

## THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

### Note of Link Meeting for Local Inter Faith Groups in North West England

from 11am to 3.30pm on Thursday 5 March 2020

at the Oasis Faith and Spirituality Centre,  
Moss Building, Kirkham Street, Preston, Lancashire, PR1 2XQ

**Present:** Mr Shabaz Ahmed; Mr Afrasiab Anwar MBE (second part of Agenda Item 4 to 7); Mrs Alison Bradley; Mrs Penny Craig; Mrs Savannah Dable; Dr Stephanie Dermott; Mr Andy Divall (for Agenda Items 1 to 5); Rabbi Warren Elf MBE (for Agenda Items 3 to 7); Ms Josephine Hartley (for Agenda Items 1 to 5); Revd Jean Hurlston (for Agenda Item 2 to close of meeting); Mr Cedric Knipe; Revd Shannon Ledbetter (Second part of Agenda Item 4 to 7); Mrs Sandy Maclean; Ms Marta Pacini (for Agenda Items 1 to 6); Mrs Faranisa Sharif (for Agenda Items 1 to 5); and Mr Alan Slater.

**In attendance:** Dr David Hampshire (Chair), Ms Ruth Foster and Ms Madiha Hussein (Inter Faith Network for the UK)  
Ms Vanessa Chew and Revd Andrew Clitherow (Oasis Faith and Spirituality Centre) (for Agenda Item 1)

*By agreement, Agenda Item 4 was continued after lunch. The minute reflects this change.*

#### Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and introduction

1. Dr Hampshire welcomed participants to the meeting which was a meeting for local inter faith organisations in the North West to come together to share news and good practice.
2. He invited Ms Vanessa Chew, Centre Manager, and Revd Andrew Clitherow, Lead Chaplain, to offer a welcome on behalf of the Oasis Faith and Spirituality Centre.
3. Ms Chew and Mr Clitherow spoke about the Oasis Centre. They explained that the ethos of the Oasis Centre was to welcome those from all faiths and none. It was delighted to be hosting this multi faith meeting.
4. Dr David Hampshire thanked Mr Clitherow and Ms Chew for the Centre's hosting of the meeting and assisting with the arrangements for the day. He explained housekeeping rules and the NHS guidance on the Coronavirus.
5. A brief period of silent reflection was held, bearing in mind everyone working for good inter faith relations around the world.

*Ms Chew and Mr Clitherow left the meeting.*

## **Agenda Item 2 – Brief roundtable introductions**

6. Those present introduced themselves briefly.

## **Agenda Item 3 – Inter faith groups in the UK**

7. Dr Hampshire introduced IFN Project Assistant Ms Ruth Foster and introduced the session.
8. Ms Foster said that she had been working on an update of the Local Inter Faith Guide. She explained that the first local inter faith groups had begun to emerge in the UK in the 1970s and that the Inter Faith Network had records of 256 independent inter faith organisations now in operation. Most were multi faith but some were bi- and tri-lateral initiatives, such as Jewish-Muslim forums. There were, additionally, 29 local branches of the Council of Christian and Jews, and 16 groups of the women's Muslim-Jewish initiative Nisa-Nashim. This totalled 306 groups overall. 34 of these were based in the North West of England.
9. Ms Foster said that there were many other types of bodies and initiatives that involved different faiths but were not specifically 'inter faith' in their aims. These were bodies such as Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) and local multi faith chaplaincies. There were also some projects, and short-term programmes with an inter faith dimension, including those supported by Near Neighbours. She mentioned the '*Faiths Working Together*' toolkit that had been developed by Near Neighbours and IFN. Local groups were essential to encouraging co-operation, encounter, respect and understanding between different faith communities across the UK at a grassroots level, particularly during difficult times, such as during the Manchester Arena attack.
10. Ms Foster said that research for the guide had included looking at various initiatives that local groups have been involved in, including educational, youth, sports, and social action initiatives, as well as working with refugees.
11. Ms Foster said partnerships between local authorities and local inter faith bodies in strengthening cohesion and integration was important. Examples included:
  - Blackpool and Preston, where faith groups had agreed a 'faith covenant' with local authorities;
  - the 'Stronger Together' Conference organised by Hertfordshire Inter Faith Forum in collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council, which had brought together faith leaders and members of Hertfordshire's diverse faith communities to explore how to create stronger cohesive communities and how inter faith dialogue can have a positive impact; and,
  - a link meeting organised by IFN in the previous week which had included a presentation from staff from Kent County Council about their plans to expand inter faith initiatives in Kent throughout the year through diverse open door days and other initiatives.

12. Ms Foster also referred to the Integrated Communities Action Plan published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2019. That encouraged good inter faith relations and interaction as part of integration. That was reflected in work being developed in five local authorities in England: Blackburn with Darwen; Bradford; Peterborough; Walsall and Waltham Forest.
13. Ms Foster explained that the first Local Inter Faith Guide was published in 1999, and the second edition was published in 2005, which was available on the IFN website in PDF format. Each edition had been rooted in research, the new guide was being developed based on information that had been collected online, and through Link Meetings and local inter faith practitioners' days. It would cover issues such as how to respond to hate crime and ways of showing solidarity, as well as practical pointers on communications and using social media to reach young people, and to promote the good work that groups are doing. The guide would also explore how local groups undergoing difficulties can review their work, become stronger and respond to new opportunities. The guide was part of IFN's work to support and encourage local inter faith groups, learn from them and share good practice.
14. Dr Hampshire said that one of the biggest issues that local inter faith groups faced when seeking support was how to show short term impact when their vision was long term. He also spoke about the difficulty in defining 'community cohesion' and what this looked like in reality. He mentioned the use by Building Bridges Pendle of YouTube and Instagram to showcase their work and talked about the advantage of using different forms of media, particularly to challenge the narrative of hate. He invited those present to give examples in the next Agenda Item of what their groups were doing to bring about real change.
15. During the Q & A and discussions, the Revd Jean Hurlston asked whether the 250+ groups referred to earlier were local, or if they just represented parts of areas but come together as groups. Dr Hampshire explained that local inter faith bodies were specific to their areas; there were also some linking structures of these such as the South East England Faiths Forum. These regional linking bodies were members of IFN in a different IFN membership category. Some of these bodies had participated in a meeting the previous week for IFN member National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations.
16. Dr Hampshire added that most regional forums had emerged in the early 2000s. The then government had offered grant support to regional faith forums for a short period. When the regional governance structures were dismantled, the locus for the regional faith forums work was affected and they were also affected by loss of funding. A few had carried on a voluntary basis.
17. Dr Hampshire thanked Ms Foster for her presentation.

#### **Agenda Item 4 – Sharing of News**

18. Dr Hampshire said that many local groups were doing things in close proximity to one another but were not necessarily aware of each other's activities. These

Link Meetings enabled people from the different groups to make connections with one another and to discuss obstacles and opportunities. He invited those present to share the good work they had been doing, as well as challenges they had had and how they had been rising to these.

19. There was a round table sharing of news and information about groups represented. The contributions are listed here in alphabetical order of the name of the bodies. The listed points relating to each reflect those made in the updates and also in response to questions.

#### *Altrincham Interfaith Group*

20. Altrincham Interfaith Group (AIG) member Mr Cedric Knipe spoke about its work.
  - Altrincham was very diverse, with all faith groups represented in the area.
  - AIG was a social entity.
  - It received talks and inspiration from representatives of different faiths.
  - AIG held a bi-annual entertainment evening, a bi-annual quiz event, and an annual shared meal. It charges for the shared meal, and the proceeds fund its activities for the rest of the year.
  - AIG had sought a grant from Trafford Council for the shared meal this year for the hire of premises. It then gave the same amount of money back to the Mayor for his charities.
  - The Northern part of Trafford borough was also very faith diverse, but was much less affluent. The Council had been trying to bring cohesion into that community but had not been as successful as they had been in the more affluent Southern part of Trafford. Mr Knipe hoped to bring the two parts of the borough together so that the whole of Trafford could learn from the successes of the inter faith group.
  - Trafford Council had a reputation for putting on very good Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) events involving many children from local schools. Due to budget cuts, there had been no HMD events one year and schools had been left to hold events individually. As an inter faith group, AIG had made recommendations through councillors to the Council and as a result, the Council had restored funding and HMD events had resumed in their old pattern.
  - AIG had not been struggling and was financially independent of the Council.
21. Dr Hampshire commented that poverty can have an impact on the nature of inter faith work in an area.

#### *Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Forum*

22. Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Forum (BwDIF) Trustee Ms Josephine Hartley spoke about its work.
  - The Council and other organisations, including Near Neighbours, were seen as crucial for the sustainability of BwDIF. The Forum previously had some funding for an Administrator/ Coordinator role for a year. As the group was made up of volunteers, this had made an impact. However, that funding had now ended and other key figures in the committee had become involved in

important work on an international level, which meant that they could not dedicate the same amount of time to BwDIF.

- A meeting had been held in late 2019 to discuss the future of BwDIF, with many members feeling that they did not have the capacity to take on large amounts of work. It was decided that instead of disbanding, each member would take on particular aspects of work, such as: school visits (to primary and secondary schools as a panel); civic events (including Holocaust Memorial Day and Remembrance Day); press releases and the media; community events; and partnerships within the County.
- BwDIF was determined to strengthen smaller inter faith groups in North, East, South and West Blackburn. BwDIF had previously held faith trails which had been successful, but it had struggled to organise local meetings following those events. Over the past 12 months a series of talks had been organised at Blackburn Cathedral on topics including fasting, pilgrimages, and birth and death within different faith traditions. These topics had been looked at from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh perspectives.
- The Jewish Way of Life exhibition was due to come to Blackburn in April 2020, spending two weeks at Blackburn Cathedral and two weeks at Star Academies.

23. The importance of individuals within local inter faith groups was discussed briefly, as was the fact that some found it was easier to start a local inter faith group than to sustain it. The importance of engaging with young people was also highlighted as a challenge. Dr Hampshire referred to 'Burst the Bubble', a youth inter faith programme facilitated through social media which does podcasts.

#### *Blackpool Faith Forum*

24. Mr Andy Divall of Blackpool Council and Blackpool Faith Forum (BFF) spoke about BFF of which he was the Facilitator.
- BFF had existed for 19 years. Activities had been at a peak in the 2000s. They were branded as 'Under One Sky'. This programme had looked at environmental issues at the time and generated a lot of success. Blackpool Tower and the Ballroom were used to facilitate activities with children.
  - In the last 5 to 7 years activity had decreased, but there had been greater focus on engagement with the local authority. There had been an 'inter faith illumination' in Blackpool each year with symbols representing nine world faiths. Most activity had focused on social justice and action as Blackpool was high on the English Indices of Deprivation across a number of different domains. Inter faith social action tended to have an impact on the 'health and wellbeing' domain.
  - BFF had signed a Faith Covenant as an agreement between leaders of various Christian denominations and other faiths, and key people within the Council as a way of working together that promoted respect and understanding, and also built bridges.
  - At the moment there was a lot of engagement with the NHS. A conference had recently taken place. 60 people had come together to talk about what people of faith could do in the interface with health, and what faith brings to

health. The NHS was now more open to ideas of spirituality than previously. A steering group had been set up with the Chair of the local hospital trust.

- On a local level, BFF acted as a lead into activities. For example, one of the representatives on the Forum was about to be co-opted onto the Town Regeneration Partnership for Blackpool.

#### *Bolton Interfaith Council (BIC)*

25. Bolton Interfaith Council (BIC) Coordinator Dr Stephanie Dermott spoke about its work.
- BIC ran many civic events, such as Holocaust Memorial Day, as well as annual community events, such as a community walk. The walk was run in partnership with faith and non-faith organisations.
  - BIC's main flagship project was the faith trails programme, which had been running for many years. There had been close to a hundred different visits a year. It had been popular with primary and secondary schools, and teachers had expressed an interest in organising it as CPD sessions for RE teachers and teaching assistants.
  - The faith trails consisted of visits to a mandir, a church, and a mosque. Each visit was led by volunteers from that particular faith community, who explained the key principles of their faith tradition, as well as the uses of their place of worship. Pupils and staff also had the chance to ask any questions they wished, as it was a safe space for all.
  - BIC had received funding from Bolton Council up until December 2019.
26. Dr Hampshire asked whether BIC had a service-level agreement with the schools that they worked with. Dr Dermott replied that they had previously asked for donations. However it was not straightforward to find the best way for the money to go to BIC and the places of worship and the visits were now all free of charge. Mrs Sharif, a volunteer of Building Bridges Burnley, said that it had a good model for service-level agreements.

#### *Building Bridges Burnley (BBB)*

27. Mr Afrasiab Anwar, Chair of Building Bridges Burnley (BBB), spoke about its work.
- BBB had existed for 19 years. It had been funded by Lancashire County Council. That funding had now come to an end, although there was support for some projects, such as Community Chat.
  - BBB was currently focusing on engagement with local schools as this provided it with sustainability as an organisation, through the service level agreement it had developed.

#### *Building Bridges Pendle*

28. Building Bridges Pendle (BBP) Community Development Officer Mr Shabaz Ahmed spoke about its work.
- With the support of the Council, BBP had done a lot of work with schools over the last year, including with 22 primary schools and 6 secondary schools. This was part of the Pendle School Linking Network which brought

schools from different backgrounds together to engage with those from a different faith. Through this, they had developed a link into community work.

- For Inter Faith Week 2019, BBP had commemorated Remembrance Day with Pendle Armed Forces Support Group. 7,000 people, including a local Christian minister and imam, had stood in remembrance of the fallen heroes. Following this, members of the Muslim community had led a procession to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as the days coincided. The minister and the Pendle Armed Forces Support Group had been invited to the mosque to share some words. Later in the day, there had been a Remembrance Day March, joined by the Imam and schools from the Linking Network.
- BBP had made good links with the Mayor and Mayoress following Inter Faith Week, and collaborated on a project for Holocaust Memorial Day. Two mono cultural schools with, respectively, students from Muslim and Christian backgrounds, had received talks from local community workers, librarians, and the police on the impact of the Holocaust on the community.
- In November, BBP had started working with the Syrian refugee community, who had arrived in Pendle 2 to 3 years ago. This was not a faith-oriented programme, but faith had played a part in it. BBP had originally not worked with the Syrians as other groups had been seeking the same funding in order to engage with them. However, BBP noticed that previous projects had not helped them to integrate into the community.
- BBP had approached Lancashire County Council with a project proposal in order to get the Syrian community involved in the area. It had since held cinema sessions with the Syrians at a local café.
- Its latest project, the Marhaba café, was due to begin in the week following the present meeting. It would be a café serving Syrian cuisine, run by Syrian refugee women. It would allow the Syrians to showcase their culture to the local community, as well as provide them with the opportunity to develop their English-speaking skills. BBP hoped that this would become a business for the Syrians and would provide them with a source of income. The response rate to this project had been 99% very positive, with only 1% being very negative, which they had anticipated.
- BBP had also worked with the Syrian men to set up a business that would involve attending events to perform the 'Dabke' (a traditional Middle Eastern dance), which was something new to the area.
- BBP had an event coming up on 29 March, 'Faith, Music and Community', which would bring together people from all faiths and none to explore how faith goes beyond religion, and how humanity and community are central.
- A church choir made up of five different churches had been working together for four years. This project had initially been a challenge to bring about but was now running successfully.
- There was also a local Sufi chanting group led by the Free Spiritual Centre.
- This year the Syrian community, which consisted of Muslims, Christians, and people of other faiths, would hold an event in which 15 Syrian men would perform a dance, and which would, for the first time, provide a three course Syrian meal. 150 people were expected to attend.
- BBP had other events lined up for this year, such as the Festival of Culture, where the Syrians would be launching their businesses.

- BBP believed in genuine relations between people of all faiths. In the planning of the above project, they had met in each other's homes, rather than in an office. This had involved each other's families too, which had helped develop a genuine relationship with one another beyond the scope of the organisation.
  - BBP planned to pair a Syrian Muslim family with a Syrian Christian family to share their stories, journeys, and experiences.
29. Dr Hampshire noted that BPP had produced a video about their work and that this was available on YouTube.

#### *Bury Faith Forum*

30. Bury Council Community Cohesion Officer Mr Alan Slater, spoke about the work of Bury Faith Forum (BFF).
- For two years in a row, BFF had held multi faith events in primary schools. Different faiths were represented on different tables and the children rotated around to learn about the various faiths represented in the community. They also had the opportunity to ask questions that they might not have got the chance to ask in lessons. This had been very well received by primary schools. (Mr Slater thanked Rabbi Warren Elf of Faith Network for Manchester for his contributions towards these events.)
  - BFF was reassessing its approach towards secondary schools, as the buy-in had not been as good. This might have been due to reasons such as the difference in timetables between primary and secondary schools, as well as the ways in which Ofsted inspection reports could have an impact on what schools felt they must prioritise.
  - BFF had put together a steering group in order to plan an adult faith event. The theme was yet to be confirmed, but Mr Slater hoped to provide more details at any future meeting.
  - Members of BFF were regularly involved in Council projects. For instance, during Hate Crime Awareness Week an inter faith Shabbat meal was organised, led by the disability group Friendship Circle.
  - Across the 18 months that he had been in post, Mr Slater had noticed that the group had been progressing somewhat slowly, largely due to funding issues. Not all of the members of BFF had the capacity to carry out the work that needed to be done at times due to funding cuts. It was to be hoped that there would be funding available to support the good work being done in Bury.
  - BFF had an Action Plan in order to keep it focused and be clear what members wanted to achieve.

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

31. Rabbi Warren Elf, part-time Director of Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M), spoke about its work.
- FN4M had been established 16 years ago. For the first 9 years it had relied completely on volunteers before securing enough funding to employ a part-time Community Development Worker and find space for an office. During this time the Manchester Multi-Faith Centre had been opened and the City



Council had funded the core work. However, the funding, as well as the building, was lost after several years. In November 2019 the group had moved into the Manchester Wesley Centre where it now had an office and a resource centre.

- FN4M was originally established to help the Council engage with faith communities and make sure that their voice was considered. However, the group had branched out into inter faith dialogue; a schools' programme entitled 'In Your Faith'; and a 'women of faith' programme. In addition to this, FN4M helped with the Greater Manchester Inter Faith Network conference. FN4M differed from the Greater Manchester IFN group as it was originally City of Manchester focused as part of an agreement with the City Council, although it did link with other local groups.
- In the last few years FN4M had begun working in five key areas: strategy and policy; health and social care; education work in schools; inter faith and multi-faith work (including inter faith dialogue and the annual conference, which was on sex education and faith concerns in 2019); and climate change (with links to the 'Our Faith, Our Planet' initiative).
- A climate change focused meeting was being arranged for faith leaders and local councillors. FN4M was also supporting a faith sector summit on family homelessness; an inter faith dialogue on safeguarding; and an event with Greater Manchester Mental Health chaplaincy and Health and Social Care Partnership for faith leaders to learn about suicide prevention.
- FN4M had issues around funding and it was working to encourage even greater levels of activity from trustees and volunteers. Even when paid staff were involved in an inter faith group, the dynamics needed to remain such that everyone involved was committed to the work being done and taking an active role in that.

#### *Faiths United (Tameside) (FUT) and Oldham Interfaith Forum (OIF)*

32. The Revd Jean Hurlston, a member of the Management Committee of Faiths United Tameside (FUT), spoke about its work.
  - FUT did not receive any funding, and so all the work was done on a voluntary basis.
  - Last year, FUT had held a day conference on the topic: 'What is the faith sector doing about loneliness?' Many people from the council, social services, health sector, and faith communities had attended. FUT was planning to hold similar events in the future.
  - FUT held reflection groups throughout the year. Prior to the conferences, FUT had held a major reflection group to analyse the topic in depth and from their faith perspectives.
  - FUT had links with the Pennine Care Foundation Trust and ran a course at the college, entitled 'Wellness of Spirit', to work with people who have received treatment for mental health issues. The course looked at where people draw strength from to get through tough periods in life. This was not a religious-based course; however, religion did play into it. The course ended with a Faith Walk around the different faith centres in the town.
  - FUT also worked with schools. Ms Hurlston was a chaplain at Ashford Sixth Form College and so, during Inter Faith Week, the chaplaincy took over the tutor programme and brought in representatives from the Inter Faith Network

to speak to students about their faith as they saw it and how it affected their life. This programme had received positive evaluations.

33. Ms Hurlston also spoke about Oldham Interfaith Forum (OIF).

- OIF received limited funding.
- OIF mainly worked with schools, for example speaking at assemblies.
- OIF held a 'Women of Faith' event last year. Representatives from each faith had spoken, including Ms Hurlston speaking from the Christian perspective, a woman who was a teacher at the mosque, a female Rabbi, and a female Hindu priest. Many people had found it very surprising that women held these high positions within their faith.
- OIF had good links with the local SACREs.
- OIF was very involved in projects with the Council. Ms Hurlston was also the Anglican Borough Dean for Oldham, which she said was useful in highlighting that the faith sector has a lot to contribute to the community.

*Lancashire Collaborative Ministry*

34. Revd Shannon Ledbetter and Ms Marta Pacini spoke about the inter faith work of the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry (LCM), of which Revd Shannon was the Social Justice Minister and Ms Pacini the Development Officer.

- LCM oversaw the Unitarian churches in Chorley, Padiham and Rawtenstall, supporting them to develop social justice programmes, engage in inter faith work through services, and to improve the lives of people in the area, for instance through free legal advice sessions. It had existed for around 18 months and was still in the development stage, but this included inter faith worship services.
- Rawtenstall was in a unique position as it had resources and physical space. LCM wanted to reach out to support the work of other inter faith groups in a collaborative effort.
- Current programmes included inter faith services in Rawtenstall every couple of months. Each service was based on a theme and attendees could bring something to share around the theme. The services ended with a pot luck dinner to get to know one another. An inter faith service had been held once a year in Padiham with the Sufi community. A luncheon club that was open to the community had also started with a women's group from Blackburn.
- In the past LCM had held a Faith Question Time with a panel of faith leaders, based on an idea from a local MP. A multi-cultural cooking session and storytelling session had been held for Inter Faith Week 2019. A faith and art project for young people was also held during the summer months in collaboration with a local charity. This was funded by the Council. The young people had made a mosaic that displayed several religious symbols and they had learnt about different faiths through art.
- LCM was partnering with the Shiva Trust, a local Hindu organisation, to host a community café in the Unitarian Chapel in Rawtenstall. This would be with vulnerable people. There was funding for six monthly luncheon clubs and a Christmas party.

### *Liverpool Community Spirit*

35. Mrs Alison Bradley spoke about the work of Liverpool Community Spirit (LCS) of which she was a staff member.
- LCS had three paid members of staff and around 40 unpaid volunteers. The group was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and applies for grants from smaller foundations.
  - LCS had five strands of work including:
    1. Taste of Life, which was an Adult Personal Development Course which focused on hospitality and catering, and which was delivered in mainly prisons. Prisoners were taught how to cook a meal from a particular tradition before a person of faith was brought in to speak to them about what it was like to be a person from that faith in the UK today. The course was also delivered in the community to adults who are marginalised from mainstream society.
    2. Home of Hospitality school workshops that took place in the LCS's centre. In 2019, 3000 pupils had attended these. LCS also supported schools by organising visits from faith ambassadors. There was sometimes a slight feeling that some schools were just 'ticking a box' by taking part in these workshops during drop down days. However the programme had value.
    3. Teacher training, acting as the base for Learn, Teach, Lead RE North, providing CPD for teachers, and working with schools directly was also a part of the work.
    4. General faith diversity training with different organisations, including the police and Everton Football Club.
    5. Leading on the Merseyside Interfaith Youth Forum (previously Youth Council). Young people of all faiths and none met to engage in different projects. This included the First Waves Exhibition which had taken the group to the Houses of Parliament in 2019 to meet David Lammy MP. The Youth Forum had also worked with Edge Hill University and Liverpool Hope University, including on a funded project exploring British identity. An annual iftar at the end of Ramadan had been held, and visits to the Abdullah Quilliam heritage centre and a pilgrimage to Wales had also taken place.
  - LCS charged for some of its work, including work with schools.

### *Liverpool Faith Leaders' Group (LFLG)*

36. Dr Hampshire read out a message from the Liverpool Faith Leaders' Group (LFLG) Chair, the Revd Canon Crispin Pailing, who had sent his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting due to another commitment.
- Merseyside Council of Faiths had closed.
  - LFLG had been set up after Mr Pailing had mapped out different places of worship in the region. The emphasis has been on attracting influential people from each worshipping community where possible. This had included the presence of Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald, who for many years had led on Christian and Muslim relations in the Vatican.
  - The focus of the group was not about sharing and learning from each other's traditions, but, rather, about identifying experiences and concerns from

people of faith. LFLG was used as a consultation group by many public and private bodies. For example at its last meeting visitors had included people from the Crown Prosecution Service and Liverpool Football Club. Visitors were encouraged to identify what they wanted from a visit to LFLG and how best to engage through discussion and presentation.

- LFLG had now invested in a part-time paid role for someone to develop contact between individual places of worship at a local level. This contact would be structured around shared activities to build relationships whilst working for the good of local communities.

### *Preston Faith Forum*

37. Preston Faith Forum (PFF) Treasurer Ms Penny Craig spoke about its work.
  - Previously PFF had funding and support from the local authority, but it no longer received this. Funding had instead been sourced for various projects, such as PFF's work with refugees.
  - Lots of people in the area knew about PFF and members had links with UCLAN, SACREs and local schools. The Forum itself had also attended training hosted by Building Bridges Burnley and had good links with Lancashire Faith Forum, the Multi Faith Centre at Burnley and Building Bridges Burnley. These links had been especially good to have following instances of hate crime.
  - Recently the group had had an inter faith float at the Preston Guild. It went into a school for an afternoon to speak with 160 children on the topic of 'unity and diversity'. This work with the school children was based on an idea for an Inter Faith Week 'speed-faithing' event.
  - PFF had held events for both Inter Faith Week in November and World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) in February. It was good for faith forums to have weeks to mark and celebrate inter faith relations at the beginning and end of the year. For 2020 WIHW, PFF had created an inter faith exhibition about nine different faiths. They had displayed this at a local hospital and at a prison, where prisoners could talk about what their faith meant to them. A faith trail event around different places of worship had also been held and the group hoped to host a similar event in the future.
  - An open meeting had been held with local councillors about the future of inter faith engagement in Preston. It had been concluded that an inter faith group was still wanted in Preston. PFF did not want to be subsumed by Lancashire Forum of Faiths; Preston is a large and diverse area and needed a forum for its specific context.
  - At the time of the present meeting the Chair and Vice-Chair of PFF had moved, but the remainder of the committee were working to make sure that Inter Faith Week 2020 went well.
  - PFF was working with the new World Integration and Families Initiative (WIFI), a funded multi-faith and inter faith group that had launched a youth group with PFF in September 2019. This work was described as 'inter faith inspired' rather than 'inter faith' and was open to all. It was hoped that this work would be included in Inter Faith Week 2020 activities.
  - PFF had found that the people most interested in inter faith work were from smaller faith communities in the area, including the Quakers who had given the Forum use of their buildings.

- PFF was volunteer-run and tended to receive a positive response to its existence but that did not necessarily translate into an offer of help for the running of the group itself.
38. Dr Hampshire highlighted research that showed that schools, particularly in poorer areas that OFSTED had targeted, were narrowing their curriculums down – excluding RE, art, music, and PSHE – and having to focus on core subjects and be ‘results-driven’. This had led to the creation of ‘drop-down days’ for the subjects that had been excluded, including Religious Education. The book ‘*White Middle-Class Identities in Urban Schooling*’ [Reay, D., Crozier, G., James, D 2011] was also highlighted by him for the way it demonstrated how schools may be diverse, but that that did not necessarily mean that pupils or communities of different faiths were mixing.

*Stockport and Friends of Stockport Interfaith*

39. Mrs Sandy Maclean, a member of Stockport Interfaith (SI) and Friends of Stockport Interfaith (FSI), spoke about their work.
- SI often met to talk about a topic. However, members had not done a lot of practical work.
  - During Inter Faith Week, Mrs Maclean had opened the church that she attended to collect clothing for North West Care UK for refugee aid. She had distributed invitations to all local churches. However no donations had ensued. The Baha’i community had, however, responded.
  - SI had had a small reflective service to commemorate the bombing in Manchester.
  - FSI was more informal and activity based, for instance they had speakers.

*Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council*

40. Mrs Faranisa Sharif, Engagement and Integration Officer, Blackburn with Darwen (BwD), gave some context to integration work in the borough which was one of the five integration areas referred to in the integrated communities green paper and action plan of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- BwD had had an Engagement and Social Integration Officer to add value by working with grassroots groups and looking at what people were doing in their communities. ‘Inter faith’ came under the theme of integration.
  - For Holocaust Memorial Day, Arts 2 Heal, a group with which the Council was involved, had created a canvas with 75 flames to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The idea was to open up dialogue and conversation among the group. The same group was also involved with upcycling and litter picking and had created a poppy wreath to present during Remembrance Sunday.
  - The Council was now looking at all of the grassroots organisations to see how they could contribute to the integration agenda and how their good work could be spread across all of the areas of BwD. This included working to heal divides between Blackburn and Darwen.
  - A 12-week Youth Ambassadors Programme was in place with a social action project at the end. It was hoped that this would help take the work of the

Council out into the community. A schools' linking programme focusing on continuing professional development (CPD), and issues surrounding integration and inter faith was also in place.

### **Agenda item 5 – Inter Faith Week**

41. Ms Madiha Hussein presented on Inter Faith Week 2019. Inter Faith Week 2019 had taken place from 10 November to 17 November. At the time of the meeting, 807 events were listed on the Inter Faith Week website, including 61 events from Scottish Interfaith Week, although this was not the final number as IFN was still in the process of editing information and checking for accuracy. There had been a huge increase in events with a climate and environmental focus during the Week in 2019, and a new category had been added to reflect this on the IFW website. Events had ranged from discussions, to practical social action and conservation tasks. Inter Faith Week 2020 would be the 12<sup>th</sup> such Week.
42. Ms Hussein shared reflections on coverage of IFW in social media. She noted that due to the forthcoming December 2019 election, government departments and politicians had not been able to tweet in the same way as they had during previous years. Growth on social media was correspondingly lower than it would otherwise have been. She noted that there had been, however, a 207% increase in impressions on posts from the IFWeek Instagram account from the previous year.
43. Ms Hussein highlighted organisations that had hosted events throughout the week. Many places of worship had held 'open door' days. She had personally had the opportunity to attend an open door day in Canterbury organised by Kent County Council. In Newham there had been an inter faith bus tour hosted by faith leaders; students from the University of West London had had the opportunity to go on a private tour of St Paul's Cathedral; hospitals had held events throughout IFW; hospices had held events on faith-based approaches to end of life care; and some universities had held week-long programmes with a range of unique and creative events including 'chat up a chaplain' and 'laughter yoga'.
44. A provisional chart of information on the number of events held was shown that excluded Scottish Interfaith Week activities. The chart showed that the majority of events that had taken place during Inter Faith Week had been centred on dialogue and discussion, on topics including peace-building, tackling hate crime, building community cohesion and introductions to different faiths. Some other examples of events that had taken place included week-long programmes in Kirklees, Leicester and Swindon; the launch of Bolton Faith Youth Project; the re-launch of Devon Interfaith Forum for Youth (DIFFY); and a podcast series launched by the Faiths Forum for London which had covered topics including mental health concerns within faith institutions, faith and artificial intelligence, and climate change.
45. Pictures from Inter Faith Week 2019 were shown, as was a map of events that had taken place across the UK, including Scottish Interfaith Week events.

Graphics that had been created by IFN and shared on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to encourage a variety of activities were also shown.

46. Ms Savannah Dable from PFF shared information on its involvement with Inter Faith Week in 2019. It had focused on doing something positive to celebrate each other's festivals. On 11 November, PFF had been invited by the Mayor to lay wreaths at the cenotaph in Preston before going to the Hindu temple. It had taken the approach of asking communities in Preston what they were doing for the Week and telling them that it would promote their events and attend them. Food had been a theme throughout all of these events, which had included two trips to the Gurdwara; two 'open days' at the mosque; a 'Faith, Food and Friendship' event hosted by the Baha'i community; and an inter faith Shabbat hosted by the Jewish community. There had been emphasis on keeping the Week positive.
47. Ms Dable noted that in 2015 PFF had organised two successful trips to Calais with more than 40 volunteers from different backgrounds. The volunteers had distributed bedding and clothes to the refugees. In 2016 the same trip had been repeated. 13 Syrian families had been resettled in the Preston, Leyland and South Ribble area. A new integration project called 'Hello Preston!' had been set up for two years to help resettle these families in the area, including through an ESOL project. The project had ended in 2019, but received further funding from Lancashire County Council to continue work with a new project for Syrian teenage refugees. That further project had ended on 19 January 2020. There had been a move towards action-based projects by the group in general.
48. Hello Preston! was a project of PFF working with Syrian refugees including women and teenagers who felt isolated. It had previously received funding from Lancashire County Council and PFF was planning on applying for more. Inter Faith Week was an important opportunity to let people know about this important work.
49. Ms Craig said that the success of Inter Faith Week 2019 was due to the focus of events on celebrating and enjoying each other's festivals. A new committee for PFF had been established with four people, which had also had an impact.
50. The issue was raised of how to deal with global political issues in an inter faith context. Rabbi Elf mentioned his role with the Forum for the Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP). This topic remained the 'elephant in the room' for many inter faith groups as dynamics of discussing Israel, Palestine, Islamism or Zionism were difficult to navigate. He offered his contact details to the attendees at the meeting if they wished to discuss these issues.
51. Mr Anwar said that, from his point of view, the whole purpose of inter faith forums and groups was to have a safe environment where these kind of topics could be discussed. It was important to make sure that these kinds of discussions were allowed to take place. There was a need to have a strong Chair to make sure that arrangements were formalised. Inter faith work was often associated with social activism, such as working with refugees and the homeless, which then involved individuals who were only interested in the

social action projects rather than inter faith work. There needed also to be room for discussion.

52. Ms Craig shared that during Inter Faith Week a Muslim group in Preston had hosted an event entitled 'Do we need Shari'a law?' The controversial topic had been approached within a safe space with clear parameters for discussion put in place, and facilitation by a strong British Muslim female Chair. Mr Anwar said that he had seen the leaflet for this event. He commended the bravery of PFF in hosting such an event with a controversial title.
53. Rabbi Elf said that 'soft inter faith work' was needed in order to be able to deal with the 'hard inter faith work', such as dealing with controversial or political topics. He gave the example of the work done by inter faith groups in the lead up to and aftermath of the Manchester Arena attack, noting the importance of the foundation of relationships and trust that can be built on. Ms Craig noted that PFF was fortunate as it had set up so many links with different people and communities in the area.
54. Dr Hampshire highlighted how IFW offered opportunities for inter faith practitioners to engage in a non-hostile environment with those who would not normally participate in inter faith work, and to build relationships that would allow them to later deal with more difficult issues. He drew attention to the *Let's Talk* resource from IFN that covered approaches to dialogue that at times can be difficult, including what to do when things go wrong.
55. Dr Hampshire said that IFN had seen growth in IFW events, especially in events within educational settings and relating to the climate. He gave the example of Birmingham Council of Faiths' project working with young people and the environment (Footsteps).
56. He asked attendees about any further plans for IFW 2020. Ms Craig said that PFF was hoping to host another event with the police chaplain and army chaplain.
57. Dr Hampshire highlighted the IFN resource *Inter Faith Week: Stories from 2018, inspiration for 2019* that was available in hard copy at the meeting, as well as online to provide ideas for local inter faith practitioners.

#### **Agenda item 6 – Experiences and view of places of worship 'open doors' days**

58. Dr Hampshire introduced the topic by explaining that IFN was hoping to produce a short publication about 'open doors' days and how best to run them, including what works and what groups need to know about if they want to run their own events. There had been a long tradition of 'open doors' days and faith trails in the North West of England, including the Muslim Council of Britain's annual 'Visit My Mosque' initiative which was being planned for June 2020. Participants were invited to share examples of their involvement in these activities.



59. Ms Maclean asked how these events were publicised. Ms Craig said that PFF had accumulated a database of teachers, SACREs and other contacts from years of hosting a faith trail in Preston. It was important to get permission to add someone's contact details to such a database under GDPR. It was possible to publicise events through different groups, including multi-faith centres and universities, as well as the inter faith group's own website and social media.
60. Mr Anwar said that Building Bridges Burnley tended to use social media more in order to 'go beyond the usual suspects' and ensure that it was not just the same people who turned up to every event they hosted. He said this was especially important when groups want to engage with young people or other groups that were viewed as on the periphery of inter faith work at a grassroots level.
61. Mr Slater also highlighted the Bury VCFA (Voluntary Community and Faith Alliance) as an organisation that supported third sector groups in Bury and acted as a contact point for communication with the third sector. Local authorities might also have a similar database. It was also possible to pay for a post on Facebook to reach out to a wider audience, although this meant having less control over who got the information and therefore who turned up to the event being publicised.
62. Mr Anwar said that, in his experience over 20 years of being involved in inter faith work, no one had ever visited a place of worship with controversial views and felt that those views had been reinforced. That was why it is important to host 'open door' days at places of worship.
63. Rabbi Elf offered publicity for groups in Greater Manchester through the FN4M newsletter and weekly emails. He noted that local authorities were also useful in terms of communications as they could directly reach out to the relevant contacts.
64. Dr Hampshire emphasised that it was possible to organise groups to go on a visit rather than just advertising 'open door' days widely and hoping that people will turn up.
65. Dr Dermott said that it was mainly schools that took part in the faith trails programme run by Bolton Interfaith Council. This included schools that they had existing relationships with or schools who have heard about the trails from word of mouth. Schools from as far as Cumbria and Blackburn had taken part in the faith trails. Bolton Interfaith Council was also trying to arrange open door, public and regular sessions or events that were not just for set groups or schools. There were issues relating to capacity when it came to opening these events up to the public, as they were reliant on volunteers.
66. Ms Hurlston said that the Tameside SACRE had in the past had a directory of places of worship with a contact for each. That was being recreated. It was also working with the Education Department to provide a training opportunity to prepare people for the questions that they might be asked if they opened their

place of worship for an 'open door' day. This was planned to include issues around safeguarding and equality.

67. Dr Hampshire, said that he was the designated safeguarding lead for IFN. He noted that the concept of vulnerability had been increasingly extended to adults. Safeguarding was often discussed more in relation to schools, children and young people than to adults, however there were broader safeguarding issues relating to 'open doors' days. It was important to ensure that safeguarding policies included those who were volunteering or are frail. If any one wanted a conversation about this he was available to discuss the issues.
68. Mr Ahmed explained that a peace walk had been hosted in Pendle, with attendees including faith organisations and schools. Two walks had taken place, focusing on communities coming together; taking people out of their comfort zones; and getting to know each other outside of places of worship. Each walk had ended with a festival where participants were able to share food and celebrate the day. Church and mosque visits also took place throughout the year with schools, which made up a big part of Building Bridges Pendle's work. Faith leaders were being challenged by this peace walk to get out of their places of worship.
69. Mr Slater talked about how 'open door' days were sometimes unsuccessful due to groups not leaving enough time for promotion or organisation. Groups needed to think about what the 'offer' was to entice people from the community to come into these places of worship, including food, community and music.
70. Ms Craig said that in 2019 PFF had looked at an 'open door' policy, which included telling places of worship of plans months in advance and what was required from them on the day, including in terms of volunteers. PFF had worked with Preston Gurdwara and the Gujarati Centre in 2019. These visits had been more successful than faith trails held in previous years. Activities and entertainment, as well as giving the centres time to prepare the hospitality to offer on the day, were key to ensuring the success. Hosting these events during IFW gave an opportunity to share how centres serve the community.
71. Ms Hussein promoted the IFN social media photography competition that was taking place on Instagram and Facebook. She encouraged entries from local groups across the four different categories.

## **Agenda item 7 – Topical issues and concerns**

72. A number of issues were addressed.

### **a) Funding**

73. Mr Slater emphasised how cuts to local authorities had created a need to change how inter faith work was looked at and thought about. There was a need to change the culture around local inter faith work to 'stand up together'.

74. Ms Craig said that PFF had worked on a membership basis for many years – for faith groups and individuals, as well as a ‘Friends of’ donation – and when a project was run both individuals and offices in the area had stood up to help with resources. There was a need to engage in projects that others could see are having a positive impact on the community. PFF was not in a position to use Gift Aid.

b) Politics and inter faith work

75. Ms Craig said that PFF had put a disclaimer on the group’s Facebook page stating that the page was not for political discussion. It was important to ask someone with mediation and conflict resolution skills to be involved if these issues were raised.
76. Mr Anwar said that he believed that it was important for politics and inter faith work to come together, giving the example of local authorities pledging to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Days and Srebrenica Memorial Days. It was important to engage with councillors and politicians.

c) Sustainability of groups

77. Dr Hampshire said that often inter faith work came out of conflict, giving the example of Wolverhampton following Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. He said that where at the beginning of a group’s existence there was a mobilisation of people around a single issue in a forum context, issues sometimes arose when these drivers were no longer present; questions were raised as to what sustained the group and ensured its long term survival.
78. Mr Slater said that leadership and ownership were key to sustaining a group. Mr Anwar explained that in 2001 Building Bridges Burnley had been given funding following disturbances in the area. However, this funding had ended in 2010. Sustainability ensured through the management committee continuing to meet every three months. Burnley was unique due to the history of disturbances and presence of a Faith Centre; however, sustainability was ensured due to passion from within the group.
79. Mr Anwar used the example of Remembrance Day in Burnley, which dramatically increased the number of attendees in 15 years once it began to include multi-faith representatives, to highlight the value and impact of inter faith work. Vigils promoted via social media were also given as an example.
80. Ms Hartley said that showing the importance of the faith sector in health and well-being was particularly important in Tameside and Oldham, where the inter faith groups had been working with hospitals and chaplaincies. Both Oldham Interfaith and Faiths United (Tameside) were held in high esteem linked to their chaplaincy and social action engagement. It was important to have a presence around the table where decisions were being made. There was a move back towards neighbourhood-based projects.

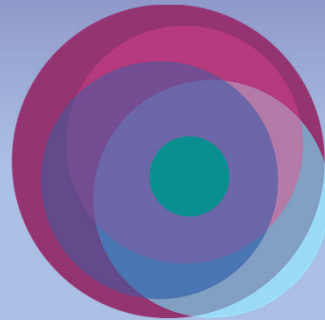
81. Mr Ahmed gave the example of the Remembrance Day march in Pendle in 2019 that had taken place during IFW and the Prophet's birthday celebration. Previously, there had been only a Christian service for Remembrance Day. When, in 2019, the imam had given a 30 second speech, that had made a big impact.

**Close of the meeting**

82. Dr Hampshire thanked everyone for their contributions and wished them a safe journey home.
83. The meeting closed at 3.30pm.

7 July 2020

# Inter Faith Week



Madiha Hussein (IFN Project Assistant)

## Inter Faith Week 2019

- Held between 10 – 17 November 2019
- 807 events currently listed on our website
- 2019 saw a large increase in events with an environment and climate focus
- 2020 will be the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the Week

Inter Faith Week



## Inter Faith Week on Social Media

- On Twitter, tweets about the Week had a marginally higher reach than in 2018 (7.9million, up 200,000), with a similar number of impressions (27.9million).
- 'Inter Faith Week' was tweeted 7,263 times
- #InterFaithWeek hashtag was used 5,548 times
- Posts from the IFWeek Instagram account had 5,663 impressions (compared to 1,841 in 2018) - 207% increase

Inter Faith  
Week



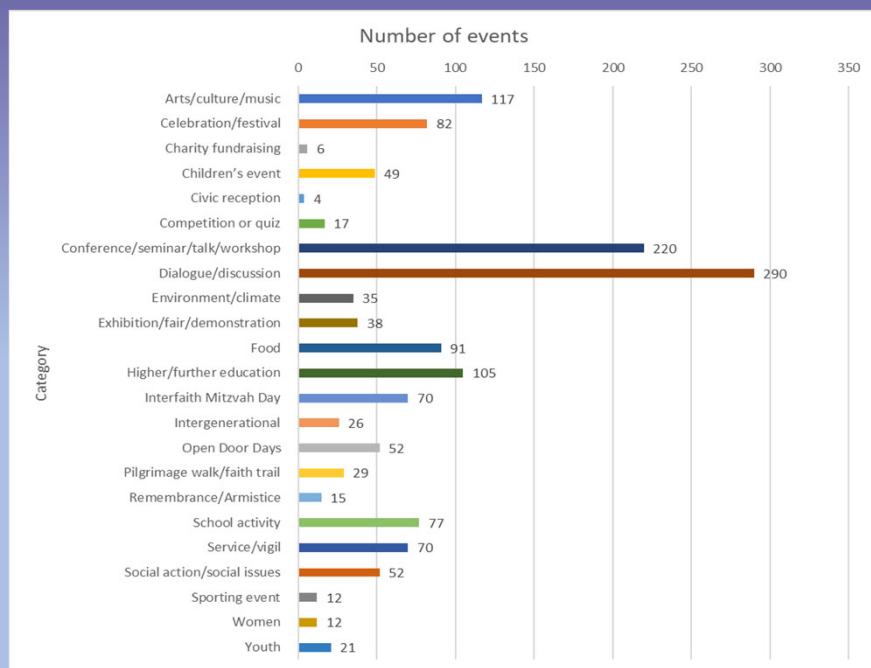
## Who?

- Places of worship i.e. churches, gurdwaras, temples, mosques, mandirs, synagogues, viharas
- Libraries
- Museums
- Schools, colleges & universities
- Hospitals
- Hospices
- Government and civic buildings
- Community centres
- Sports grounds
- The Great Outdoors

Inter Faith  
Week



# What?



## What?

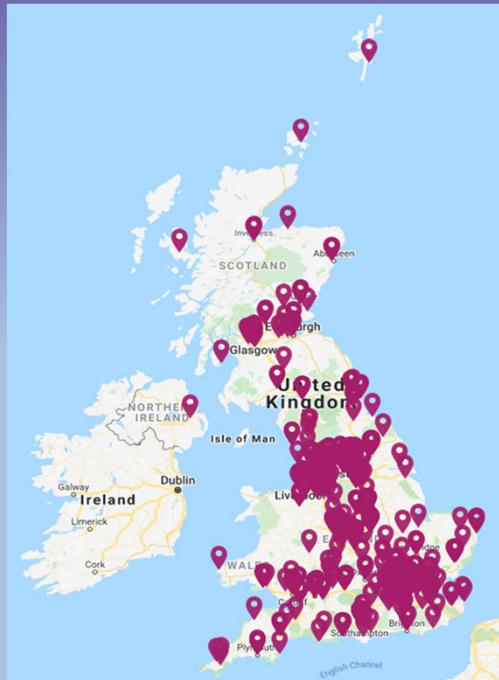
- Week long programmes
- Launch of Bolton Faith Youth Project
- Re-launch of Devon Interfaith Forum for Youth (DIFFY)
- Faiths Forum for London launched a new podcast series @HowCanFaithHelp and released a new podcast every day of the Week

Inter Faith  
Week





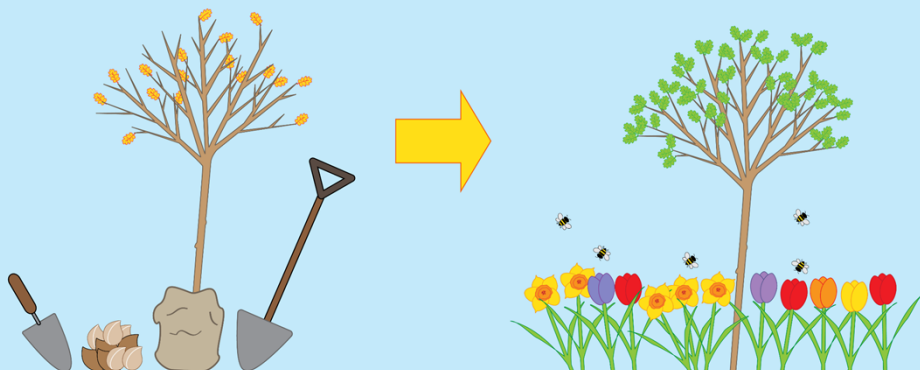
Where?



Inter Faith  
Week



**Inter Faith Week:**  
A great time to plant bulbs and trees together!



[www.interfaithweek.org](http://www.interfaithweek.org)

#InterFaithWeek

[f](#) [@](#) [@IFWeek](#)

