

## THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

### Note of Link Meeting for Local Inter Faith Organisations in the North West

from 2pm to 4pm on Thursday 30 September 2021

by Zoom

**Present:** Mr Cedric Knipe (Altrincham Inter Faith Group); Mr Andy Divall (Blackpool Faith Forum); Mr Philip Austin (Bolton Inter Faith Council); Mr Shabaz Ahmed (Building Bridges Pendle – Inter Faith Community Project); the Revd Canon Paul Cannon (Bury Faith Forum); Rabbi Warren Elf MBE (Faith Network 4 Manchester); Ms Megan Harrison (Faiths United Tameside); The Revd Jean Hurlston (Faiths United Tameside); Ms Annie Merry (Faiths4Change); Mr Peter Lumsden (Lancashire Forum of Faiths); Ms Joyce Sabour (Lancashire Forum of Faiths); Mr Fazal Rahim (Oldham Inter Faith Forum); Ms Savannah Dable (Preston Faith Forum); and Mr Malcom Craig (Preston Faith Forum).

**In attendance:** Dr Harriet Crabtree (Chair); Dr David Hampshire; and Mr Ashley Beck (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

#### Agenda Item 1: Welcome and introduction

1. Dr Harriet Crabtree welcomed participants to this regional link meeting for local inter faith organisations in the North West of England. These 'link' meetings were held so that people could exchange good practice and news and discuss issues of common concern. In some cases local groups already met within sub-regional areas, for example the North West there were such opportunities for groups within Greater Manchester. However, it had been found that groups found cross-regional meetings such as this one to be helpful and so the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) continued to hold them. IFN link meetings used to be held in conjunction with the regional faith forums, most of which sadly no longer existed.
2. The meetings formed part of IFN's overall work, which was to promote good inter faith relations and support the work that people were doing to that end. The present meeting was held about six weeks before Inter Faith Week and time had been included for participants to share their plans for the Week.
3. The meeting would be minuted and participants would be sent the minutes in draft for clearance. If a participant preferred that a point be minuted they were asked to say so. Screenshots of the meeting would be taken for social media purposes; if participants did not wish to have their photograph used for such purposes, they should indicate. No objections to use of photographs were raised.

## **Agenda Item 2: Inter Faith Network news update**

4. Dr Crabtree spoke about how IFN had been assisting people during the pandemic by supporting faith and inter faith responses. Part of that had been helping with skills for digital engagement, for example through the delivery of digital surgeries run by IFN's Inter Faith Development Office Mr Ashley Beck. IFN had also continued its core work for increased inter faith understanding and cooperation for the common good, such as linking and working with national faith community bodies, local, regional inter faith organisations and educational and academic bodies.

## **Agenda Item 3: Inter faith activity and #COP26**

5. Dr Crabtree said that IFN had been working with Faith for the Climate - <https://www.faithfortheclimate.org.uk/> in the run up to COP26 to highlight the ways that faith groups were preparing and encourage involvement. If there were participants whose groups were doing work related to 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) - or environmental work more generally – they might like to let Faith for the Climate know.
6. Ms Annie Merry, Director of Faiths4Change, was welcomed to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.
7. Ms Annie Merry said she was very pleased to join the meeting. She noted that Faiths4Change had for a number of years had offices based in Building Bridges Burnley. She shared her PowerPoint slides for those in attendance and for the minutes. (A copy of her PowerPoint slides is attached with these minutes.) Her key points were as follows:
  - Faiths4Change is an environmental charity with inter faith roots and a local focus. It began in 2004 as a project started by the former Bishop of Liverpool James Jones in partnership with senior faith leaders from across Merseyside and became an independent charity in 2010.
  - Faiths4Change facilitates an umbrella group, the Faith and Climate Network, working with faith communities local. The Network has worked on the Paris Agreement, COP26, the UK 2050 target, and local actions and cooperation.
  - Faiths4Change has always worked on climate change but had previously had more of a health focus, climate change not having been top of the political agenda.
  - Since 2017, Faiths4Change has run a series of inquiry events during Inter Faith Week, working with faith communities to look at actions that they were or wanted to take in relation to climate change, challenges they faced and key areas for focus.
  - In 2018, a Faith and Climate Network event was hosted during Inter Faith Week by the Wirral Dean Centre, a mosque in Birkenhead. It brought together representatives from 56 different faith groups from across the city region. It opened with a presentation on some Islamic teachings on caring for the environment and had a series of short talks and a workshop from Energy Projects Plus on energy and climate change.
  - Faiths4Change has developed projects at a strategic level, primarily about working at local level.

- The Wirral has had an active climate change strategy and a climate change team which has continued its work throughout the austerity period. The strategy is strong on working with faith communities and recognising their role in engaging the local community and not just their own faith communities.
- Faiths4Change's key projects include leading on the carbon net zero programme with the Diocese of Liverpool, the 2030 programme of which works directly with churches.
- Faiths4Change continues also to work with other faith communities across the Wirral on climate change strategy and action, using cluster-based approach.
- It is about to start work with the Mersey Forest, working across Merseyside and Cheshire on tree planting and aftercare with faith communities.
- To understand where COP26 came from and where it is going, it is important to understand that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was created in 1992 and was an international agreement on climate action. The UNFCCC formally recognised (for the first time ever) that the changes in greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and that rising temperatures were a result of human action.
- The UNFCCC had 195 signatories. This was the first time that countries around the world came together to negotiate and to take action on five key areas:
  - Mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, such as reducing gas emissions;
  - Adapting to climate change in recognition that climate change was happening, that adaptations were needed and there was no way for climate change to stop happening;
  - Reporting from national emissaries to obtain a global picture of the situation in order to make plans for change;
  - Financing of climate action in developing countries and recognition that developing countries may be affected most adversely by climate change but had not contributed as significantly to the factors causing climate change; and
  - Preparations for climate change.
- The UNFCCC is the root of the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and The Paris Agreement (2015).
- The Paris Agreement is unusual itself as a significant step forward in identifying an opportunity to create five year plans that all signatories agree to make. These plans have to be worked through with national carbon budgets, known as Nationally Determined Contributions. The five year plans made must be brought forward and shared with other signatory countries to be negotiated to create the next five-year plan. The Paris Agreement also recognised and required economic and social transformation as part of tackling climate change.
- COP 26 is rooted in the UNFCCC 1992 framework and is the twenty sixth UN Climate Change COP and the biggest international summit that the UK has ever hosted. During COP 26, the UK, along with the other signatories, will be sharing their five-year plans, what they have done since 2015 and where they will be going beyond that. Negotiations will take place throughout the twelve-day conference and anticipation has grown about the increased challenges to be faced. Implementing simpler actions, which should have already been done at but have not been actioned as yet, may become harder in light of new challenges.

- The root of COP 26 remains the UNFCCC with the recognition of the global consequences of greenhouse emissions and the need to tackle these starting at global level, then at national and at local authority levels.
- The UK has one of the most stringent targets set by an independent committee on climate change in that it aims to be carbon net zero by 2050. This means that any carbon created by the UK's activities (such as from the energy industry) has to be offset. This might be through technology, tree planting or various other ways. However, the UK is a long way off from the plans it set for the last five years. As reported in the press, the UK is set to increase its carbon emissions if certain planned projects go ahead, such as a new coal mine in Cumbria, oil exploration off Shetland and investment in Blue Hydrogen (which is based on fossil fuel gas).
- Local actions generate ideas, interest, partnerships and opportunities to be brought to the attention of the world leaders, including the UK's Prime Minister and the President of the conference, who will be gathering at COP 26. The need to act, and the strength of feeling on this matter in the people in the UK and worldwide, will also be brought to their attention
- Countries who have done the least damage to the climate, suffer the most from the most and this remains an issue. Climate change is therefore a social justice issue – hence the calls for 'climate justice'.
- Local actions have been taking place. Hope for the Future (<https://www.hfff.org.uk/>) is working to train local people, particularly faith communities and local environment groups, on how to engage with their MPs on climate change. Specific work on fuel poverty and home insulation has been done, particularly in Merseyside due to the nature of the local housing stock.
- There is a need to work together as the way forward.
- Faiths4Change has delivered accredited carbon literacy courses and has worked with faith communities to agree to undertake significant action. Meeting participants might wish to change to a 100% renewable energy tariff: a simple thing that makes a big difference to one's carbon footprint.
- The Young Christian Climate Network is organising five climate relay walks and a Rise to the Moment Campaign. This campaign involves prayers being written onto folded paper boats in recognition that although everyone is in the same situation – or in the same boat as it were (although due to differences in geographical location the consequences of climate change will be experienced differently around the world.)
- Faiths4Change will be creating digital, post COP26 action packs in conjunction with the Diocese of Liverpool and other places of worship in the Wirral. These will encourage people to take simple actions such as a switch to renewable energy.
- There is an unusual coalition across the Liverpool City region, which brings a diverse range of environmental groups, such as Extinction Rebellion, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace together with local environmental groups, citizens groups and faith communities. Coalition members support one another in the sharing of actions, such as protests. A recent protest was held at the port of Liverpool by a group called Cut Carbon, Not Forests. This was to highlight the transfer and transport out of Liverpool port by train across from Merseyside of biofuel burnt in the Drax Power Station in Yorkshire. Those

particular biofuels contribute to the climate change problem as they are harvested from virgin wood in the eastern United States.

- Faiths4Change has worked with a tree planting project of small faith communities where the community has decided to hold a day of action by planting trees, naming the areas 'COPSE 26'.
- Over the last 17 years since Faiths 4 Change began its work, climate change has presented an opportunity for understanding and cooperation between faith communities and local partners. Meeting participants could look at joining in and creating local activities such as growing food and planting trees. She would be happy to provide more ideas and information beyond the meeting.
- Revd Mike Loach, from an Anglican church in the Wirral, was part of the COPSE 26 tree planting initiative. His church is working towards an Eco Church Gold Award. He is a Cool Places of Worship group facilitator which Faiths4Change has worked. He has said "We are a group of faiths working as one".

[Ms Merry showed a picture of faith communities working together to create a garden design, taken in the garden of St Michaels in the City with a volunteer holding a potato that Faiths4Change had harvested, shaped like a heart. ]

8. Dr Crabtree thanked Ms Merry for her presentation and invited to raise questions or comments.
9. Mr Fazal Rahim (Oldham Inter Faith Forum) thanked Ms Merry for her presentation. He commented that heating large places of worship was not only expensive but costly to the environment. Large amounts of water were used in mosques and the Muslim community. He wanted to know how to collect the water from the large roofs of the mosques for use in a more professional manner - currently the mosque used a crude container to collect and transfer water for reuse by the community. He also wanted to know how faith communities might harvest free electricity, for example through using solar panels on roofs. He noted that solar panels were costly and might not be suitable for listed buildings such as some churches.
10. Ms Merry said significant investment was needed for funds to be made available for the purposes described. There were low-cost loans available (or similar for faith communities in particular) to adapt buildings. She offered examples were offered of adapted buildings and newly built ones, such as the Eco Mosque in Cambridge. She said that there were a number of good examples of adaptations made to Grade One Listed Buildings. The adaptations were costly but there were solutions to be found. Those wishing to make contact for sharing of information and further signposting were invited to do so.
11. Dr Crabtree thanked Ms Merry and highlighted that Eco Church (<https://ecochurch.arocho.org.uk/>) and Eco Synagogue (<https://ecosynagogue.org/>) as useful initiatives. She signposted Eco Mosque and said IFN had contacts in other national faith communities who were working initiatives of a similar nature. Participants could contact Ms Merry ([annie@faiths4change.org.uk](mailto:annie@faiths4change.org.uk)) or IFN for more information.

12. Mr Philip Austin (Bolton Interfaith Council) commented that Bolton counsellors had published a Climate Change Strategy, having been encouraged to declare a climate emergency. Bolton had a structure in place called Bolton 2030, which brought together the business, public, and voluntary sectors to work on a range of social issues in the community. The opportunity for working at a local level was there and it was time to encourage the council do what they could in partnership with local groups, given the scarcity of money in local councils. He highlighted the success of faith communities in Greater Manchester in addressing health issues by working with the health and social care sector and the role that faith communities have in taking the opportunities that frameworks from action on climate present.
13. Mr Peter Lumsden (Lancashire Forum of Faiths) reflected on the sobering statement made regarding the UK targets not being met despite the UK hosting COP26. He sought advice and insight from Ms Merry on lobbying decision makers.
14. Ms Merry said that lobbying was important and it was her belief that faith communities could make significant difference in that way because of the size of their membership She again recommended Hope for the Future, noting that it offered training across the country including equipping people with knowledge about how to hold MPs and the government to account. This was vital given that we could each affect 60% of our own carbon footprint but the other 40% could only be addressed by actions of the government and industry.
15. Ms Merry offered to share the presentation slides. She was happy to be contacted directly: [annie@faiths4change.org.uk](mailto:annie@faiths4change.org.uk).
16. Dr Crabtree thanked Ms Merry for her wide-ranging presentation and responses to questions. It had been very good to have her input at this meeting.

*Ms Merry left the meeting.*

#### **Agenda Item 4: Round table sharing of news, information and ideas**

17. Round table reports and sharing of information and ideas followed. Each group was invited to share and then questions were invited, either after the individual input or after a set of inputs.

*Altrincham Interfaith Group*

18. Mr Cedric Knipe said that:
  - AIFG is more of a social inter faith group rather than a political one.
  - The group is to have its first inter faith related face to face meeting of any kind for two years that evening when the committee will meet.
  - An Annual Memorial Lecture in Memory of Alf Keeling, the founder of Altrincham Inter Faith Group (AIFG), will be held close to inter Faith Week. It has been decided this event will be held virtually.
  - An annual inter faith shared meal is planned for February 2022.

- AIFG will be discussing whether or not it will support particular Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Panel initiatives, one of which is related to climate change.
19. Dr Crabtree thanked Mr Knipe. She commented on the significance of memorial events, such as the one for Alf Keeling (whom she remembered well). They helped groups keep significant members in memory and were an encouragement to others.

*Bolton Inter Faith Council*

20. Mr Philip Austin said that Mr Hirendra Patel had sent apologies due to conflicting commitments. He said that:
- Up until 2019, Bolton Inter Faith Council (BIFC) received local government funding for a paid secretary/ coordinator. The group had had residual funds to use beyond that point to maintain the post filled by Stephanie Dermott. During the early COVID period, she played a networking role, disseminating information and keeping in touch with faith groups. She did so until the end of May 2021. She subsequently left the role to take up a full-time job elsewhere.
  - The local council no longer funds directly. Now funding is fed through a combination of public and private bodies, for example Bolton's Fund. BIFC has been successful in securing funding from the latter for purposes: first, to develop Bolton's existing Faith Trail programme, albeit in a somewhat smaller way; and second, in partnership with the Bolton Unity Project, an alliance of faith and non-faith organisations, to work on a community cohesion project.
  - Mr Patel is paid to do work on both of these projects on a part-time basis.
  - The COVID period has had quite an impact on BIFC's energies, both spiritual and emotional, with many of the group struggling over the last year.
  - The group's last few meetings have been in person. That has been a bonus as Zoom has not worked well for it.
  - For Inter Faith Week the group is looking at what it can do, outside of the funded work that it has, perhaps more of the kind of friendship activities: perhaps an inter faith walk and a Zoom event for those who are not ready for in person events, may be put on in addition to an, as yet, unconfirmed event.
  - The need to bring new people into the committee has been identified as the group has lost some active members and the remaining ones are feeling rather tired.
  - BIFC is planning to hold a strategic review in the latter part of the year, looking at other possible projects beyond the funded work. The aim is to enrich the overall work, creating new connections with other parts of the faith world in its area.
21. Dr Crabtree commented on BIFC's past high-profile work over a number of years with young people. Its youth inter faith ambassador programme had become a model for many other groups throughout the country. This had been at a time it still had Chan Parmar as its Development Officer working on that as well as other members of BIFC. Maintaining that kind of programme work was challenging - working with young people was particularly so since the mix of the group changed continually.

22. Mr Austin said that it had been difficult to sustain the previous level of work on a paid basis; much had depended on Chan's using his personal time. The group had needed to recalibrate. The new community cohesion work being done with the Unity alliance was in partnership with Bolton Wanderers Community Trust. This was enabling links to be made to parts of the community not reached before and providing new opportunities for development.

*Blackpool Faith Forum*

23. Mr Andy Divall said:
- Blackpool Faith Forum (BFF) has been operating online for the last eighteen months. Attendance at meetings has dwindled considerably.
  - Earlier this week, BFF had its first face to face meeting in eighteen months. It had a good attendance, with nine people.
  - The inter faith aspects of BFF work great and there is lots of activity around faith and social action.
  - BFF is involved in activity to promote and establish a Blackpool Poverty Truth Commission. That has received funding for three years via two faith and social action related streams. This Commission is now beginning to recruit Local Community Commissioners, who are people who have lived experience of poverty.
  - BFF has been active in lobbying the local council on issues relating to the socio-economic impact of COVID on marginalised communities.
  - BFF have been operating in faith community projects to meet people's immediate needs that have been hidden in lockdown.
  - Blackpool is top of the league for deprivation as a local authority area. So the chronic needs of our population are something that all faith communities necessity get involved in and do instinctively understand and react to.
  - A priority for BFF, as identified at our meeting earlier this week, is rebuilding the representation of different faith leaders from across Blackpool. BFF used to have active representation from the Jewish community, the Muslim community, from the Hindu community and a member who is part of the Jain community but this level of representation has dwindled and this therefore is a priority area for the Forum.
  - Another priority is to become engaged in Blackburn Council's discussions on climate change. The Council produced a climate change action plan and faith communities are conscious of the need to get involved and become more actively involved.
  - After the last meeting of the BFF, the general feeling was upbeat and the Forum is keen to get going in their work.
24. Mr Peter Lumsden (of Lancashire Forum of Faiths and Building Bridges Burnley) asked about the 'Faith Covenants' which faith groups in one or two areas had with their local authorities. How were these working? It was perhaps something that other local authorities and local faith groups might try.
25. Mr Divall said that BFF had negotiated something of this kind with Blackburn Council approximately three years ago, although choosing to call it a 'faith agreement'. It is actively recognised and was very helpful during the early parts



of the first COVID lockdown insofar as it helped with joining up activities to assist those in most need during that time.

26. Dr Crabtree flagged up, through a link in Chat, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society which developed the 'Faith Covenant', supported by FaithAction (<https://www.faithandsociety.org/covenant/>, <https://www.faithaction.net/working-with-you/health-and-care/info/faith-covenant/>).

#### *Building Bridges Burnley*

27. Mr Lumsden said:
- Inter faith groups tend to go through cycles in their work. BBB seems to be on an upward trajectory at the moment.
  - One or two new committee members have recently been appointed.
  - Through COVID, BBB has had good links with the local council. It supplied some COVID Community Champions. That proved to be very informative in terms of engaging with hard to reach communities, particularly Eastern European ones.
  - BBB's schools visits programme with Lancashire County Council took a hit because of COVID. However, the connections remain through BBB's program called 'Faith Friends'. Through this, pairs of people of two different faiths - often Christian and Muslim - go into schools together. Occasionally just one person will go it. The programme has most take up from primary schools. A significant number of schools have signed a service agreement with BBB to provide such visits and also to organise visits to places of worship
  - BBB received a Near Neighbour's contract for delivery of its work in East Lancashire. A coordinator was appointed six months ago and is making lots of contacts across the community.
  - BBB's Bea Foster has organised a good programme for inter faith week, with a walk planned for the Sunday, a celebration meal on the Monday, a stall in Burnley on the Wednesday and an event with the director of Christian Aid as the speaker on the Thursday.

#### *Building Bridges Pendle*

28. Mr Shabaz Ahmed said:
- Prior to the COVID pandemic, Building Bridges Pendle (BBP) had an event planned with Mr Lumsden. This was postponed. BBP is keen to reschedule it.
  - Pendle Forum of Faiths has not met as a separate forum during the pandemic. We did a lot of work with mosques and churches individually, from many of which we had approaches. We are now working to get the Forum to meet together again.
  - A lot of churches and mosques are still having problems and challenges, including just getting the regular worshipers back in.
  - Some projects have resumed. This week is Good Neighbours Week, one of BBP's busiest weeks. Some faith organisations are taking part, for example St John's Methodist and St Bartholomew's which have been working with the Khan mosque to run a small neighbourhood event. BBP has been trying

involve the mosque in an active role for about three years so this is a big breakthrough.

- In Bradfield, St Luke's church and Bradfield mosque are doing a litter pick together and holding a joint coffee morning.
- For Inter Faith Week, BBP are looking forward to working with the Pendle Armed Forces on a local memorial event, into which inter faith aspects will be brought.
- For Inter Faith Week an event called Faith, Music and Community will also run on the last Sunday in November. We've made a lot of connections with Eastern European communities which are useful to that.
- I made contact with Keith Pennington from Humanists UK through the IFN and its Inter Faith Buddies scheme. I am planning to meet with him in October. This meeting is a personal meeting, rather than a work one it is a good connection made through the pandemic. Thank you IFN for facilitating this connection.

### *Bury Faith Forum*

29. The Revd Paul Cannon said:

- Prior to COVID, Bury Faith Forum (BFF) organised a schools event during two successive Inter Faith Weeks. These took place in a church and in the parish centre attached to the church. Eight to ten different faiths were represented. Primary schools took up the event more strongly than secondary schools. We received great feedback about the event as it provided the possibility to talk to people of different faiths. During the events, information was shared and different faith artefacts were shown.
- In 2020, we were not able to run the event because COVID meant we could not bring schools together. So we started to build a collection of videos filmed by a parishioner who is a professional. These videos are to be made available for schools to view. They are suitable for all age groups.
- Throughout the pandemic, BFF has continued to meet virtually. Attendance has dropped slightly. BFF's upcoming meeting will be virtual but we hope we may be able to return to face to face meetings at the beginning of 2022.
- BFF held an online event on the history of Christianity and Judaism within the borough. This lasted for an hour and half and was well attended and received.
- BFF has been contacted by some people from faith communities who have not previously been represented in BFF, requesting to join. These are people who live in the borough but whose faith groups do not have places of worship within it. It has been decided that as people of a particular faith who live within the borough they are entitled to be a part of the BFF. The new members are positive additions and it is hoped that they will make good contributions, especially once BFF returns to in person meetings.

### *Faith Network 4 Manchester (FN4M)*

30. Rabbi Warren Elf said:

- FN4M has been running for about seventeen years. For a number of years it received council funding to employ a community development worker. That role was first held by the Revd Andy Williams, then in Burnley, who later

moved and left the role. I took over the role for a short time. However, I was furloughed last year and at the end of the first period of furlough the role was discontinued.

- An election was held last August which saw new people join the Board of Trustees.
- Across the last year, FN4M has organised faith dialogues and information sessions on key issues that communities have been facing, such as loneliness, isolation, domestic abuse, mental health issues and suicide. This work has been well received.
- In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, FN4M's Faith in Black Lives Matter project worked, including through workshops, to engage people from faith communities to tackle racism and encourage people and communities to be anti-racist. Listening to and recognising the experience of black people was part of this. This has been going extremely well, as did an online conference that we organised.
- We're also looking at training on anti-racism and taking this into the communities has been explored.
- We are doing a women's sports project, funded by a grant from This Girl Can. A panel discussion has been held and a series of sporting and other active activities are coming up. We are planning a women of faith cycling event next month
- There is a Greater Manchester Interfaith Health and Social Care Working Group and we have engaged with this. We have also engaged with the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership, including on its Recovery Academy training for faith leaders.
- We have a good group of trustees. We are very grateful to Charles Kwaku Odoi and Quisra Shashraz, as our Co-Chairs, for the steering of the group for so long, and also to past Chair and Treasurer Bob Day.
- We joined with Bolton and Bury and some other groups in a bid for funding under a grant scheme of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. This was unsuccessful. Other funding sources are being explored.

#### *Greater Manchester Inter Faith Network*

31. Rabbi Elf said:

- The Greater Manchester Inter Faith Network (GMIFN) provides an opportunity for Greater Manchester inter faith groups to come together and share ideas and news and to plan a yearly conference together. Last year, an online conference was held exploring engaging with local policy and strategy. Mayor Andy Burnham and Professor Colin Baker contributed. Colin Bloom talked about his review of Government engagement with faith communities in England. The conference also looked at the 'Keeping the Faith Report' and faith communities' involvement with local authorities during the pandemic.
- A conference on Religion and Media is planned for 24 November 2021. The Religion Media Centre is working with GMIFN to hold the conference and publicity for the event will go out shortly.
- The Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) have committed to setting up panels to engage

with groups linked to strands such as disability, race, LGBT plus and another two groups. This includes a Women and Girls Equality Panel.

- A Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Advisory panel is being set up. GMIN has been giving input to its development. It is hoped that this may be an opportunity for all faith communities and inter faith groups to have representation and to give input into what's going on in Greater Manchester.
- We have agreed, as a group, the Terms of Reference for the new Panel. Tender has gone out for work to service the panel. The procurement process was complicated and the nature of its requirements effectively cut out any inter faith groups from applying. This had been raised with the GMCA.
- The Panel is in its infancy but it is hoped that it will involve all the inter faith groups in and around Greater Manchester and have positive effects for faith communities and for decision making processes within the GMCA but also across other boroughs.

32. Dr Crabtree noted that it could be challenging for local and faith groups to be considered in tendering processes for work such as to support local authority initiatives since they were often not big enough to do so. Rabbi Elf said that it was important for local authorities and government to take such issues into consideration.

33. Mr Lumsden reflected that comparison of notes with Rabbi Elf would be helpful to gather any lessons that could be learnt for Lancashire Forum of Faiths. He added that the Government's White Paper [setting out legislative proposals for a Health and Care Bill] pointed to opportunities to partner with health partners. In Lancashire there were five integrated care partnerships. Opportunities for partnering with these could be as big, if not bigger, as with the local authorities.

#### *Faith United Tameside*

34. The Revd Jean Hurlston said:

- Reverend Roger Farnworth (Chair) would be retiring in December. He would be missed greatly.
- On 18 November a meeting of FUT will be held via Zoom. Meetings will remain on Zoom due to difficulties faced in meeting face to face.
- Close involvement with SACRE in Tameside has improved the links of Faith United Tameside (FUT) with schools and colleges.
- Training has taken place for people within places of worship who will be present when schools and colleges visit and will talk about their place of worship. The training covered how to welcome young people, health and safety, safeguarding, and educational items
- We are also developing links with Oldham SACRE (I am the Chair of that).
- An increase in work in the Tameside area is hoped as the months progress.
- We have a longstanding involvement with Ashton Sixth Form College, for example contributing to tutorials. On 17 of November we are going to be running there a CPD session - professional development session for the teachers of RE - for the teachers in our local catchment area.
- FUT has been involved with the promotion of chaplains in General Practice. This is a personal area of interest and one on which I am conducting some

research. A grant was received (£15,000) from Tameside and Glossop CCG to pilot this scheme. An Association of Chaplains in General Practice is present but does not function in Greater Manchester and is therefore new to the area. In Tameside and Glossop, there are five primary care networks and we're looking at having one practice within each of those with a volunteer chaplain based in the surgery in the practice. There are four Christian chaplains and one Muslim chaplain. These were not handpicked in such distribution, rather it was the chaplains who came forward for the project. They are all people who have been working within a hospital environment.

- I am part of a Women and Girls Panel within the GMCA. It is positive to have faith representation on other panels alongside the dedicated faith and belief panel of the GMCA.

35. Ms Megan Harrison said:

- As an NHS Manager, I am working on a project linking faith communities with the NHS in Greater Manchester. It is identifying any groups or projects that support health and wellbeing to offer support or training and support with policies and funding.
- Outreach to all councils and trusts across Greater Manchester will be being undertaken to highlight what faith communities can offer them. The platform used will be Social Prescribing.
- An example of a faith group offering support is a church in Oldham which provides a number of groups that support the health and wellbeing of the local community.
- I contacted the local social prescriber to raise awareness of such groups. This will mean that if a person visits their GP and a non-medical issue is identified, a referral to a social prescriber can be made. They can then make the patient aware of the offering of the local faith group, for example food banks, drama groups and cafes.
- The majority of inter faith groups present at the meeting have been contacted and contact –for anyone else who would like them are: [megan.harrison@nhs.net](mailto:megan.harrison@nhs.net).

*Lancashire Forum of Faiths*

36. Mr Lumsden said:

- LFF has been meeting monthly, on a Tuesday evening, on Zoom. Sometimes members of seven different faith communities have been present. It's been very powerful actually and our relationships have developed as a result of that
- Throughout the COVID pandemic, LFF has delivered webinars. These have included: webinars for local authority/ health partners on topics such as death, bereavement and grief; a webinar for the refugee community; and a webinar during Advent on the topic of Hope. These webinars have raised the profile of LFF significantly.
- LFF has also run sessions, called 'Lancashire Leaders', which have brought together faith leaders, local authority leaders and health sector leaders to improve relationships and develop a shared understanding of current issues. This has helped to clarify, for secular partners, how faith may be viewed in terms of social action, social cohesion and in terms of spiritual and emotional wellbeing. The latter, puts us in a good position in regard to the work Ms

Harrison spoke about. If links can be made with GPs and social prescribers, then inter faith communities have something very powerful to offer.

- LFF have been approached by the Police with a request for cultural and community cohesion training. This is for the police to gain a better understanding of some of the traditions and cultures of the different communities.
- Over all, LFF has seen many positives from the COVID pandemic in terms of its position to engage at a strategic level.
- LFF has lots of different things to be working on in terms of recovery and re-weaving the fabric of society.

#### *Oldham Inter Faith Forum*

37. Mr Fazal Rahim said:

- Oldham Inter Faith Forum (OIFF) has been working with the local authority in the drive for uptake of COVID vaccinations. There have been some issues within the Muslim and BAME communities with people not signing up to be vaccinated. OIFF encouraged the uptake of the offer of vaccination, working with local mosques and providing food for hospital staff for a number of weeks to show gratitude for their services.
- OIFF's women only group, Women Growing Together (WGT), has been meeting monthly throughout the pandemic. WGT applied for and was granted some funding from Near Neighbours. These funds are being used to employ someone for one day a week for the next six months,
- WGT held an online breaking of the fast for Ramadan and volunteers delivered food to participants' houses. Around seventy participants from various parts of the borough took part in the event.
- OIFF's work with schools has been paused due to COVID. It has therefore created, in partnership with a mosque, a church, a synagogue and a mandir, four videos for use in schools. The premier was at an in person meeting yesterday.
- OIFF's first in person meeting will be taking place this Thursday.
- Many sixth form colleges ask OIFF for advice every year with the new intake of students. OIFF goes to the colleges to talk with the new students and answer questions. A colleague from OIFF is currently trying to arrange something with a college on this front.

#### *Preston Faith Forum*

38. Ms Savannah Dable (secretary of Preston Faith Forum) said:

- Monthly meetings have been happening through lockdown via Zoom. Credit is due to Malcolm and Penny Craig for maintaining these 'Preston Prays' meetings which are enjoyable and have become very popular. It is hoped these will continue.
- At the AGM Penny was elected as Chairwoman.
- Discussion on events for Inter Faith Week is underway. An exciting program is coming up. There will be a discussion about Net Zero, with a link to the issues in Ms Merry's presentation earlier in the present meeting.

- A cookery demonstration will be held and a talk from a Black Muslim perspective.
- We have a sister organisation, Hello Preston, that we look after. We have been supporting its volunteers help to Syrian refugees over the last few years.
- A volunteer has requested, and secured funding for, work supporting the Windrush Generation and Descendants. This will be going ahead in the next twelve months. This will be mainly working with men and about how to be good fathers. The volunteer will go on work related days out. PFF are excited to support this project.
- PFF is experiencing a time of change. Members have felt that is has been getting a bit 'tired'. An email was sent out by the Penny and the response has been new people with new ideas taking PFF to the next step for the next twelve months. A new vice chair has been appointed, as has Karen, a new trustee.
- PFF has been inspired by Building Bridges Pendle and Burnley Building Bridges and members have decided they would like to change their name, gradually over the next few months, to Building Bridges Preston. Penny has already been in touch with Shabaz Ahmed about this.

39. Mr Malcolm Craig (of PFF) said:

- PFF went through a difficult time. It was felt the general ethos of the world was anti faith at this moment. PFF is endeavouring to be more inclusive and to create ways that others, Humanists for example, could slot into meetings and discussions.
- It is hoped that the re-badging of PFF will be complete by Christmas Jeremy Dable is assisting with the legal side of constitutional changes. Credit is also due to the outgoing Chairman, Mr Sahay Ashraf, who was very helpful and to the membership secretary, Peter Bowman from the Quakers.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Local inter faith groups and engagement with schools and other education settings**

40. Dr Crabtree invited Dr David Hampshire, Assistant Director of IFN, to offer reflections on the work being done by local inter faith organisations with schools.

41. Dr Hampshire said:

- It has been wonderful to listen to the groups' presentations.
- To begin with, I will reflect on research done by IFN, based on groups' reports at its last eight regional link meetings for local inter faith organisations, beginning with the last NW one which took place in Preston at the University of Central Lancashire just before the pandemic. I have reviewed the notes for mention of schools and school work and related work. One caveat - groups were not specifically asked to speak about school work and therefore there will have been some schools-related work that was not mentioned during feedback at the meeting.
- Over the course of the eight meetings reviewed, the words 'school, or 'schools' were mentioned 79 times.
- 18 different types of schools-related activities were reported as engaged in by the participating local inter faith groups.

- Of the 95 groups present at the meetings, over a third had spoken about school work, with frequent mention of visiting schools.
- The difficulties of visiting schools and engaging with them during the pandemic had been talked about. Some groups reported work continuing via Zoom, MS Teams and Google Meets. These platforms continued to afford the opportunity to engage virtually once schools had returned.
- The findings indicate that primary schools had been found easier to work with and access than secondary schools.
- Not all local inter faith groups had focused just on primary or secondary schools. Some had looked at alternative education settings where it had been felt work of importance and significance could also be done. For example, one group had targeted a pupil referral unit to carry out work with the young people being assisted by that.
- Visits were to assemblies and for classroom work. Some focused on particular year groups and, in one case, included organising a sixth form conference.
- A small number of groups reported that they had facilitated visits to places of worship. Some, such as Bolton and Oldham, had specific ways of facilitating these visits and had held events such as faith trails through towns. Inter faith groups are important in organising and facilitating open door days in different faith communities.
- One local inter faith group had been involved in a project to create resources for local schools. This had included a bus going around to take items to schools in areas where people couldn't easily go beyond their locality to visit places of worship of different faiths. This provided a first-hand experience of meeting people from different faiths and enabled people to see things important to people of different faiths.
- The importance of local groups in relation to special days and events had been highlighted by some groups. For example, for Inter Faith Week, Holocaust Memorial Day and Remembrance Sunday local inter faith groups were sometimes either the sole organisers (in the case of Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration) or involved in the organisation of activities.
- Black Lives Matter events had been facilitated by some groups and focused on the effect that racism has within communities.
- A yearly competition was run by one group, with its local authority, to encourage schools to reflect on faith and inter faith issues through art and poetry.
- Upon schools returning, in one area some students had been anxious about returning to school for fear of stigmatisation in relation to second hand uniforms. The local inter faith body organised a collection from faith communities to help purchase every child from a deprived background who needed one a brand new school uniform. Examples such as this demonstrate how working with schools is part of promoting community cohesion and building the faith assets in the area.
- Of interest to local groups when thinking about school and school work may be the extensive OFSTED report on Religious Education (RE) from a research and review series in RE.
- One of the things that emerged from the OFSTED report was the problem of generalisations about religions which may bear limited resemblance to the living traditions of pupils and their families. Teacher expositions on different



faiths sometimes did not resonate with pupils of those faiths. Local inter faith groups can help by connecting schools with people with lived experience of the faith traditions in the area of the school to represent better what faith is about. This can help break down stereotypes.

- The OFSTED report and IFN have identified a narrative that religions are in competition with one another and that they do not collaborate. However, it is known not to be the case - faith communities do work together for the good of their communities. This is not sufficiently represented in RE yet. IFN has therefore developed and provided free, downloadable resources for secondary and primary school teachers (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/publications/schools>) to help pupils to think about how faiths work together to create a better society in which we live. The resources focus on local assets and try to promote conversation with local faith communities and inter faith bodies.
- IFN is currently working on some resources for use in assemblies, aiming to make these available by Inter Faith Week. Teachers had been consulted. For primary schools, short videos will be made of people from different faiths, who are friends, who will discuss their friendship to break down the idea that friendship is not possible between people of different world views and backgrounds and to demonstrate that it is enriching to have friends of different faiths and with differing perspectives of the world. For secondary schools, short videos of how different faith communities have come together to make a difference in their own local area are planned. Any participants interested to become involved in the video project are invited to contact me.

42. Dr Crabtree thanked Dr Hampshire and invited reflections or questions. None were offered.
43. Dr Crabtree then invited Mr Ashley Beck, IFN's Interfaith Development Officer, to give his reflections. He had playing a significant role in supporting digital engagement by groups during the pandemic.
44. Mr Beck said that he always very much valued being in these meetings, hearing the range of things that groups do - during the pandemic often digitally. The transition to digital had clearly been difficult for some groups across the UK and IFN had done a lot of work to assist. That work had included uploads of practical guidance to the IFN website and one to one 'digital surgeries' focusing on using Zoom and social media. He highlighted the latter as a useful resource; sessions were shaped in the light of the needs that local inter faith groups identified – ideally at the time when they booked them.

#### **Agenda Item 6: Final reflections**

45. Dr Crabtree said that it was a privilege to facilitate and be part of a meeting such as the present one. Local inter faith bodies played a vital role in developing and strengthening good inter faith relations. The last few years had been challenging for many local inter faith practitioners - most recently because of the pandemic but also because of factors such as changing funding regimes, committees of some groups getting older, succession issues, and a range of other things people had lifted up and shared in different link meetings. These were not easy times.

But what had been striking about presentations at the meeting, and some of those of participants' colleagues from different UK nations and different parts of England at other link meetings, was that there clearly remained a huge commitment, despite these challenges. People were continuing to volunteer their time and skills and the few paid staff in some local groups had often gone beyond the requirements of their posts, using also their personal time to help their local inter faith initiatives survive. During the pandemic all this had to be carried forward when people were wrestling with new technology and felt disconnection because of not being able to meet in person.

46. At the same time, it was clear that some good things had come out of the digital baptism of fire. IFN's report on the 2020 Inter Faith Week (<https://www.interfaithweek.org/resources/inter-faith-week-2020-connection-learning-and-cooperation-at-the-time-of-covid>) highlighted a range of innovative and effective uses of digital communication to connect people. A number of representatives of local inter faith organisations at recent link meetings had commented that they had gained members and had more people attending meetings of certain kinds because online meetings had drawn in younger people and people who might not have come out to meetings in the evenings. So there were pros and cons.
47. Dr Crabtree closed by thanking participants again for the excellent and inspiring inputs that had been shared and wish them well, on behalf of IFN, with their important work.

28 January 2022