



Inter Faith Network day event for local inter faith practitioners

A SHORT REPORT

Thursday 26 March 2015
St Mary's Conference Centre, Sheffield



About the day

On 26 March, practitioners from a range of local inter faith groups from different parts of the UK came together for a day of learning and sharing held by the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The first local inter faith groups began to emerge in the UK back in the 1970s. From a handful of pioneering groups, local inter faith bodies have mushroomed in number to over 250 and there are also many types of local initiative which are not 'inter faith organisations' as such, including bodies such as SACREs and local multi faith chaplaincies as well as projects, initiatives and short term programmes. What are some of the features of the landscape today and some of the challenges and possibilities in working locally for inter faith understanding and cooperation?

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has, since it was established in 1987, advocated strongly for the importance of local inter faith activity. This has been a part of its overall pattern of work. Local activity is organically related to the very important work of national faith community bodies and also benefits from the work of national and regional inter faith and educational initiatives of many kinds. Past IFN National Meetings have explored these links and the importance of the role of national faith communities and inter faith initiatives in supporting and encouraging local inter faith activity.

This day event was offered specifically for local inter faith practitioners to share their experiences, discuss issues of common interest and concern and for focused learning opportunities drawing on the kinds of questions and issues raised by IFN member local groups at link meetings in the last two years. It was open to all local inter faith groups in the UK and also local



The Revd Gareth Jones, Joyce Pickard, the Revd Richard Tetlow and Professor Harbhajan Singh

inter faith practitioners with a particular interest in the issues working in other contexts.

The event was facilitated by the Director of Inter Faith Network for the UK, Harriet Crabtree. She spoke, in her opening remarks, about the vital importance of inter faith work at local level and the commitment of those who carried this out. The day was an opportunity to strengthen this work through sharing of good practice, practical learning about particular issues, and discussion of matters of common interest.

Participants were welcomed by the Revd Andrew Crowley, Chair of Sheffield Interfaith. He described Sheffield as a tolerant and friendly city which had become the first UK 'City of Sanctuary' some years ago. Its many hills and skylines meant that it was in some ways rather like a group of villages/localities. Sheffield Interfaith is a small, grassroots organisation which organises an annual inter faith walk, and has food and friendship groups.

Hearing from grassroots activists working in different contexts

There were short presentations from a range of local inter faith practitioners from different contexts.

1. A vital contribution to local inter faith understanding and cooperation

Bessie White, Secretary, Hounslow Friends of Faith

Bessie White offered the following reflections:



Bessie White, Hounslow Friends of Faith

- In the London Borough of Hounslow 39% of the population is White and the rest is mainly Asian. There are people of many different religious backgrounds.
- Hounslow Friends of Faith (HFoF) is open to anyone to join.
- Local inter faith work takes time and commitment. It is important to be there ‘yesterday, today and tomorrow’.
- It helps to have a regular programme of events, even if there are not many. HFoF hosts each year a friendship walk, an AGM and an Inter Faith Week (IFW) event.
- HFoF has a women’s group which meets regularly over food. Creating friendships through such groups makes faith real and provides continuity between events. Women often seem better at engaging on a deeper level.
- Visibility and continuity matter. There are many ways to ensure visibility, such as marketing, circulating emails, using a website, keeping the local media informed, and writing a newsletter. It is helpful to have ‘pegs’ on which to hang items, even if they’re only small.
- Be prepared to change if you’re not successful.
- Inter Faith Week provides real value for local inter faith groups. IFN’s annual letter about IFW to Local Authority Chief Executives is very useful.

In response to questions she said that:

- The friendship walk is always held within the borough of Hounslow and includes visits to places of worship or other faith institutions, such as schools. They try as far as possible to use different areas of the borough each year.
- The women's group has between 18 and 20 members. Each month about 12 people attend the meeting.

Jonny Wineberg, Faith Network 4 Manchester, Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester and Community Futures Trust CIC

Jonny Wineberg offered a brief overview of the work of the Faith Network 4 Manchester (FN4M) and the Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester (MJFGM):

- There are 17 different inter faith groups in the Greater Manchester area.
- FN4M runs various activities including: a schools initiative, an allotment programme, work with services such as the police and a Multi Faith Centre.
- FN4M is a registered charity. This charity status helps with fundraising.
- FN4M has open elections each year. It aims to be very transparent in its processes.
- It is run entirely on a voluntary basis.
- MJFGM holds approximately 12 very different types of events per year such as: seminars for lawyers and accountants; concerts; school assemblies; sporting events; and women's events. Different people attend different events.

- MJFGM has also been involved in campaigns, such as one to protect religious slaughter.
- The Jewish community is based more in Greater Manchester than in the centre.
- It has been difficult to involve rabbis and imams in MJFGM.
- FN4M has one part time Administrator and one part time Development Worker.
- MJFGM's Executive Committee meets every 6 to 8 weeks.
- It is very important to evaluate events in order to learn from them.

In response to questions, he said that:

- Local Community and Voluntary Services would be able to assist local inter faith organisations with an application for charitable status. This usually involved completing an online form, which took between 2 and 3 hours and was not too onerous. Charities are required to submit annual reports and accounts.
- MJFGM and FN4M have held some events regarding issues in prisons and hospitals but such work was usually carried out by individual faith chaplains.

Shahida Siddique, Project Officer, Doncaster Faiths Together and Sheffield Faiths Together (under development)

Shahida Siddique said that she had worked in the voluntary, community, faith sector for over 20 years. She offered the following reflections:

- Faith communities in Doncaster are very diverse but small in number.

- Doncaster Faiths Together emerged from a desire to work out where faith communities fitted into the changes that were taking place in Doncaster.
- Faith communities work with the public and private sector organisations involved in the Doncaster Together Partnership Charter, both as individual faith communities and together.
- In some areas faith communities are the lynchpin of services.
- Faith communities' voices need to be heard and used strategically in the wider plans for Doncaster.
- When Doncaster Faiths Together was set up they looked at the local authority's key priorities for the area and prepared a report to outline what faith communities were already doing to impact on these. The local authority had been surprised and impressed and taken them seriously.
- Doncaster Faiths Together and Doncaster Interfaith Network complement one another and share some events, but they work differently.
- The idea for Sheffield Faiths Together had developed following a conversation that she had had with the Bishop of Sheffield about Doncaster Faiths Together. It is still in its early stages.
- It is important to empower existing faith and inter faith structures, and not to tread on each other's toes.

In response to questions she said that:

- Consistency is important for an organisation. Doncaster Faiths Together always holds regular meetings, regardless of the number of people who attend.

- Publicity is important, even if there is no major, exciting news, it's important to let people know you're still a presence.
- The work goes in cycles so sometimes there is more activity than others. For example, recently faith communities came together in Sheffield following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris. Between 500 and 700 people attended. It was a learning experience. Some people had not been included who ought to have been. They are therefore developing a communications protocol to ensure that the right people can have a voice at the right time.
- Doncaster Faiths Together events are held in different venues. This creates different atmospheres and can take people out of comfort zones.

2. Challenging times: the importance of solidarity and strengthening links

Manjit Singh Bhogal, Dudley Borough Interfaith Network

Manjit Bhogal spoke about the response to a new mosque being built in the Dudley area:

- The mosque is due to be built in a Muslim area on the edge of the town and was originally refused planning permission for being too large. Plans have since been scaled down but protests are continuing.
- In February this year members of the English Defence League (EDL) held a demonstration against the proposed mosque.
- A counter-demonstration took place involving members of the local authority, faith communities and others.



Informal networking during the lunch break

- Both the demonstration and the counter-demonstration took place in Coronation Gardens. These are community gardens with a memorial to a peace campaigner.
- Dudley Borough Interfaith Network realised that by demonstrating in these Gardens the EDL were to an extent ‘stamping on hallowed ground’. They decided that faith and inter faith groups should reclaim the Gardens for peace. They plan to hold a peace rally in the Gardens and to make this a regular event. This will enable them to be proactive and positive rather than just reacting to negative events.
- The local authority paid for a police presence and security during the EDL’s demonstration. But it has indicated that it is unlikely to make any funds available for the peace rally. It seems easier for local authorities to fund responses to problems rather than positive initiatives.

In response to questions, he said that:

- It will take time to reclaim the space. Faith communities need to be placemakers and shapemakers. Their voices should be heard.
- The peace rally will be non-threatening. It will not be political or religious. It will be publicised well in advance. Well-known and respected community members will speak and there will be music to break down barriers.

The Revd Richard Tetlow, Convenor, Highgate Inter Faith Group and Moseley Inter Faith Forum (Greater Birmingham)

The Revd Richard Tetlow said that following the attacks in Paris and demonstrations in Germany in January, Highgate Inter Faith Group and Moseley Inter Faith Forum in Birmingham had organised an inter faith rally entitled ‘Not in Our Name’. He offered the following reflections:

- The rally was organised very quickly because the two inter faith groups involved are small in number.
- The rally began with approximately 150 people and grew to 400 people in 40 minutes.



Manjit Singh Bhogal, Dudley Borough Interfaith Network

- There were 6 speakers from different faiths who each offered a reflection from their faith. These were very moving.
- The rally did not address the issue of free speech because that would have been too divisive.
- Theological issues are central to strengthening relationships between faiths. It is acceptable to talk about God around all faith communities. Christians are seeking to shed the perception that they have a superior attitude. These are crucial issues to strengthening solidarity between communities.
- The speakers' expenses were paid for by the Roman Catholic Church.
- The leaflets for the rally were paid for by the local mosque.
- There was local TV and radio coverage and some national media coverage.
- The symbolism of the rally was very important. No other rally took place in Birmingham.

In response to questions, Mr Tetlow said that:

- It was easier to organise a quick response because the groups involved were from a small local area and had closer relationships than if they were spread across the whole of Birmingham.
- There had not been any major backlash from the rally. It was too small an event for the EDL to know about it. Someone who had spoken about the rally on the radio had received an unpleasant telephone call. The media had been terrific.

The following comment was offered:

- There are different forms of leadership. There is no hierarchy between faith communities as long as someone is prepared to take on the role. There is a need to recognise different types of leadership to bring people together.

Mr Tetlow read out the statement made at the 'Not in our Name' rally, which is reproduced below.

"As members of the Highgate Inter Faith group and the Moseley Inter Faith Forum we utterly reject the violent and extremist actions committed in the name of religion by desperate murderers in Paris and worldwide. They do not act or speak for us. We believe true religion is to seek to practise justice, love, mercy and peace among all people both locally and internationally. We equally reject anti-Semitism, islamophobia and racism and any associated violence: these have no rightful place in our city.

"We are confident that all communities in Birmingham of whatever faith or belief can continue to work for a peaceful future. We wish to show mutual respect in our relationships and appreciation of both our similarities and our differences. We

are proud that BIRMINGHAM belongs to all of us and we are proud to belong to BIRMINGHAM, our great cosmopolitan and inclusive city.”

At this point in the day there were three workshops, each run twice:

‘Getting the message across’, facilitated by Mark Cosens of York Interfaith and then Patricia Stoa of Nottingham Inter Faith Council and led by Ashley Beck of the Inter Faith Network, which looked at such questions as:

- What are the communications needs of local inter faith groups?
- We live in a world with ever more ways to communicate – talking, emails, letters, instant messaging, websites, social networks and more. How can we keep in touch with members and others and communicate the importance of our work in ways which are effective, easy and not heavily labour intensive?
- What may be the possibilities and challenges when it comes to using websites and social networking?
- Some simple steps for thinking through communications and a chance to take a look at Twitter and Facebook and how some local inter faith groups are using these.

‘Funding and resourcing your work’, led by Kaye Wilson of Fit4Funding, which looked at topics such as:

- Attracting funding for activities and projects
- The kind of resources we need to enable us to carry out our work
- How best to fundraise
- Planning for raising funds
- Demonstrating need and describing outcomes positively
- Identifying suitable sources of funding
- Tips on raising funds – such as what makes a successful bid
- Submitting funding applications

‘Developing and maintaining programmes that work well for your area’, facilitated by the Revd Gareth Jones and led by Harriet Crabtree which looked at such topics as:

- Identifying what we are seeking to achieve
- Taking forward a broad programme including, eg, dialogue and education, while also responding well to particular local issues, including possible tensions
- Social action as part of a programme – Mitzvah Day, Sewa Day and other ongoing forms of inter faith/multi faith social action
- Playing an active role in the community and the civic context

- Engaging people of different faiths, beliefs and ages
- Keeping long-term and newer members involved and enthused
- Organisational matters – frameworks which underpin the activity
- Using Inter Faith Week as a platform for raising awareness and widening membership

At Annex A is a note of points from the latter workshop. Material from other workshops was mainly in Powerpoint format and is also available on request.

3. Thinking about the future of local inter faith action and engagement

The Revd James Breslin, Council of Christians and Jews North East and Newcastle Council of Faiths

The Revd James Breslin offered the following reflections:

- Newcastle has approximately the same population as the London Borough of Hounslow mentioned earlier in the day.
- The North East region in general has a population which is 98% White European. In Newcastle the figure is 92%. The largest ethnic group other than these is Chinese. The majority religion followed by Chinese background residents is Christianity, although there are some Buddhists and some who follow traditional Chinese religions. The largest grouping, other than Christian, is Muslim.
- Some mosques are linked to particular denominations of Islam; others to

particular languages spoken by attenders, for example Turkish.

- Historically there have been good inter faith relations but in recent times there have been demonstrations by PEGIDA and the EDL. Even when relationships are good, one should never become complacent.
- The agendas of CCJ North East and the Newcastle Council of Faiths are – and must be – different. What can be done in a bilateral discussion cannot be done as well or as easily in a multi faith discussion, especially when the communities vary greatly in size.
- What works in one place does not necessarily work everywhere. For example, in the Newcastle area different faith communities are reluctant to eat together and so it is easier not to focus events around food. This might work well in other areas.

Dr Rose Drew, Project Manager, Interfaith Glasgow

Dr Rose Drew offered the following reflections:

- Interfaith Glasgow has been running for 2.5 years and is currently a project under the auspices of Interfaith Scotland but hopes to become an organisation in its own right. It is exciting to be part of building a new organisation.
- Interfaith Glasgow has an advisory group made up of people from Glasgow's faith communities. The hope is that the advisory group will become the board of trustees of the new body.
- As part of setting up the group, research was commissioned to get a measure of the current inter faith scene in Glasgow. This showed that there was an over-reliance on a very small group of people



Workshop discussion

(and therefore a need to increase participation); and that a lot of people felt that inter faith was ‘not for them’.

- Further investigation of the latter point showed this sense was often related to overly narrow conceptions of what interfaith engagement is!
- Interfaith Glasgow has therefore tried to avoid the ‘one size fits all’ approach. Instead it has a three-fold model of engagement: friendship building activities; religious dialogue; and cooperation on matters of shared concern. This enables different people to attend different types of events.
- In order to evaluate success, there is a need to decide at the beginning what success will look like. The difficulty is that often it is the funders who decide what success will look like (for example asking how many stakeholders have been reached). It is helpful if inter faith groups can be stakeholders in deciding how evaluations are carried out and what funders should be looking for.

Chan Parmar, Bolton Interfaith Council

Mr Chan Parmar offered the following reflections:

- He used to work in a bank but then at the age of 55 years moved to work for Bolton Interfaith Council, where he has now been for 9 years.
- He used to represent the Hindu community on an inter faith forum that met in a church and it was through this that he was invited to become part of the Bolton Interfaith Council.
- Bolton Interfaith Council was founded about 15 years ago.
- Bolton has a population of 276,000 and there are three major faith communities: Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.
- The local authority saw the value of people of faiths and partnerships. It was already funding cohesion posts at the Council of Mosques and the Hindu Forum but decided that a link was needed between them all and that is



Jonny Wineberg, Faith Network 4 Manchester, Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester

- how his Strategic Officer post was created.
- Bolton Interfaith Council's website is updated at least twice a week.
- The local authority is very supportive and Bolton Interfaith Council has worked on events in partnership with hospitals, Greater Manchester Police, the Community Network and Bolton CVS. Partnerships are key to building relationships and trust.
- Bolton Interfaith Council organised an inter faith cricket match and despite there being no cricket because of the weather, it was an excellent day for people to get together. On the same day there was an EDL demonstration taking place on the other side of town. There were more people at the cricket match than the demonstration.
- The aid worker Alan Henning, who was killed in Syria, came from Lancashire. Bolton Interfaith Council held prayers from him. Hundreds of people from different faiths attended.
- It is an absolute privilege to work in inter faith relations.

- Inter faith work is vital for the future. It is about breaking down barriers, changing perceptions and bringing people together. It helps to bring safety and security to communities and to bring peace and harmony for future generations.
- Funding is not everything. Building trust and relying on one another is more important.

Comments and reflections on the theme

Harriet Crabtree invited any comments and reflections on the theme.

The following were offered:

- The importance of just being there is going to become critical. No one knows what is around the corner. It is vital to build relationships.
- There is a great value in multi-agency approaches: engaging in partnerships with local authorities and public bodies but also with other inter faith organisations. It is important to have one's 'inter faith hat' on all the time, not



Dr Rose Drew, Interfaith Glasgow

just to switch it on and off at certain times.

- The next five years are going to be very difficult and turbulent for all faiths because wherever faiths are in the minority, the majority will see them as a soft target to attack in order to get international media coverage. People of all ages from faith communities need to visibly come out from their safe, comfortable spaces to meet together, cry together and laugh together.
- Faith communities need to decide what they want to happen for future generations and decide what they are going to do about it.
- Groups vary considerably in their level of professional approach.
- In the foreseeable future inter faith work will be diverse, proactive and dynamic. Faith communities need to look after the vulnerable in society and hold authorities to account for their wellbeing.
- The next five years will be a difficult period. The significance will be in the doing together rather than in what is being done.

And, closing the day, local inter faith, the next generation

Aamna Alam, Chair of Bolton Interfaith Young Ambassadors, a young person deeply involved in inter faith work, attended the day. She was invited to offer some closing words and spoke of how fantastic it was to see the shared intergenerational work that was taking place between young people, adults and the elderly and to consider how those links could be strengthened and sustained in the future. It was also good to be able to share such questions as ‘How do I bring people to my inter faith work or to my place of worship?’ She would be taking a lot of learning points from the day.

More about Aamna’s own work can be seen in a special video made at IFN’s event *Young Voices, Young Agents for Change* at www.youth.interfaith.org.uk.

ANNEX

SUMMARY NOTES FROM WORKSHOP ON DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING PROGRAMMES THAT WORK WELL FOR YOUR AREA

This workshop was held twice. Each session was facilitated by the Revd Gareth Jones of Sheffield Interfaith and the presentation in each was made by Dr Harriet Crabtree, Inter Faith Network for the UK.

In each case introductory points offered by the speaker are listed, followed by points made by participants in discussion.

1. Our vision and our goals

- Developing a programme of an organisation calls for clarity about its vision and goals.
- It is helpful for vision and goals to be reassessed from time to time in order to keep them up to date and avoid 'mission drift'.

2. Scoping and planning

- Planning activities and programmes needs to take into account the needs of the area and other relevant factors such as who else may be responding to these. This calls for 'scoping'.
- Scoping and planning is a way to ensure that you avoid duplication of other organisations' work.
- Scoping is important to carry out from time to time as it is important to adapt to local changes, for example a new group being established.

- A mini audit of who is doing what on the local inter faith scene can be helpful as part of this – and also of how different parts of a group's programme relate to particular local needs.
- Local authorities also do work in this area and it is useful to have some 'joined up-ness' with the local authority – to know who to speak with there and to discuss from time to time your and their perceptions of what is needed.
- It's useful, at the planning stage, to explore possible partners for your work or events.
- It's good to work out with whom you'd like to engage and how.
- Optimistic realism – or realistic optimism – is important.

Discussion points:

- It's important to position yourself strategically with regard to other organisations and to look at the bigger picture.
- Sometimes it is impossible to have a complete overview. Inter faith activity has increased so much, we have to recognise that we are never going to know everything.
- Derby SACRE joined together with Derbyshire SACRE to hold a joint event which saved money.

- Bolton Inter Faith Council is part of both the Bolton Stronger Communities Partnership and the Vision Steering Group run by Bolton Council. Involvement in these is a good way of finding out about and supporting one another's activities and events.
- Interfaith Glasgow receives some funding from the Scottish Government's Equality Unit.
- The local authority used to provide some funding for Sheffield Faiths Forum but this has now ceased.

3. Thinking about resources

- It's important to be realistic and not over-reach.
- Volunteers are invaluable in inter faith work.
- In-kind resources, such as meeting room spaces, can be very helpful.
- It is prudent to look at planning annually in order to remain focused.
- Grant opportunities are important and a separate workshop is looking at this and at other aspects of fund raising.
- Some groups talk about how going for particular types of funding skewed their programme; funding can be very important but needs to be sought in the context of vision, mission and any agreed programme of work.
- It's important to respect the integrity of your own aims as well as those of your funders.
- Cleveland and Tees Valley Interfaith Group spans five different local authorities: each is reluctant to provide funding because of this.
- Wisbech Interfaith Forum has applied for £500 from the local authority and is due to make a presentation about this shortly.
- Huddersfield Inter Faith Council gave back some of its funding as it did not fit with its core aims.
- There are not sufficient funding programmes for local inter faith work and many of those that there are don't cover all areas and/or are short term.

Discussion points:

- Sustainability has different meanings to different people.
- It's very important to have a contingency.
- Doncaster Faiths Together receives some funding from South Yorkshire Police.

4. Programmes

- It can be useful to hold different types of events and activities in order to encourage different people.
- Special 'days' and 'weeks' are useful.
- It can be very valuable to engage civic leaders in events and activities but they require a lot of notice for their diaries.
- All publicity and other literature should be clearly written and easy to read/absorb.
- Having an established pattern of events and activities is good. It's also good to

occasionally throw in a wild card and try something different.

- It is good to have distinctive events to promote awareness of your organisation locally. For example York Interfaith Group is well known for its Inter Faith Week programme.

Discussion points:

- It's important to make it clear that the faith communities and/ or individuals involved are carrying out the inter faith work because of their faith.
- It is important to make it clear that the faith groups involved in inter faith activity are not evangelising.
- It's helpful to invite civic leaders to events 'on the ground' within the area, rather than just in the Town Hall.
- Involving civic leaders can be very positive but can sometimes also skew agendas.
- Moseley Inter Faith Forum and Highgate Inter Faith Group are only one mile apart geographically but they are very different. They can learn from each other and help each other.
- Chesterfield held a 'Faith in the community' day in December. It had learned from similar days held in other parts of the country. Overall it was very successful and had helped to raise awareness of different traditions and cultures in the area.

5. Organisational underpinnings

- It's important to match the organisation's programme to the people available to carry it out; and to be clear on who is responsible for what.

- It's important to communicate well with those with whom you'd like to engage. This includes the language used and the methods of communication.
- York Interfaith Group uses three layers of communication: email, social media and hand-delivering hard copies to those who do not have computers. The latter is a living expression of caring.

6. Maintaining and growing participation

- It's helpful to know which groups and constituencies you would like to involve. It is not possible to involve all the people all the time.
- Sometimes it's useful to have quiet conversations with groups not involved about why they may not be attending.
- There needs to be frank and realistic talking alongside visioning.
- Some people may only wish to participate in some types of events.
- You can grow participation through themed events, such as those involving young people.
- There is sometimes more than one local inter faith group in an area, each with a different focus. Complementary activity of this kind can be mutually strengthening.

7. Monitoring and evaluating

- Monitoring and evaluation is helpful internally (for example in deciding whether or not to continue holding an event) and also externally (for example for funders).
- It's important to decide at the beginning of the year what your measurements

will be. (For example, footfall at events and demonstrably strengthened relationships resulting in more work/events together.)

- It is difficult to know how to evaluate the wider impact of inter faith work: absence of tensions and improved inter faith understanding and cooperation are hard to measure.
- Participants could be asked to give feedback; and to answer ‘How did you feel before?/How do you feel now?’ style questions.

Discussion points:

- Evaluation should be embedded in early planning.
- You need to look back and evaluate in order to look forward.
- You need to keep your vision in mind and also adapt to change.

8. Affirmation and celebration

- It’s not possible to achieve everything, so don’t beat yourself up! Take on board lessons for the future but affirm the positive and value your work.
- Evaluating your work can make you realise how much you’ve achieved. It’s good to find ways to acknowledge successes and any special contributions at least once a year.
- It’s important to find time to say ‘thank you’ and to celebrate.
- It can be helpful to let the local media know about your achievements.
- Inter faith work is difficult and complex. It is the work of lifetimes and generations.

Discussion points:

- You need to define success in order to achieve it!

The group then opened up the general workshop theme for wider discussion. The following reflections, questions and comments were offered:

How can local inter faith groups ensure that they are not duplicating the work of other groups around the country?

- Information on local activity can be found by searching on the internet, talking to the local authority and to local faith communities.
- IFN is putting together more examples of good practice.
- Local newspapers can be very useful for promoting inter faith work.
- The Regional Faith Forums in England were very useful in assisting local inter faith groups. Due to the withdrawal of Government funding, only a few of these still exist.
- Newsletters of local faith communities and local Community Voluntary Services can be useful; as can local issue-based networks such as food banks.

There have not been any members of a particular major faith community involved in our local inter faith group for several years.

- In some areas some faith communities are very few in number and it is therefore hard to get representation from them all.
- If people turn up to an inter faith event and don’t find people from a variety of

different communities they may not return because the group is not diverse enough.

- York mosque invited English Defence League activists in for 'tea and biscuits' and the open day at the mosque was well supported each year during Inter Faith Week.
- The pattern of faith community engagement depends on what they think is useful to them.
- Often faith leaders have very full diaries.
- It can be useful to have a frank discussion about why a community feels uneasy about inter faith engagement.
- It's useful to emphasise why it is good to come to regular meetings, not just to occasional events.
- Often it is like-minded people who participate; those who could benefit don't attend.
- It might be helpful to invite an imam to a local church for a question and answer event.
- A Muslim lady had held a question and answer event in a church for a Mothers Union group. About 50 women were present and they had been able to ask questions in a safe, comfortable space. It is important to continue engagement after such events, for example through email discussions.
- Care needs to be taken in the choice of speakers.
- In Wisbech speakers are invited to stay overnight and to visit a local school the following morning. This has been well received by the local press.

- It might be helpful to phone a local imam and invite your group to the mosque.
- It might be helpful to offer a role, such as that of treasurer, to a person from the faith community which you are having difficulty engaging.
- It's important to think about ways to engage in addition to holding meetings and events.
- It can be a good idea to offer speakers from different faiths to go into schools, emergency services and so forth, but the speakers need adequate training.
- The Faith Encounter Programme in the West Midlands trains people from all faith communities to become faith guides.
- You cannot force people to join in; just 'be there' if they want to.
- Informal conversations with people of different faiths happen all the time. We are always wearing inter faith hats!

The make-up of different local inter faith groups varies greatly.

- Some organisations have representatives in membership, others focus on individuals.
- Some people feel that they are specially called to do inter faith work and their resulting strong commitment adds impact.
- Some local inter faith groups which thought that they could not engage certain faith communities have found that this has changed over time.
- It is rare for faith community leaders to be involved in local inter faith groups on an ongoing regular basis.

- Over time the problem of involving faith community leaders can be solved because young people already involved in the group may go on to become faith leaders.
- Individuals searching for something are often drawn to inter faith groups.
- It can create difficulties if those who want to engage with a local inter faith group want it to be representative but do not see it as being so.
- Communities and organisations need to have a corporate memory.
- It is often possible to engage new members by holding a charity event, such as a walk to raise funds for Diabetes UK.
- Informal groups can be as useful as formal ones. It all depends on the vision and goals and the context. There is no one fixed model.
- In some groups there are 'shining lights' and no one takes over when they leave. Planning for succession is important.
- Inter faith pantomimes are a good idea – people remember being made happy.
- It can be helpful to keep in touch with people by telephone, as leaflets and emails can be ignored.
- You need to be committed to local inter faith work for it to be successful; and there needs to be an element of enjoyment.
- We need to remember why we are involved in inter faith work and appreciate how far we've come.
- Local inter faith groups are often used as a good insurance policy and only called upon when needed.
- Tensions can be eased when faith leaders in local communities know one another well.
- There are serious aspects to inter faith work – and sometimes challenging ones – but there is also enjoyment and joy in coming together and working together in service to others.
- It is a privilege to be involved in inter faith work.

Local inter faith work is challenging but very rewarding.

- It's a constant learning curve.
- It's good for young and old to learn from one another.
- You need to be good at delivering but also good at evaluating.
- Partnerships are vital but integrity must be maintained. Relationships are enhanced by supporting one another's events.
- Inter faith workers need to be adaptable – like potatoes!

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