aimed to bring awareness and create a more nuanced understanding of the kinds of issues being faced by refugees around the world. These talks had also brought in concepts from the Jewish refugee experience in the Holocaust and explored parallels to modern day refugees' experiences as a way of helping people.
- NN's regional groups had been hosting events that focused on the needs of refugees in each local area.
- It had also held Coffee Mornings which were organised under the auspices of the Persian Advice Bureau in Finchley. Members of NN often went to those meetings to provide support, but also just to meet new people.
- NN had a few events coming up such as an Eid celebration where it would be hosting an event for some of the children of the families of refugees. It would also be creating care packs for refugees staying in hotels in different areas and had been supporting the charity 'Sebby's Corner' which gave supplies to disadvantaged families across South-East England.

- It had also hosted events for International Women's Day.
- NN shared information about Mitzvah Day to everybody in its network. Mitzvah Day was international and NN was all over the UK, so many NN regional groups organised events for the occasion.
- Finally, NN's teachers' group recently went on a synagogue tour and its politicians' group would be meeting next month.

The South-East England Faiths Forum (SEEFF)

39. Mr Iyadh Daoud said that:

- SEEFF had recently held a Zoom event on faith and the environment which had been well-attended.
- It was planning hybrid, in person and Zoom events with a focus on a variety of faith subjects. These would begin in September and would be organised in conjunction with universities and educational departments. It was hoped that students would be encouraged to participate.
- It also hoped to organise a conference in the Autumn for the first time since COVID.
- The number of people on SEEFF's board had unfortunately gone down because of COVID.

40. Dr Crabtree said that a number of inter faith organisations had had real challenges keeping people involved in organisations during and following COVID but also for other reasons. One issue often mentioned was that some had aging committees and memberships and that their work did not easily accommodate young people whose commitments did not enable them, for example, to attend daytime events. That's why it was positive to hear about work in universities and other contexts which could encourage younger people to really get interested in this area of work.

United Religions Initiative UK (URI UK)

41. Mr Singh said that:

- URI UK was an international organisation which had a branch in Europe and the UK.
- The UK branch had only recently re-launched and was going through a process of reviewing whether the activities that it had used to organise remained relevant and worthwhile.
- It was participating in a number of Europe-wide webinars on different topics and areas. Last year, members of URI had participated in one on 'food and fasting' across a variety of faith traditions.
- Last year, it had also organised a fringe event for the Freedom of Religion or Belief Ministerial Conference. It was now working on developing closer ties with the University of Coventry and looking at how it could extend that relationship into academia and an increase in inter faith work by students.
- URI UK was looking at launching an inter faith podcast. He might ask some of the people present to come and speak on that.

World Congress of Faiths (WCF)

42. The Revd Dr Alan Race said that:

- There had recently been a conference at the University of Birmingham to celebrate the 100th birthday (had he been alive) of John Hick who had published the seminal book 'Religious Pluralism in Global Perspective'. John Hick had been a very major figure in the theological and philosophical explorations of inter faith relations. The conference was intended to promote his thought and keep his reflections relevant to the contemporary context. It had been hosted by a Hindu academic and a multitude of people from different religions had taken part.
- WCF had recently produced a book called 'Unutterable Joy'. It was going to launch this at St John's College in Oxford in May. The book was a compendium of what he called 'the best of WCF' which included its talks, presentations and lecture throughout the years.
- At the beginning of August, WCF would be participating in Inter Faith Awareness Week 2023, which was promoted by the World Interfaith Network. The event would be 45 minutes long and part of it would involve WCF members talking about how and why inter faith work was important.

The International Interfaith centre (IIC)

43. Mrs Charanjit Ajit Singh said that:

- COVID had affected IIC quite badly; it had lost one of its trustees and another was unwell.
- There were some plans in the pipeline but these were not at a stage where they could be shared.
- At the time of the King's Coronation there would be a number of events held in relation to the Buddha's birthday. It would also be the birthday anniversary of one of the Sikh faith's 18th century leaders and so quite a number of Sikh groupings would also be congregating on 8 May. That was likely to mean that they would not get involved in the Big Help Out on that particular day.

Agenda 8: Finding and creating spaces for dialogue

44. Dr Crabtree introduced the final agenda item which focused on finding and creating spaces for dialogue and included a short presentation about the 'Inter Faith Buddies' one-to-one dialogue scheme.

45. Aled Vernon-Rees, Project Assistant at IFN, spoke about its 'Inter Faith Buddies Scheme'. This was a scheme which brought together individuals to engage in dialogue and discussion. The two individuals were of different faiths or non-religious beliefs. The 'buddies' kept in touch on a weekly basis for an agreed period of time, either in person or online, and talked about what was important to them in their faith and in the context of the wider community as well.

46. The scheme allowed participants to choose or develop questions on which to share their thoughts and experiences. For example, they could ask a question about how their faith or non-religious belief shaped their lives, their approach to

particular issues such as social justice, the environment and education, and how it encouraged service to others in society.

47. The process and the scheme were flexible. Participants agreed in advance their expectations about the frequency, medium or duration of the contact, any boundaries for the discussion, and their expectations for the process. The process could lead to longer term conversation and discussion, collaborations and partnership but that was not a built in expectation.
48. The scheme had also been run by local inter faith groups like Surrey Faith Links and Woking People of Faith (a great video could be seen on YouTube where they talked about their experiences during the week). Some schools and universities, had also used the scheme, modified as necessary. A few other organisations had used it to partner with another organisation or another institution.
49. Over the past couple of years, IFN had organised a scheme with Humanists UK and helped them find buddies from different faith or beliefs across the UK.
50. Dr Crabtree thanked Aled Vernon-Rees for the overview. She asked participants what they had found were productive ways to open up conversations and to initiate new dialogues and conversations.
51. Dr Capey said that he recalled a useful URI scheme called 'Emerging Visionaries'. This had involved older people being paired up with younger people to share different ideas with each other. He thought that this was a great way for different generations to share ideas and learn from each other. Mr Singh said that the 'Emerging Visionaries' scheme was one of the initiatives that URI was considering reviving. It had found in the past that it was very useful and had attracted sizeable numbers of participants. People had left the process feeling they had gained something and made friendships.
52. Dr Crabtree asked participants if their organisations used online dialogue or whether they tended to work mainly with people in person? During COVID, people had had to adopt and get used to online discussion as there was no alternative. There were real positives. For example, if you were elderly or disabled or had caring commitments, it could enable you to reach out and be in touch with people more easily. But the IFN office increasingly heard people saying they want to come back into in person physical encounter as something was missing in purely online engagement.
53. Mr Singh and Dr Capey said that their organisations both used online meetings but they found that in person events were much more personal and powerful ways of engaging in dialogue.
54. Ms Gewolb said that she worked with police recruits through the St Philip's Centre in Leicester, many of whom were from diverse religious backgrounds. Difficult dialogues were not just about explaining different theological views, but the police especially wanted to know from a Jewish perspective how they could work with Jewish people. If they were from Muslim-Palestinian backgrounds, the conversation always would come back to Israel. Although that was not what she

was there for she could not easily say at that point in the discussion that she did not want to talk about it. It was a very sensitive issue that had to be handled understandingly from both sides. During the last meeting they had had in September, they had talked about boundaries and she had explained what it felt like to be a Jewish person in Britain. This had required a lot of preparation. When you were not sure who you were going to meet when you were talking to young police recruits, you had to be open to their perspectives which could be very difficult. Those conversations had to be face-to-face as they could be hard.

55. Mr Weightman agreed that face-to-face meetings were the best for inter faith encounter. He had recently attended a Crawley Interfaith event at the Gurdwara in Crawley. It was essentially a presentation on Sikhism and had involved people from a variety of different religions. The conversation after the presentation had been very detailed and involved a Q&A with a baptised Sikh who had given in depth answers to complicated questions. When AFN hosted their music cultural events, those were to establish a foundation for people to have an understanding of each other, rather than to go into detail. From that foundation, deeper understanding could be developed about different religious traditions.
56. Ms Bye said that what was important was to think about how one created a space and how one held and facilitated that space. CCJ had been working very hard on setting the right tone in its programmes and on co-creating ground rules for respect and conversation. Dialogue was not about convincing someone or changing their mind but, rather, creating environments where people could 'lovingly disagree'. She had seen this right space be created in both online and face-to face settings and some online frameworks had been surprisingly good in terms of how powerful the intimate environment was.
57. Mr Ybring agreed with Ms Bye's point about the importance of setting a space for dialogue. It was crucial to ensure that some of the ground rules were co-created and that the space created was for dialogue rather than debate. The idea that you could locate differences of opinion was exciting rather than threatening. Having people work on a common project or engaged in some of joint inter faith action could provide a very solid foundation for wider dialogue. Because you had built that joint identity, you had a shared identity as members of the project and any differences or disagreements that you face would likely be easier to deal with. You needed a little bit of face-to-face interaction to prepare for this side-by-side work. However, face-to-face and side-by-side action could be a very powerful combination which could help people have very difficult conversations.
58. Dr Crabtree said that social action or practical activities could sometimes be helpful in enabling inter faith conversation. You could find yourself having a conversation in the course of doing something. This arose naturally and could develop. She gave as an example Hounslow Friends of Faith Women's Knitting Group. What other kinds of contexts encouraged people to come naturally into dialogue?
59. Dr Race said that when you organised a day event which was based on discussion you could still arrange the space to make it more interactive. He used the example of 'café church' where people sat round tables rather than in rows

and listened in on conversation. This allowed people to talk to each other about the presentation and about the material that had been given to them. You could structure an event in a way that would let you build up resources and conversation as the day progressed.

60. Ms Gewolb shared her involvement in a new interactive project called 'Dialogue with Dignity' which was primarily organised by the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network. This involved bringing together people of different faiths to look at religious scriptures in an interactive way. She was organising one of these events in Cardiff.
61. Dr Crabtree wondered if people might find it useful to visit each other's organisations to learn about their work and particular dialogue techniques. Some local inter faith groups visited each other and it was a great way to learn from each other.

Agenda Item 9: Closing reflections from the Chair

62. Dr Crabtree thanked everybody for their contributions and brought the meeting to a close.

23 January 2024