# CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY: CHANGING PATTERNS OF INTER FAITH ENGAGEMENT IN THE UK

**2006 National Meeting**
**of**
**The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

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# PROCEEDINGS

**Bishop Tom Butler**, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting and welcomed participants to it. He said that 'faith' and 'inter faith' issues have come strongly to the forefront of the public agenda in recent years and the importance of people of different religious backgrounds living harmoniously has become more widely recognised. The meeting provided an opportunity to explore the rich and complex new terrain of inter faith activity and to reflect on how the task of building good inter faith relations is changing and how we can build on the good practice developed over the last two decades and ensure this is continued and extended.

The first speaker was **Brian Pearce, Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK**, who gave a brief overview of the changing landscape of inter faith engagement in the UK. This was followed by some reflections from **Dr Edward Kessler, Director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge** on developments which had taken place over recent years in the field of inter faith dialogue and academic study.

There was then a presentation by **Vijayanti Chauhan, Chair of the Preston Faith Forum, a member of Lancashire Forum of Faiths and Voluntary, Community, and Faith Sector Liaison Officer for Lancashire County Council**, who discussed the changing face of local inter faith work, including relationships with local authorities. She was followed by **Pramila Kaur, Chief Executive Officer of the Scottish Inter Faith Council** who talked about developments which had taken place in inter faith working in Scotland.

The final speakers before lunch were **Rev Canon Guy Wilkinson, Inter Faith Adviser to the Church of England** and **Moulana M Shahid Raza, Executive Secretary of the Imams and Mosques Council (UK) and Head Imam of Leicester Central Mosque**. They both looked at what 'new circumstances' call faith communities to do, including the need to consider the language we use with one another and ways of furthering co-citizenship and deepening dialogue.

After lunch **Bishop Tom Butler** introduced the afternoon session. This began with a presentation by **Debbie Ladds, Director of Projects for the Community Development Foundation** who discussed new funding streams that have become available and some of the possibilities that now exist for developing the faith dimension of community cohesion.

After this participants attended one of six workshops on:

(1) Faith communities and their inter faith programmes
(2) Deepening Dialogue
(3) Women and inter faith initiatives
(4) Websites: windows onto the changing world of inter faith work
(5) Funding and running inter faith and faith initiatives
(6) Young people and inter faith bridge building

After the tea break there was a presentation by **Meg Munn MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government** who spoke about the Government's plans with regard to faith communities and inter faith engagement.

The meeting ended with final reflections from four of the day's participants: **Hon Barney Leith, Secretary for External Affairs of the Baha'i Community of the UK**, **Rev Daniel Otieno-Ndale, from the Baptist Union and Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs Reference Group of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**, **Nitin Palan, from the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission** and **Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.**

# THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF INTER FAITH ENGAGEMENT IN THE UK

**Brian Pearce, Director, the Inter Faith Network**

Back in the year 2000 the Network's National Meeting looked at the agenda for inter faith relations in the UK in the coming decade. No one, I think, could have predicted then the scale and pace of developments over the last few years and their major impact on the landscape of our inter faith work, of which I now offer a very rapid tour.

The Inter Faith Network has always had as one of its aims to facilitate the engagement in public life of the full range of our member faith communities. The shared planning in the so called Lambeth Group between the Government and faith communities of the religious aspects of the Millennium celebrations - including the Faith Zone in the Dome and the groundbreaking Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment in the Houses of Parliament on the first weekend of the new Millennium - proved to be an important watershed. Approaching the Millennium the question was whether faith communities should be involved in the forthcoming celebrations. By the time of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, only two years later, the question was not whether, but how. There was a major reception at Buckingham Palace for leading members of faith communities and visits by members of the Royal Family to places of worship of different faiths.

As its final legacy, the Millennium Lambeth Group recommended a review of arrangements generally for consultation between central Government and faith communities. In a significant step, in 2003 a Faith Communities Unit was set up in the Home Office as the focal point for contact between Government and faith communities; and the Working Together exercise was launched to review and improve the arrangements for consultation with faith communities across Government as a whole. The latest step in this process has been the establishment of the Government's new Faith Communities Consultative Council. This merges the work of the Inner Cities Religious Council, formerly in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Working Together stream of work in the Home Office. The Council, which held its first meeting at the end of April, is now the responsibility of the new Department for Communities and Local Government.

Faith communities themselves now have a national framework within which to share their mutual concerns and their views on Government policies and initiatives affecting them. At the Network's 2000 National Meeting there was discussion of ways to develop further the links within the different categories of Network member bodies to address their particular concerns. A separate meeting of representative faith community organisations in membership of the Network took place for the first time in early 2002 and there are now regular meetings of this Faith Communities Consultative Forum. The relationship between the Forum and the Government's new Consultative Council will need careful handling.

In what should prove to be a useful step, the new Department for Communities and Local Government brings together key aspects of the Government's work on faith community issues from the Home Office, the ODPM and the Department for Trade and Industry, including the work which is leading to the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights becoming operational next year. The Commission will have responsibility for discrimination and equality issues including those relating to 'religion and belief'. Significant new legislative measures are already in place to provide protection against discrimination on the basis of a person's religious identity - an issue which had been on the Network's agenda from its early days. The new Commission will also have a responsibility for work on 'good relations'. The way the new Commission decides to tackle this will have a significant impact on the future handling of inter faith work.

A separate Religion and Belief Consultative Group, independent of Government, but with some Government financial help, now deals with developments in the field of equality, discrimination and human rights and planning for the new Commission. There have been interesting, and at times difficult, discussions in the Group between representatives of faith communities and of the British Humanist Association and National Secular Society, all of whom belong to it. The dialogue within our society between those who have a formal religious commitment and those who do not is of increasing importance.

In addition to new consultation arrangements the Government has introduced new funding opportunities. Its new Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund has already helped to fund a wide range of projects designed to develop the capacity of individual faith communities and also to promote inter faith activity. The way this money is distributed will be a major factor in the future development of inter faith work.

Inevitably, some of the interest which the Government has been taking in faith community and inter faith affairs has been a response to troubling events here and overseas - including, in 2001, the disturbances in northern towns and cities that summer and the terrorist attacks that September in the United States and all that has flowed from those, and then the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July just a year ago. We are all now much more aware of the way religion and politics can become caught up together in complex and sometimes tragically distorted ways and of the impact which overseas events and conflicts can have on our life here in the UK and the need for us to support one another at times of pressure and difficulty. But the Government's greater involvement with faith communities and its community cohesion agenda are much more broadly based and longer term as is the need for inter faith work.

There have been other important developments in the pattern of inter faith work at national and regional level within the UK. The Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum and the Scottish Inter Faith Council were already in place at the turn of the Millennium and there is now an Inter Faith Council for Wales created in 2001.A first meeting between the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh bodies took place in Glasgow last summer to compare notes on the way inter faith activity is being handled in the context of the devolution arrangements within which they operate and we hope to hold a second meeting, probably this time in Wales, later this year.

There are also now significantly more UK wide and national inter faith organisations focusing on dialogue between two or three specific traditions or on particular dimensions of inter faith work, such as issues of international peace and justice or work with young people. The work of these organisations is of great importance but time is too short for me to mention all of them individually. Since the 2000 National Meeting there have been annual meetings of these national inter faith organisations. Two particular issues have been emerging. First, how to ensure that the growing number of inter faith organisations complement and add value to each other's work, for example through cooperating more in pooling their resources where joint action on particular projects or areas of work would be more effective. Second, how can national inter faith organisations with specialist expertise best act as a resource for the work of local inter faith groups, not necessarily by setting up local branches of their own organisation, but perhaps through providing speakers and holding joint meetings.

Our AGM later today is being invited to welcome into Network membership a number of multi faith bodies set up in the English regions. Despite the shelving of proposals for elected assemblies in the eight English regions outside London following the defeat in the referendum in 20004 of the proposal for an elected assembly in the North East, the roles of Regional Assemblies and of the Government Offices in each of the regions are continuing to develop. Creating in response to this effective multi faith regional bodies has not been an easy task, given the absence in most faith communities of regional structures, but they are nonetheless beginning to make a significant impact as part of the overall pattern of inter faith activity and are building links with the local inter faith bodies in their region. Regional bodies are now in place in all the English regions except the North East, where discussions are in progress, as they are in London on forming a pan-London forum of faiths.

In many ways the most remarkable development in recent years has been the rapid increase in local inter faith activity and the engagement in this process with local authorities. In 2000 there were about 70 multi faith local inter faith organisations. The latest edition of the Network's *Directory of Inter Faith Organisations* lists 220 of them. The value of their work in building local relationships was demonstrated very clearly last summer when across the UK faith community representatives came together in many cities and towns to show their solidarity at the time of the London bombings.

In early 2000 the Network organised, in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council, a meeting in Birmingham to look at ways in which local authorities might help to encourage local inter faith activity. The presence at that conference of representatives of the Local Government Association led to joint work on the important document on *Faith and Community* published early in 2002. With the authority of the Local Government Association behind it, this encouraged local authorities to do more to engage with faith communities as an important part of the wider local community in their areas and made it clear that they can properly provide funding for activities which are not directly in support of the propagation of a particular faith.

Key elements from *Faith and Community* were fed into a subsequent series of documents offering guidance to local authorities on their community cohesion policies and strategies and the Network was involved in the preparation of these alongside the LGA, the Home Office, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Commission for Racial Equality.

The Chair, who is Darra Singh, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Ealing, and the terms of reference for the Government's new short term Commission on Integration and Cohesion were announced last week. It will be addressing in particular issues of cohesion at local level and no doubt will be looking at the contribution which local inter faith activity makes to this.

The Network's survey of local inter faith activity carried out in 2003 described in full for the first time the richness and variety of developing inter faith work. Last autumn the second edition of the Network's *The Local Inter Faith Guide* was published, bringing up to date the advice and help it offers to those seeking to initiate or strengthen local inter faith activity in their area. And there is now a new "Local Inter Faith Zone" on the Network's website.

Alongside the work of all these inter faith organisations there is a growing pattern of more informal inter faith activity. For example, work at neighbourhood level with exchange visits between local places of worship, conferences, research projects and developments in inter faith cooperation in the field of chaplaincy. Two particular fields of inter faith activity singled out by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund as a priority for its financial support were work involving women in different faith communities and work involving young people. Each of these is the subject of a workshop this afternoon.

Clearly, work in the educational and academic field is of particular relevance to helping young people grow up with an understanding of different faith traditions. The new non-statutory framework for RE in England points to the need for schools also to tackle inter faith issues in the area of overlap between RE and Citizenship Education. How to help this forward was the focus of a Network seminar this February as part of our current "Faith and Citizenship" project and will be discussed at a follow up meeting later this month. There has been an increasing number of academic centres exploring inter faith issues in greater depth. It is important for faith community and inter faith organisations to draw on the resources increasingly available in the educational and academic field and indeed to contribute to them. Resources designed for use with older pupils in schools and in further and higher education can be valuable tools for use by faith communities in their own teaching programmes.

So we can take some satisfaction in the significant progress which there has been in the last few years in fostering positive inter faith relations. Many organisations and individuals have contributed to this, including all of you here today. It is generally accepted that inter faith work is more highly developed here than anywhere else in Europe, and indeed than in most countries elsewhere.

Finally, a couple of linked issues which I think require particular attention at the present time. The first relates to the risk of excessive "governmentalisation" of inter

faith activity. The second relates to the need for faith communities, in the midst of their preoccupation with issues in the 'public square' and their own internal concerns, to ensure that sufficient time and energy are left for deepening the dialogue between them.

First, "governmentalisation". There are many positive and constructive aspects to the greater engagement of Government at national, regional and local level with faith communities and in its encouragement of inter faith activity. However, it is important that this greater engagement with Government, while very welcome, does not subtly undermine the independence and freedom of action of faith communities and inter faith organisations; and, for example, that its funding for inter faith work does not lead all our national inter faith organisations to focus on the same areas of work, increasing the overlap between them rather than maintaining their distinctiveness. It is vitally important for us to maintain structures at all levels which are independent of Government and within which faith communities can meet together to consult on matters of mutual concern, and for developing relationships between them, as well as for concerting strategies for dealing with Government. It is a matter of getting the balance right.

The second point is the need to bear in mind that the key purpose of our inter faith work is the promotion of greater mutual understanding and respect between people of different faiths in our country. We have made good progress in building personal relationships at all levels and in developing the organisational frameworks we need to promote engagement and dialogue. But while inter faith activity is now high up on the public agenda and is seen as a mainstream task for our different faith communities, as yet many people remain untouched by it. Arguably, it is still the case that too little is being done within our faith communities to promote increased inter faith understanding and to dispel damaging prejudices and misleading stereotypes. We ought also to be capable now of tackling some of the more difficult questions in inter faith relations, bringing out into the open concerns and anxieties so that they can be tackled more effectively. Workshops this afternoon will be looking at how we can best deepen the dialogue and at the role which faith communities themselves can play in this.

So – much done; but much to do. I hope that the Inter Faith Network can continue to play its part in helping to resource, encourage, develop and take forward inter faith work across the UK, which now involves so many organisations and initiatives. There can be no doubt at all of this work's importance for the future well being of our society.

# DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF INTER FAITH DIALOGUE AND ACADEMIC STUDY

**Dr Edward Kessler, Director, Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge**

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak here this morning. I would like to say a few words about the academic study of inter faith relations as I see it from my perspective in Cambridge. I will endeavour to keep it reasonably brief to enable you to ask some questions and, I hope, give me some advice in this new and developing, field of study. The subject of inter faith relations needs not only practitioners and activists but also teachers and scholars. We need to develop a study which is keen to learn from, as well as contribute to, academic learning as well as wider society. I think this can be illustrated by the following story.

A *yeshiva* is a traditional Jewish place of learning. The principal of a yeshiva in London decided that his students needed proper exercise so he decided to set up a rowing team. They team practised and practised and he entered them in a regatta. They came last. He entered them in other regattas but they always came last. Eventually he made the sensible decision to send a spy to the best rowing team in the country – Cambridge! So the spy sneaked up the M11 and hid in the bulrushes of the River Cam, from where he carefully watched the University team going up and down the river. He eventually worked out the secret. He returned to the yeshiva and said, "I have figured out their secret. They have eight men rowing and only one shouting!"

The study of inter faith relations faces many challenges, the first of which is that it is a new field of study. Unfortunately, unlike the academic study of religion and theology, the study of inter faith relations is, in my experience, still treated as an optional extra, time permitting. Institutes such, as my own, the Centre for the Study of Jewish Christian Relations, still struggle to make their voices heard within a University setting and I believe this is also true in the theological setting in the training of ministers, whether it be in the Anglican Church or other faith communities. On the other hand, it is not all doom and gloom. We heard Brian Pearce saying that the subject of inter faith dialogue is now being taken more seriously and I think this is true in the academic context. For instance, Cambridge University is setting up its first ever Masters degree course in the study of Jewish-Christian Relations. This is the first inter faith degree in the University's 800 year history. But this is just a beginning and it should not stop there. There is a real challenge to get our tertiary educational institutes to take this subject more seriously.

The second challenge is a consequence of the fact that inter faith dialogue mirrors the themes of wider society, including social, religious and cultural themes. So it needs to be inter-disciplinary and to hold these disciplines in a creative tension. Faith traditions sometimes focus disproportionately on questions of truth – and, unfortunately, on the idea of one absolute truth. We are tempted to think, as men and women of religion, that truth can only be followed by falsehood, but actually, one truth could well be followed by another truth and, of course, it is possible to have more than one right answer to a question.

When the Jewish physicist, Isadore Rabi won the Nobel Prize for his research, he was asked what it was that first got him interested in science. He explained that it was his mother. Unlike other mothers who would ask their children when they came home from school, "What did you learn at school today?" His mother said, "Izzy, did you ask a good question?"

The question I would like to ask is: Which disciplines does the study of inter faith relations need to include? I offer just a few thoughts. Clearly it needs to include theology, my own discipline. But it also needs to include history; the study of religion (which is not the same as theology); political science; literature; cultural studies; and philosophy.

If we do not include all these fields of study, all these disciplines, and hold them together it would be a little bit like a plug that only has one wire fixed in. You put it in the power socket and it does not work. You need three different wires and then you have a little bit of light.

The third challenge, I believe, for the study of inter faith relations is that we need to take into account the intra-faith dialogue. For example, the tensions inherent within Judaism are illustrated in a number of ways. The secular and religious divide is well exemplified by Isaiah Berlin saying to Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: "Please forgive me, Chief Rabbi, for I am a lapsed heretic". Differences within Judaism are also reflected in the tension between its traditional and liberal wings [demonstrated by theological differences over the extent to which the *Torah* was divinely revealed to Moses.] This, of course, is not just true of Judaism, but also of most faith traditions. It is essential that our study of inter faith relations takes into account not only religion but also culture and peoplehood.

Fourthly, the study of inter faith relations needs to take into account the issue of minority-majority concerns. Many of us have a strong sense of being surrounded by others, not of our own faith. One consequence is, therefore, that we feel as a minority a sense that the outside world is a threat. This tension is not just true of minority groups but exists, in my experience, for many groups - even those groups that appear to be majority groups. Many of my Anglican and Catholic colleagues at Cambridge also feel that they are in a minority. We live in a world where we are all minorities. You only have to read the newspapers, *Church Times, Catholic Herald, The Universe, Jewish Chronicle, The Recorder, The Reform* and various other newspapers, to see that sense of being a minority. The study of inter faith relations needs to take that into account. Since we are minorities it means that we are caught in what Martin Luther King called 'an inextricable network of mutuality'. In other words, what affects one directly, affects all of us indirectly. Rabbi Hugo Gryn used to say, in his dialogue between the Jewish community and the Black community, "Attacks on the Black community are a direct threat to us Jews." Our communities can only flourish in a decent society which respects the rights of all minorities.

In our society no one is safe when religious or ethnic prejudice is tolerated, when racism is rife and when decent, well-meaning people keep quiet because it is prudent. This, my friends, is true in the world of academia as much as anywhere else where we face pressure on censorship of ideas, even on academic boycotts. That is not the way

forward. Reflection on issues such as these of course needs to extend well beyond the university classroom and to influence the curriculum in seminaries and in other educational institutions. The study and teaching of inter faith relations must become one of the pieces of good news that we can report in today's inter faith encounter. In the words of John Paul II, "In order to become a blessing for humankind we must first be a blessing for one another".

*[The following section was omitted from the talk given at the meeting due to time constraints but is reproduced below for the sake of completeness.]*

Because Jews and Muslims share the experience of being minority religious communities in Europe, they have parallel experiences and needs. Yet the dialogue between them is overshadowed by the failure of both communities to address the impact of the Middle East conflict on their own communities.

Understanding what lies behind this failure is key to the future success of Jewish-Muslim dialogue. The Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the main factors. For most Jews, the creation of the State of Israel is an ancient promise fulfilled - the ingathering of exiles and the creation of a vibrant nation-state, guaranteeing physical and spiritual security. Yet, for many Muslims, the permanent existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East is a religious and political anomaly. It is a common view that Islamic rule must be returned to the Land of Israel

As well as Israel, a major division between Judaism and Islam is the view that Islam fulfils both Judaism and Christianity. The question of supercessionism is a well-known subject for discussion in Jewish-Christian dialogue but needs also to be addressed in Jewish-Muslim dialogue.

As important as these factors are, the most important failing in the dialogue is ignorance. The lack of knowledge among Jews and Muslims provides a seedbed for prejudice. This makes the recent publication of two volumes designed to advance understanding a significant development. *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims*, by Reuven Firestone and *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Islam for Jews*, by Khalid Duran both seek to enhance mutual understanding.

This development is welcome because of increasing antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe. This means when we come across prejudice and ignorance, whether it be within the Jewish, Christian or Muslim communities, we should not be afraid to condemn it.

However, we also need to recognise that because Jewish-Muslim dialogue lags so far behind Jewish-Christian dialogue that it is essential to be prepared for conflicting views. An authentic encounter must allow for sharp differences, especially since the modern dialogue is young and vulnerable. For example, Jews view the creation of the state of Israel as an act of national liberation following nearly 2,000 years of powerlessness and homelessness. Muslims term the same events "The Disaster," a time when an Islamic society was uprooted and became a minority in a land that was once *dar al-Islam*. Most Jews do not separate Zionism from its deep religious roots

within Judaism. However, many Muslims make a distinction between Zionism and Judaism, failing to recognize that Zionism is an integral component of Judaism and not a "racist" ideology.

How should Jews and Muslims progress the dialogue in practical terms? A foundation of mutual trust and respect is best built step by step, for example organising reciprocal visits to synagogues and mosques, developing joint strategies on issues such as discrimination, as well as supporting each other's attempt to maintain a distinctive religious identity in a society that promotes conformity to the majority culture.

If the challenges faced by Muslim-Jewish dialogue seem daunting, consider the significant advances in Christian-Jewish relations in the last 100 years. Surely this is one of the few pieces of good news in today's encounter between religions. Christian-Jewish dialogue arose despite profound theological differences and many centuries of alienation and distrust. The fact that Jews and Christians have built mutual respect and understanding does not, of course, mean that this model can be wholly applied to Islamic-Jewish relations with the same positive results. Jews and Muslims today carry far different memories and issues from the historical baggage brought to encounters with Christians. While there has been nearly a century of fruitful Christian-Jewish dialogue, building positive Islamic-Jewish relations is in its early stages and represents a new challenge.

We must move towards an encounter which will take us on the journey from disdain to recognition, when we will see the Other as a creature of God and part of God's special design for humanity: a respectful relationship that is called dialogue.

**There followed a short question period:**

**Rajjinder Nijjar**: I would like you to offer your views on what was the religion of Jesus?

**Dr Ed Kessler**: What was the religion of Jesus? How long have we got?! My own field of study and teaching is the encounter between Jews and Christians. That is what I have been trained in and my response to the question would be quite simply that Jesus was a Jew. He was born, he lived and he died a Jew. To understand the formation of Christianity one has to understand its Jewish context. This is important not just for Christians but for Jews also. Understanding the roots of their faith is the value for Christians. But as Jews we too need to think, for example, that as a result of this Jew, Jesus, two million Christians read the Jewish bible.

**Dr Ahsan**: I am Director of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester and have also been a Vice-Chair of the Inter Faith Network for the last ten years or so. I just wanted to add a couple of footnotes to what you said. The study of dialogue and inter faith relations has been going on for quite some time in the UK. I recall that about 20 years ago we Muslims helped develop a centre for Christian-Muslim relations at Selly Oak College in Birmingham which is now integrated in the Department of Theology in the University of Birmingham. We have seen a lot of development of dialogue in inter faith meetings, conferences and seminars. The Islamic Foundation has the Markfield Institute of Higher Education. We have an MA in Islamic Studies and students can study inter faith dialogue as part of this. I am also involved with the Multi-Faith

Centre at the University of Derby where Professor Paul Weller is an expert on inter faith issues. These positive developments in a number of different institutions perhaps need to be taken into account as part of the full picture of recent developments.

**Dr Kessler**: Thank you very much. You are absolutely right to point out the beacons of light, such as the Centre at Selly Oak College and the work that is going on at the Markfield Institute in Leicester and at the University of Derby. My worry, though. is that it is limited to a few academic environments. In my experience, for instance, when I try to get the University of Cambridge to take seriously inter faith relations in its own right - not just when it teaches Christianity or Judaism or 20th Century history - everybody says, "Yes, yes, terribly important Edward! But we don't have room." That is the challenge - to take it beyond the beacons that we have out there, such as the places you have mentioned and now Cambridge, and to make sure it permeates more widely.

**Rev Canon Andrew Wingate**: I am a colleague of Dr Manazir Ahsan's and am also from Leicester. We are developing a new centre, St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society, which, along with one in Bradford, will be a national centre for resourcing the inter faith work of the Churches and we have a special agreement with the Markfield Islamic Foundation to work together closely, as you are doing in Cambridge. But I just wanted to add three more areas where inter faith issues are relevant in the curriculum. One is pastoral studies. That is the engagement with personal, family and issues of chaplaincy in which we are involved with Muslims at Markfield. Those people meet the subject at a pastoral level. The second is spirituality, prayer, worship, liturgy. That is another area of the syllabus. The third, is 'mission', which I mention with some hesitation, but from the Christian and Muslim perspective we dare to use the word 'mission'. By this I mean mission in a broad sense, engaging with those outside our community. That includes dialogue and social engagement and indeed in our case appropriate forms of evangelism, sharing the good news of what we live by.

**Dr S Ali Akbar**: I am from the World Islamic Mission. Jewish-Christian dialogue is good but the urgent need is for dialogue with the Muslim community. If Jews and Muslim communities can dialogue together then the possibility of world peace is there. So there is an urgent need to do this.

**Dr Kessler**: The rabbis have this wonderful expression that the labourers are sluggish and the master of the house is pressing. I really feel like a labourer who is sluggish - perhaps we all do - and the master of the house, of course, is God. You are quite right that there is an urgency so far as Jewish-Muslim dialogue is concerned. One of the initiatives in Cambridge is to set up a centre for the study of Jewish-Muslim relations to deal with areas not only of difference but also of commonality. I hope that over the next year or two there will be more initiatives. But we must be very careful, particularly in Jewish-Christian dialogue, and I think in Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue, not to be or be seen to be exclusive. The challenge is to ensure that there is a specificity to the dialogue of the Abrahamic faiths, while recognising that there is also a general principle of inter faith dialogue that needs to be applied to all faith communities.

**Dr Brian Walker**: I am from Winchester and the Director of Religions for Peace (UK). Brian Pearce mentioned deepening dialogue. Swidler and Mozjes talk about a number of stages in doing so, from initial, pre-dialogue, encounter through to global transformation. I would just like you to share your views on how academia can actually help deepen dialogue.

**Dr Kessler**: Thank you for that. Academia and the study of dialogue is about increasing understanding. The points that Andrew Wingate raised in terms of spirituality and in terms of pastoral studies would be particularly applicable to a theological setting, in other words training people who are taking positions of religious leadership. That may or may not be as relevant to the academic study of inter faith dialogue. One of the challenges we have in inter faith dialogue is to hold together the fact that it is an academic discipline with the fact that at the same time we are dealing with people's faith. Holding these together is not easy but if we do not do so then we will fall into the simply secular study of religion and the relations between peoples and faiths and have a theological study just within our own faith communities. I do not think that is the way forward. Rather, the way forward is to hold these two aspects together.

**Dr Natubhai Shah**: I am the Founder President of Jain Samaj Europe. You said that the truth has got more than one answer. There are many faiths who have said so, right from their origins. Jains, for example, have said that truth has got many facets. Do you pursue comparative studies of religions in your academic work?

**Dr Kessler**: Our academic course looks specifically at bilateral encounters. I know there has recently been a group set up in London for Jewish-Jain conversation and dialogue. The basis for our programme is the encounter between two faith communities, whichever those communities are. We began initially with the study of Jewish-Christian relations. We are now going to move on to Muslim-Jewish studies and then we will move on to other bilateral studies in the future. I think it is about finding out what there is in common with between the two parties and dealing with the difference as well as the commonality. We do not have a course on 'truth' or the search for truth or absolute truth. As a university, we are holding together the issues of faith and belief and it is in the end a critique, a rigorous study, of encounter between faith traditions. It is an academic study of that relationship rather than the search for truth itself.

# THE CHANGING FACE OF LOCAL INTER FAITH WORK: CONSULTATION, COOPERATION, AND COHESION

**Vijayanti Chauhan, Chair, Preston Faith Forum,
member Lancashire Forum of Faiths and Voluntary, Community,
and Faith Sector Liaison Officer, Lancashire County Council**

Moving away from the academic Cambridge setting where Dr Kessler has just taken us, let me take you to the world of the local and perhaps county-wide inter faith situation.

There are many local, regional and national faith forums which are doing very worthwhile and important and valid inter faith work across the country. In my presentation I am using Preston Faith Forum and Lancashire Forum of Faiths as examples but their experience has, I think, much in common with that of people in other parts of the country.

Greg Smith recently carried out a project called Bridge Builders Project in partnership with Preston Faiths Forum. Some of the findings from that project, although it was very local, were actually applicable to other parts of the country, especially the statutory sector. They help illustrate why local inter faith work and awareness raising continues to grow in importance.

One of the important findings of the Building Bridges Project was the lack of understanding and low levels of religious literacy among statutory organisations. It is very important for those in the statutory sector to recognise that. Faith forums have an important role in helping increase religious literacy in the sector. I should say that I am myself based in the statutory sector. I am the 'Voluntary, Community, Faith Sector Liaison Officer' for Lancashire County Council (LCC). LCC have been very clear, since 2000, that they wanted to include faith within the third sector. My role as Liaison Officer builds on the previous work that I have been involved in in terms of the faith and inter faith work. As well as being within the statutory sector and, as part of this, helping support Lancashire Forum of Faiths, I am also, in a personal capacity and as a member of Preston's Hindu community, Chair of Preston Faith Forum. So I am speaking from the unusual perspective of being both within and outside the statutory sector!

Faith forums are often talked about in terms of sounding boards for consultation and as a route for engaging with faith leaders. This is true and they are important in this regard. I would want to flag up a potential problem, though, in patterns of consultation. This is what Greg Smith points to in his study, using the concepts of 'superstars' in faith based groups and the 'usual suspects'. I worry about this pattern where it means that consulters are going to community leaders and religious leaders but ordinary members of the faith communities may not understand what is going on or be really involved. And if we do not have involvement and participation from the communities more widely we have not got the representation that we need and we are not able to have full dialogue and communication.

I think that the Preston/Lancashire scene is successful and that one of the 'drivers' for this is Government policy and its agenda on community cohesion and partnership in service delivery. This is contributing to the growth in the importance of local inter faith work. Certainly it has been a driver for me in the work that I do in my statutory sector capacity and working with inter faith work in Lancashire. It helps me to ensure that each and every department within LCC is knowledgeable, has the information, and has the tools for consultation which is as representative as it can be. LCC is very active in seeking consultation with faith communities and looking to engage in an appropriate way. As one way of doing this it is supporting Lancashire Forum of Faiths and, as the officer who helps service this, that brings me very close to the work that Lancashire Forum of Faiths are doing. My colleague, Rev Dale Barton from the Forum, is here as well today. Lancashire County Council is working in partnership with Lancashire Forum of Faiths on an initiative, which has been funded by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund, to organise a conference in November looking at faith, inter faith work and the statutory sector and maintaining a strong link between the two sectors. The LCC also works closely with the faith communities and their leaders in the context of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Lancashire has a very well recognised syllabus for RE. At the LCC we also have strong links with the Northwest Faiths Forum and also Churches Together. I think partnership is key to all this, working together, getting to know each other and coming to common aims and objectives and trying to build on that.

I think we need to distinguish between the work around race and culture and the work with faith and to understand how they both overlap with the community cohesion agenda. Cohesion and inter faith work have many comparable areas: social capital, consultation and representation, the people involved, relationships, social justice.

I would like to talk now about the way forward as I see it. In Lancashire we have got twelve districts and I think ten districts out of the twelve already have local forums of some stature. They are quite different. They vary in size and some are active and some perhaps less active for varying reasons. I would like to see a structure where we have active local faith forums in all districts and these are then linked to the sub-regional forum, the Lancashire Forum of Faiths (and the reason why it is sub-regional is because it also covers the unitary authorities of Blackburn and Blackpool) and through that to the North West regional forum where common aims and objectives or common principles to work to could be agreed, though local forums would, of course still have their own distinctive features and independence. The important goal is to get the statutory sector on board because without that I do not think that we will be able to build the kind of inter faith structures that we want to do.

**There followed a short question period:**

**Venilal Vaghela**: I am from the Brent Multi-Faith Forum. My question is about the RE curriculum and SACREs and the Department for Education. Within RE, schools seem to want to teach Christianity for two thirds of the time, yet we have schools in boroughs like Brent and Harrow where 90% or 95% of the pupils are from minority ethnic communities of other faiths. It is mystifying to me why we should be teaching them more about the Christian religion than about their own religion.

**Vijayanti Chauhan**: From the involvement that I have had, I would say that in Lancashire schools have some freedom in which faith unit they teach. Christianity is mandatory (although I cannot say for what percentage of the time) but what is taught also takes into account the pattern of faiths locally and the resources, facilities and expertise that the schools have. For example, in some East Lancashire schools 99.9% of the pupils are from a Muslim background and I think that what is taught reflects that.

**Angela Jagger**: I am from Leicester Council of Faiths. A point and a question. First, I take very much on board your comment about 'usual suspects'. I think that is something of which we are all very much aware. We were very lucky to get some funding from the recent FCCBF programme to help set up a project to do some research over the coming year, at grassroots level, in order to try and get to grips with concerns about consulting the leaders of communities. We have appointed two researchers who are going to set up focus groups across the different faith communities and other communities in Leicester. I hope that perhaps by next year we might have some results from this. Secondly, you are Chair of the Preston Forum and you also have a role working for local government. In Leicester we have a very close relationship with the Leicester City Council and we have one or two councillors, one of whom is present today, who are actually members of the Council of Faiths, but we have always had a policy of ensuring that our Officers are independent people. My question is, Have you found that there is a tension in your role, particularly in the context of concerns about 'governmentalisation', and, if so, how have you resolved it?

**Vijayanti Chauhan**: Your first comment reminds me that I would like to acknowledge our gratitude and thanks to the Home Office via the Community Development Foundation for the funding that Preston Faiths Forum has received through the FCCB scheme. One of the objectives of the Forum's project is to counter the 'usual suspects' scenario, partly by working very closely with women and young people. Hopefully by bringing them on board we can really broaden the range of involvement. The second part of your question was about working within the statutory sector while also being involved in a local faiths forum. It is tricky and it is even trickier because Lancashire has a two-tier government. We have the county council but also twelve district councils. Luckily the County Council has its headquarters in Preston which makes it slightly easier for me in terms of time commitment and ease of participation. My difficulty is in having a statutory hat and then having a voluntary (not only faith) hat on. I have to be very careful about which hat I wear to certain organisations and to make clear to those present which hat I am wearing. For example, sometimes I go to Lancashire Forum of Faiths in my personal capacity and sometimes in my official capacity. So I need to make it very clear in what capacity I have gone to the meeting. On this basis I do not experience a tension. I am here today during my working day as part of the commitment that the County Council has to this important agenda. But I am also here because I am, on a voluntary personal basis, Chair of Preston Faith Forum. I would like to meet someone who is in a similar position. It would be good to share. But perhaps it is a unique combination!

# DEVELOPMENTS IN INTER FAITH WORKING IN SCOTLAND

**Pramila Kaur, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Inter Faith Council**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our work with you so that you can have some picture of how the changing inter faith landscape looks from within Scotland and in particular the role that the Scottish Inter Faith Council is playing.

I'd like to begin with a general outline of the functions of the Scottish Inter Faith Council. Our remit is to work with faith communities, local inter faith groups, government bodies, public sector bodies, non governmental organisations, women's groups, young people and educational bodies, to help ensure that Scotland becomes a truly just and inclusive society. We do not speak on behalf of faith communities but in their interest. That distinction is a very important one.

The Scottish Inter Faith Council was established in 1999 as a charity and a private limited company. We were very grateful to the Inter Faith Network for the UK for the support they have provided to the organisation from the earliest point. We see ourselves very much as a 'daughter' to the Inter Faith Network because of the support that they have been providing. I was appointed last year as Chief Executive and Network staff have been have been tremendously helpful in helping me as I seek to steer clear of muddy waters.

We have a 34 member Council which has delegated authority to a 12 member Executive Committee which is made up of the majority faith traditions. We have a general membership encompassing Scotland's major faiths, local inter faith groups, and educational institutions. We also have 'observers' and currently the Pagan Federation have this status. The Latter Day Saints were also 'observers' but are not so any longer. We also have a new tier of membership called the "Friends of Scottish Inter Faith Council" for those who are not eligible for full membership. They are invited to be involved in our work through the Friends' network.

Currently we have five and a half members of staff: myself as the Chief Executive, Maureen Sier, our Development Officer and Education Officer (who is here with us today running one of the workshops), a Policy and Equalities Officer, a Training and Events Officer, and an Office Administrator. We are also currently in the process of recruiting a Health Officer to support the Scottish Executive Health Department in Scotland to draft a national policy on meeting the health needs of faith communities. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar who is on our Executive Committee is also with us today.

Before I talk about our work it might be useful just to give you a general profile of Scotland's faith communities based on the 2001 Census. The Christian community is the most sizeable (65%), followed by the Muslim community (0.84%), and then the Sikh (0.13%), Jewish (0.13%), Buddhist (0.13%), and Hindu (0.11%) communities. A quarter of people responding to the voluntary question on religious identity on the last Census indicated that that they had no religion and 5.5% chose not to respond. The majority of members of the minority faiths live in the central belt cities of Edinburgh,

Dundee and Glasgow, although the rural areas are now beginning to attract members from minority faith communities. The Home Office dispersal programme for asylum seekers and refugees is one factor which is changing the ethnic and religious landscape of Scotland, in the context of a dwindling overall population of 5 million.

The Council's work is at two levels - strategic and operational. I will start with the strategic level. We work very much in partnership with all relevant organisations, but particularly with the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament, to involve faith communities in public life. The Scottish Executive are our main funders and we need to be very careful that we are not seen as an extended agency of the Executive. We publish regular newsletters and guidance. We currently have two newsletters; the first is a general newsletter and the second is a Parliamentary newsletter. Currently the Parliamentary newsletter just outlines current consultation processes but I think we need to develop it to build the capacity of faith communities so that they themselves can provide evidence and respond to consultations rather than doing so through the Council. We are in the process of reviewing that issue.

We also provide training on the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003. When those regulations came into force our work doubled or tripled. The work we are doing on the training is deemed as an example of good practice. It is also seen as an example of good cross strand working because we are working with Stonewall Scotland which is an organisation supporting the needs of lesbians and gays in Scotland. Because the regulations dealing with religion and belief and with sexual orientation came into being at the same time, it has made sense, rather than reinventing the wheel, for us to work in partnership with Stonewall to provide training to non governmental organisations, public and private organisations. We also have another training project which is to help faith communities to be aware of their rights under the regulations. That training is not just about helping faith communities understand the religion and belief regulations, but it is helping them to understand the wider equal opportunities framework as a whole. Faith groups themselves have to be very clear that, whilst they have protection under the law, they cannot discriminate against other groups as well. Both the Council's and Stonewall's training projects are funded by the Department of Trade and Industry.

We carry out many special inter faith projects and programmes. For the last two years, helping to facilitate and promote Scottish 'inter faith week' in November has been one of the highpoints of our work. During this week, events take place across Scotland to help encourage inter faith understanding and awareness. Activities are very varied: sharing of food; ceilidhs; publications; a children's competition; and visits by religious leaders to each others' places of worship, accompanied by MSPs and Ministers.

Work with young people is very important to us. We established a Youth Steering Committee, which is an exceptionally dynamic group, and have supported them in hosting a retreat to plan their activities for the year, which may include a conference. The YSC has been involved in responding to consultation documents such as the Scottish Executive's Youth Strategy; has hosted workshops; and has provided speakers for various events inc World Youth Congress, UK Network, Scottish Parliament, Radio Scotland. Members have also been involved in the recruitment of two Global Xchange volunteers to work on an inter faith and environmental project.

SIFC also brings together women of different faith communities to meet once a year to promote dialogue and we are looking to establish a Women's' Steering Committee to enable women to speak for themselves and to respond to government consultations. We hope that SIFC itself will not need to play the organising role for much longer but that women will want to meet on their own accord.

We work directly with Scottish religious leaders in Scotland, acting as the secretariat for their bi-annual meetings and coordinating their visits to each other's places of worship during 'inter faith week'. We are supporting them in hosting their first ever conference during the forthcoming Scottish Inter Faith Week and co-ordinating their audience with the First Minister on 9/11 this year.

SIFC also works extensively with local inter faith groups, responding to their requests for support. The 13 inter faith groups in Scotland are members of SIFC but are autonomous. Most of the help which is sought is to do with fundraising and constitutions but SIFC can also suggest topics of interest should the local groups want that kind of support too. We help promote dialogue between the groups by hosting an annual networking seminar and meetings ahead of the Council meeting. We also work to support the development of new groups.

The SIFC also provides advice and information to faith communities and to the wider public. This is particular important in the absence of a 'commission on faith' equivalent to the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality, or indeed the Disability Rights Commission. We keep faith communities informed of Government legislation and consultation documents; and we hold focus groups to provide written and oral evidence to Parliamentary Committees. We have given evidence on the Adoption Bill, the Family Law Bill, the Charities Bill, and have responded to the Dying with Dignity consultation. We are in the process of establishing a 'faith representative forum' to deal with this area of work.

We have a good engagement with the Scottish Parliament and there are a number of members of the Scottish Parliament who are Friends of the Council. The Council hosted a meeting in Glasgow last year, arranged by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, of the Network, SIFC, the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum and the Inter Faith Council for Wales. It was a very useful get-together. We welcome here today Brigid Bowen who is the new Development Officer of the Inter Faith Council for Wales. We look forward to working with her and wish her success in what I am sure will be a very interesting but very challenging task ahead!

Let me say a word about devolution. 'Devolution' has brought a transfer of legislative power from the UK Parliament at Westminster to the Scottish Parliament. The areas where this has happened include health; local government; housing; tourism; some aspects of transport; police and fire services; natural and built heritage; sport and the arts; education; social work; planning; economic development; courts and legal system; environment; agriculture, forestry and fishing; and public registers and records. Other areas are 'reserved' matters where the power to legislate has been retained the UK Parliament at Westminster.

Devolution has certainly created a fresh impetus to promote inter faith work in Scotland and the structures of devolution make possible greater participation in the processes of Government. For example, the Scottish Parliament has a Petitions Committee: only one person needs to lodge a petition and that petition will be taken as seriously with one name on it as it will with a thousand names. You can see all its debates on television through Holyrood TV so you can keep in touch with what is happening there and civil servants, members of Scottish Parliament, and indeed Ministers visit faith communities. The SIFC also hosts an annual meeting with the First Minister. One of the benefits of devolution is the easier access it affords to decision makers.

There are, however, some pitfalls in devolution, for example, when Holyrood and Westminster pass laws on the same issue, which are not identical and do not seem to be compatible. There can also be differences in terms of domestic law and international law. The Scotland Act is compatible with the Human Rights Act but my understanding is that this might not be the case with all legislation enacted in England. There is also much potential for confusion because of the dividing lines between 'devolved' and 'reserved' matters. For example equal opportunities (where religion and belief and some immigration issues fall) is a 'reserved' matter and even where the Scottish Executive has devolved authority the Westminster Parliament still has the power to legislate, for example, on issues of drugs trafficking. This creates a lack of clarity. There are cross party groups, which cover matters which are in part 'devolved' and in part 'reserved'.

Brian Pearce touched in his talk on the forthcoming Commission for Equality and Human Rights. The SIFC supports the development of the CEHR and welcomes the new Equality Act. However, we recognise the tensions that exist in some cases between different 'strands' covered by the Act, such as sexual orientation and religion and belief, in terms of both employment and in terms of service provision, particularly in terms of the exemptions provided in legislation for religious organisations. We hope that the cross strand work that we are doing with Stonewall Scotland will ease some of these tensions.

Lastly, I would like to mention a particular challenge we face. This is the challenge of resources. The first aspect of this is financial, despite the generous and welcome support we receive from a number of sources. Currently we do not use Lottery funding but we may need to review that position. The second aspect of this is to do with skills and what you might call 'intellectual capital'. There is fantastic work being done at the grassroots level but when we are recruiting to posts in our office at the strategic level we currently have to recruit staff who have an equalities background, rather than people who are actually working on inter faith issues or in the area of religion and faith more generally because there are so few of the these. We really do need more 'intellectual capital'.

I have told you a little about the Scottish Inter Faith Council's remit and its work, as well as some of the opportunities and challenges it faces in the rapidly changing inter faith landscape. I will be very happy to take some questions and also to talk later with those who would like to know more.

**There followed a short question period:**

**John Tilbury**: I am from the Leeds Faith Forum. I believe you said that you could not accept the Pagans into full membership. Is that right?

**Pramila Kaur**: The Pagan Federation currently has 'observer' status. When a body has observer status they are given two years as 'observers' to allow members of the Inter Faith Council to have discussions with them and vice versa, in order to determine whether they actually meet the criteria for full membership.

**John Tilbury**: The reason I ask is because we are in this situation at the moment, as Leeds Faith Forum has had an application from the Pagans, and I wondered whether you had any advice on the criteria to apply in accepting or rejecting it.

**Pramila Kaur**: We need to have a lot more discussion before we reach a decision. The Latter Day Saints who I mentioned earlier applied directly for membership. After a lengthy discussion, it was ultimately agreed not to grant them full membership and in consequence the observer status was withdrawn.

**Dr Raheem Khan**: I am from the Muslim Council of Britain and I would like to congratulate you on the magnificent job the Scottish Inter Faith Council is doing. Clearly you are receiving cooperation from the First Minister and the Scottish Executive as well as from the people in Scotland. It seems that you do not have the problems in Scotland of particular groups being treated unequally. Unfortunately, we do have that problem in London and try to tackle this as effectively as we can. At a recent consultation meeting on plans for the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights I said that this was going to be a very major body and that the expectations of it will be very high as it will need to tackle the absence of equality and the current infringements of human rights.

# FAITH COMMUNITIES AND INTER FAITH RELATIONS – TO WHAT TASKS DO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES CALL US?

**Rev Canon Guy Wilkinson, Inter Faith Adviser to the Church of England**

I am grateful for, and distinctly daunted by, this opportunity - grateful for the opportunity to speak, but daunted to be amongst people who at national, regional and local level have probably had a great deal more experience in the inter faith field than have I. The first thing I want to say is how fruitful has been the work of the Inter Faith Network and the fact that there are now so many inter faith organisations, many in membership of the Network, testifies to the energy and the desire for taking forward good inter faith relations that exists in this country. In that regard we all owe a particular debt to Brian and to Harriet. I want to offer some brief personal observations, rather than an analysis of the inter faith scene, to be put alongside the observations of so many others. They come from a Christian practitioner who has lived for some fifteen years in Coventry and in East Birmingham and in Bradford, and now has a national inter faith role for the Church of England.

It is obvious that we are in a time of transition. Perhaps we always are, but the timescales of the change through which we are going now in relation to our religious composition and perspectives are, I think, particularly short and condensed. We are talking about change of a very substantial kind over not more than a generation. On top of that, of course, or perhaps underlying that, are all the other vast changes in our society, under the headings of modernisation, post-modernity, and so on. Transition often leads to anxiety and, not least where deep religious feelings are concerned, we have to be aware of the anxieties that rapid and deep change bring about. From a Christian perspective I am always reminded of the words that Jesus often spoke to his colleagues, "Do not be afraid!", which was a constant admonition to his disciples and also his recipe of "Perfect love casts out fear". So to live in hope, which I think is what we all do, is to hold together realism with vision and desire. I think there is a vision that together we can manage this transition, and there is certainly a desire to do so, but realism makes us, or should make us, acutely conscious of the fragility of the situation in the paths that we seek to tread together.

The title I was given is "To what tasks do new circumstances call us?". First of all, what are these new circumstances and what are their associated tasks? I am going to try briefly to identify four, although one could no doubt name a whole bundle of them, and probably all four are to a high degree new to Britain and perhaps north west Europe, much more than they are new in any other part of the world.

My first changing circumstance relates to the language of religious plurality and the realities that lie behind that language. I would like to raise issues about much of the language in relation to faith and inter faith that we have developed over these last twenty five years. I do so as always with an agenda of suspicion towards language, because language is the vehicle for agendas and for the distribution of power. So I want to raise questions about words such as 'traditions', 'diversity', 'cohesion', 'faith' as in 'faith communities', 'inter faith' and much else. There are many words which carry meanings and agendas beyond those that appear on the surface. Let us focus

very briefly for a moment on the widespread use of the prefix 'multi', as in 'multi-faith', 'multicultural', 'multi-ethnic', multi many things and, of course, the pros and cons of being 'multi' in a society are constantly debated. I want to advise caution in the use of this 'multi' language, because to a degree what we understand by it and how we receive it, and whether it plays to our anxieties or not, depends upon the scale, the level of one's own observation and lived perspective. At the national level, as we learned, for example, about Scotland in a previous presentation, we are actually not a particularly multi-religious society. I am visiting Malaysia next week, which is a multi-religious society. On a national scale, from that perspective, we are not actually particularly so with about 6% only from the so called 'other faiths'. At a city level, in the case of some cities we certainly are, and Birmingham and London are, of course, examples of this. At the residential neighbourhood level mainly we are not 'multi'. In some neighbourhoods we are, but mainly we are not. And one could go on reinforcing the point. We need to be careful how we use this language because it is also mixed up with the language of minority and majority, and all of that feeds into anxieties at different levels of our society. So the language we use must reflect the actual reality of peoples' lives. We must not construct, by the language we use, pictures that simply do not accord with the lived experience of people on the ground.

My second changing circumstance relates to religion in the public square, the place of religion in our culture if you like. This is currently changing rapidly but unevenly. There is a substantial additional place for religion on the ground so to speak, in the neighbourhoods, in the schools, amongst students. There is something of a changing perception amongst the media and the arts, but that is often a rather particular set of perspectives; and you might say that there is relatively little change in the place of religion in the public place so far as the intellectual and academic elites are concerned. Now religion was never absent from the public space. It is woven, if you like, into its social, legal and artistic fabric, but it has for long been implicit rather than explicit and perhaps for quite good reasons. It is not so much a question as to whether there is belief or disbelief in society. Levels of belief have remained constant for generations. Rather, it is about the ways in which belief is manifested. As you know, our society makes some very broad generalisations about religion, ie it's good or it's bad, it's ours, or it's theirs - those kinds of very generalised statements. As religious expression becomes more explicit, so the risk is that anxieties in society about religion increase. And, of course, we are, and we need to be, aware that for all the positives and the benefits of a stronger place for religion in the public place, society has all kinds of anxieties about religious competition, competition between different faith communities, about coercion and exploitation in evangelism, and, of course, about religiously motivated violence. We have a real task in moulding and shaping the consequences of this new found explicit public position. How we, as religious leaders and advisers, behave in public will determine the religious environment for our children and grandchildren for generations to come. I want to suggest that one task, a testing area for all of us, might be how we differently and collectively respond to what we regard as religiously offensive material, whether it be cartoons or Jerry Springer or theatre performances, commercial use of religious images, or artistic exhibitions. How we respond to those issues, I think, will be of major importance in how we collectively as religious people are regarded by society.

My third changing circumstance, very briefly, relates to Government and religion. It is quite extraordinary, for someone of my age anyway, to see the substantial change in

the perspective of political government on the presence of faith as a stakeholder and a player in society. This is, of course, welcome, but the task is for us to have eyes open: eyes open for instrumentality. Naturally, government is there to govern, that is its proper task, but we have to be careful not to become the instruments of Government. That is not what religious communities are fundamentally about. We need to have a real awareness of the effect of our relationships with Government, through capacity building funds or consultative councils, on the structures of our own communities. These are not one-way flows; they do affect our own structures. The task, I think, is how to be the critical friend of Government, a Government which is open to the religious perspective. How to be the critical friend and bring our theologies of governance to bear on policy.

Lastly, and again briefly, my fourth changing circumstance and associated task relates to the place of Christianity in the culture and in the constitution. I think we have to develop the debate on this. Christianity has been the primary factor in shaping the society in which we live, including its post-enlightenment humanism and much of the secular structures of Government that we have inherited. Christianity has been behind, and in favour of, much of that, and Christianity remains embedded in the constitutional, the legal, the artistic and spiritual fabric, if you like, of the nation. I want to suggest that the changing circumstance is that the country as a whole and the Churches in particular might be working on what you might call a 'paradigm shift' away from a 'host-guest' type of understanding, towards a 'co-citizenship' type of understanding. 'Host-guest' implies hospitality, yes, but also a degree of paternalism. 'Host-guest' implies politeness, but can also imply a degree of less than full openness with each other. Now the implications of this paradigm change are not yet clear, but the task for us all as people of faith seems to me to be to consider carefully what a 'co-citizenship' model means in terms of the structures of religion within our society. So perhaps the task is to discover whether it is possible to develop a model which respects the deep religiously embedded, cultural and constitutional structures; accepts the fact of deep religious difference and deep human commonality; and is open, positively open, to the 'other' and ready to learn from it and to work alongside it for the common good. Because the common good for all of us is the flourishing of human beings under God.

**There followed a short question period:**

**Dr Jagdish Sharma:** I am from Hindu Council (UK). Thank you for a very enlightening analysis of the changing aspects of our society. I refer to the very first one, language. Words have a habit of acquiring currency as they get used. I used to have a bee in my bonnet about the word 'ethnic'. Take 'multi', add 'ethnic' and then you have a scenario. If you look at the Oxford English Dictionary the origins of the word 'ethnic' are linked to the concept of the 'heathen' - people who lived 'on the heath' and who were regarded as non-believers by the believers. Today I think people do not even ask where the word began but they use it irrespective of the fact that we are all believers. I am regarded as belonging to an ethnic minority, a visible ethnic minority. Wherever you take this discussion with the Church it is important to ask that these words should be understood in their proper context. I especially listen for people using the word 'ethnic' without any care at all.

**Rev Canon Guy Wilkinson:** I wholly agree with that, which is an illustration of precisely the point that I want to make, not least that what I referred to as a paradigm shift from 'host-guest' to 'co-citizenship' implies far more careful use of language precisely of that kind.

**Marilyn Trovato:** I am Chair of the Leeds Faith Forum and was interested in your comments about language as I deal with language on a day to day basis. Is our modern language appropriate for this ever-changing inter faith environment? Do we need, for example, new words to describe our present society and what is happening to it?

**Rev Canon Guy Wilkinson:** Words, of course, are always in transition and that is neither bad nor surprising. My plea is that we do not devalue words by loading them with more multiple meanings than they can usefully bear. I suggest that the word 'inter faith' in its variety of forms is close to the point of buckling under the meanings that we are giving to it. So far as inventing new language is concerned, I would say that any energetic arena of endeavour does develop its own words and language as it goes along. One of the phrases we are playing with in the Church of England at the moment is the notion of 'presence and engagement', the notion of being present amongst, but engaging with, those alongside, and we are trying to begin to use that as an additional pair of words over and above the notion of simply inter faith relations in the local context of churches. That may be appropriate to us and not necessarily to others but it is an example of trying to develop the language which matches circumstances as those develop.

# FAITH COMMUNITIES AND INTER FAITH RELATIONS – TO WHAT TASKS DO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES CALL US?

**Moulana M Shahid Raza, Executive Secretary, Imams and Mosques Council and Head Imam, Leicester Central Mosque**

I begin in the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most kind. It is a privileged opportunity for me to share some of my experiences with this rich gathering to which our sisters and brothers bring enormous faith and experiences.

I will begin with what I have experienced as an imam and as a person engaged in inter faith activities and dialogue during the last 28 years. I can see quite distinctly that the agenda has changed across this period of time. For me personally, as a Muslim and as an imam, I can see that change has been of various kinds: neutral and positive, but, unfortunately, negative as well.

There have been some positive developments, for example, progress on inter faith activities in the field of institutions. We have heard this morning about inter faith educational developments in Cambridge. In Markfield, near Leicester, the Islamic Foundation has taken forward work in this area. Rev Canon Andew Wingate is here from St Philip's Centre in Leicester, and that is an example of a church linked inter faith initiative. There are so many initiatives. Similarly I have witnessed some positive developments at national level, for example, the formation of the Christian-Muslim Forum as well as recent efforts to have bilateral dialogue between imams and rabbis. At a conference in Spain at the end of March, many rabbis and roughly 50 imams exchanged views and interacted with each other. These are very positive and constructive shifts to the agenda in respect of inter faith dialogue and this change of agenda requires from us more human investment and more commitment. We need more and more resources so that we may continue in this part of inter faith dialogue with new arenas and avenues.

At the same time, quite recently we have all witnessed that Muslims in particular have become increasingly the focus of attention and in many cases the focus of negative attention. The vast majority of Muslims very strongly feel that their faith is being demonised and that an engineered profiling of the Muslim community is taking place. I would classify this as a negative shift in the wider agenda. I am quite clear that Islam related violence has also increased remarkably, not only in this country, but almost globally.

Debate on Islam in Britain and in Europe has widened and is becoming in my opinion more vigorous and rigorous every day. Issues like integration, citizenship, clash of cultures, the roles of imams and of mosques, and European values are being raised more commonly and more widely. Within the Muslim community, we continue to witness and experience issues related to our youth, our women and the generation gap. On a very small scale, there is also an issue within the Muslim community of the individualisation of faith. This is quite worrying for me as an imam. Muslims are also experiencing misunderstanding, suspicion, prejudice and even hatred and it is contributing to fear and alienation. So although some good initiatives and some good

shifts towards the inter faith agenda have brought at the same time some hope, confidence and friendship as well I very strongly feel that we need more active engagement in the field of inter faith dialogue. Brian Pearce and other colleagues have done historic work at the Inter Faith Network and it is because of the Network that we are here today sharing and hearing so much from the leaders of faith communities and members of the faith communities about our experiences. But even today almost one year after the bombings of 7 July I strongly feel that there is a greater need for more and more inter faith dialogue and engagement. This dialogue, my dear friends, should not only be about the descriptions of our problems, which is what I generally feel that it is. We get together, we smile, we embrace, we shake hands, we speak about the description of our problems. Instead we need to offer tangible and clear suggestions about the nature of the solutions of these problems. Perhaps this is the challenge for us. This is the way forward for the inter faith dialogue.

We, as Muslims, also need to do more work in this particular field. I am glad to inform you, my dear brothers and sisters, that very recently the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board has produced a good practice guide for mosques and imams in Britain. It was launched in London on 27 June. It offers a clear path setting out the role of imams and mosques in this changed situation after such a shift has taken place in the agenda of inter faith dialogue. For example, at the end it says "Imams should provide comprehensive spiritual leadership to the Muslim community. Imams should use Friday sermons to present a speech with answers to the everyday needs of the Muslim community as well deep theological insight. Issues such as drugs, smoking, environment, health, respect and tolerance of others should also be addressed. The sermon could be delivered in Arabic and in English. Advertising mosque functions to the wider community." There are many cases of good practice advised to the Muslim community. So the community are taking initiatives and are serious in their commitment to this. We hope that we will be sharing our recent inter faith experiences with all other faith communities.

At the moment, I think that there are items on our agenda which must be a priority. There is an urgent need for the deepening of dialogue. This issue is the topic of one of the workshops this afternoon but I will just say one or two sentences about it. For example, the recent uproar over the provocative anti-Islamic Danish cartoons. Let us ask this question. Would the papers have printed the cartoons if they knew at the time that people would lose their lives, many would be wounded, properties would be destroyed, multinational companies would lose business heavily and Muslims would be scandalised? Many would not. So we need to deepen our dialogue. Just superficial information about each other is not enough. We need to go deeply, to consider the repercussions of what we do, what we publish, what we say and how it may affect or potentially damage the whole structure of society. I cannot speak on behalf of other communities but, as far as the Muslim community in the UK is concerned, the Muslim media and imams are the two largest public opinion makers and we need their participation and their real engagement in this field of dialogue.

Finally, I would like to conclude with the words of Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, who said at the end of one of his lectures delivered in a meeting organised by the Three Faiths Forum. "Let us all hope and pray that instead

of negative fallout in the days to come, people of goodwill will be even more determined to create better understanding".

# NEW FUNDING STREAMS, NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE FAITH DIMENSION OF COMMUNITY COHESION

**Debbie Ladds, Director of Projects for the Community Development Foundation**

It is great to be here with you this afternoon to tell you our story, in terms of the work that we have been doing on the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. I would like to see this as our joint story, because I know many of you applied for funding, and I know many of you received it. It is a continuing story because there will be a second round of this funding and I will also mention briefly the Connecting Communities Plus Community Grants programme, which is another fund that the Community Development Foundation is administering.

First, let me say a little about who we are and about CDF itself. It is a non departmental public body and up until a month or so ago we were sponsored by the Home Office. They asked us to take on the grant administration role for the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. We are currently in the process of moving towards the new Department for Communities and Local Government, and so we will I am sure maintain our links with the Cohesion and Faiths Unit, the Race Equality Unit, and many other people now working from that Government department rather than from the Home Office. But CDF is also a charity and has a board of trustees that steer and guide our work. At CDF our vision is of an active, inclusive and just society. Our main tasks are not just about grant administration. We are primarily about empowering communities and working with people locally so that what happens in their local area is what they want to happen and to which they are committed. We often bridge the divide between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector and we see our role as enabling and empowering and supporting that relationship. So in terms of our mission, we want to lead community development and to empower people to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

We have previously administered a grant programme of the Department for Education and Skills so we have previous experience of the work of grant administration. My own background is in the voluntary and community sector, so I am used to being on the receiving end of grants rather than being able to be involved in distributing them. As I am sure many of you know, the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund opened last year. It has two main purposes: one is about capacity building in the faith and inter faith sector, and the second is about encouraging the development of inter faith activities, for which I know that many of you received grants. It is all about contributing to community cohesion and the strategy set out by the Government in *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*. There is about £12 million to distribute and we are able to run two rounds of funding. As I said, we had one round of funding last year and now have organisations in receipt of funding, and hope to open the second round quite soon and distribute some more money. The fund is sponsored by the Cohesion and Faiths Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In round one we received 2,128 applications by the closing date. I do not think we quite knew what that meant until two days before the closing date, when the phones

went mad and the postman had to start delivering our sacks of post in a van just for them. Most of the post came by recorded delivery which you usually have to sign for each envelope that comes through the door, but once the postman worked out what was happening he just delivered the sack loads of post to us. We were inundated with applications. Over 100 people came themselves on the actual closing date with their forms in their hands and as we are based in Cambridge lots of people had very bizarre journeys trying to reach us there. But we were glad to see every one of them. The Government had never funded the sector before, so I do not think they quite realised what the demand would be although I know some of you, including Brian and Harriet, were saying loudly that there would be a huge demand.

We opened this Fund with £5 million to distribute and in total received requests for £52 million. Most people were very conservative about the amount of money for which they were asking. Many small grant applications only asked for up to £5000. Many of the large grant applications were for less than £50,000, although I have to say there were many good ideas put forward costing £49,999! The huge response raised the profile of the sector and potential funding opportunities with the Minister, who at the time was Paul Goggins. We informed the Government how many applications we had received and the amount of funding being requested and said that we believed that very many of them deserved funding. So we were actually able to offer funding totalling about £7.4 million because more money was added in for the current round and it was agreed that there would be a second round. The available funding goes nowhere near meeting £52 million worth of requests and I know that many organisations chose not to apply in round one, perhaps because they wanted to see how it was going, realised that £5 million would not go very far and knew the deadlines were very tight. So I would expect that we shall receive even more applications in round two. So I anticipate saying again to the DCLG that the sector needs more funding.

Details of who we funded are up on our website. If any of you want those details we can email them to you. Here are some photos from groups we are funding. Those of you that received funding know that we asked for pictures to use in publicity, so you may even see your own organisation featured here. I will say a little about the organisations we are funding, but you all know more about what you are doing than I do. After all, I am the funder and we all know how much we tell funders! Sometimes we just get the strapline of what you are doing.

I am not yet in a position to tell you when round two will be open. We have drafted some guidance notes for it based on our experience of round one and the feedback we received from organisations and others that helped us in the funding process in round one and that is with the Department at present. I am hopeful that announcements will be made before the summer holidays, so that we can start the process in good time. We can email the information to you direct and we will be running briefing sessions. We are very willing to come out to events as well.

Some of our assessors read hundreds of forms in round one. So you need to cover the basic information we need, make sure you get the application to us on time, make sure it is signed and make sure it is legible if it is handwritten. Actually, what caught our attention most were innovative ideas with the potential for local impact. I would echo the speakers this morning who talked about making a difference locally. I am

particularly keen to fund activities which make a real difference in local communities. What has struck me in working with the faith and inter faith sector is the huge commitment and the values and cooperation that go with this. When I started at CDF eighteen months ago and was asked to manage this piece of work I thought "Oh dear. Money - everybody argues about money" and when they asked me to fund the religions of the UK, I thought "Money and religion – here we go! Let's see how we get on." But actually I have been very impressed because there is an obvious commitment, a shared set of values and a distinctive way of cooperating which has driven this Fund from the beginning. I have been very impressed by the people with whom we have been working and how understanding those that we have not been able to fund have been. Obviously, the ones we are funding think we are wonderful, but that is life! I know we have not been able to please everybody. I wish we could. I constantly say to my colleagues and to others I meet "Actually, the faith and inter faith sector need this money. They deserve it and they are equal partners, but with a bit more capacity building and a bit more funding to enable more activities to happen there is an even greater potential for partnership working, for active contributions that makes a real difference to our society."

So it has been a real privilege to be working with you all on this Fund, and I do not see our work simply as grant administration. I come from twenty years in the voluntary and community sector, as has Osman Sheikh who is our adviser to this Fund. Someone asked Osman the other day "Which side of the fence do you sit on? Are you the funder or are you one of us?". In our hearts we <u>are</u> one of you, even if we are being paid to distribute this funding. Someone in a Government department described me as a public sector worker. I thought "But, my heart is in the voluntary and community sector!" We definitely want to do our best for you, because we know the dangers of inappropriate funding. We know how difficult it can be to keep your organisation on the path towards the goal you have set it up to achieve, when a funder comes along and waves some money and wants you to go in a different direction. We know how dangerous that can be because we have been there. So we are very keen to keep the guidance generic and for you tell us what best suits your work in your local area in meeting that generic requirement. The generic requirement for work is about community cohesion, about improving what happens locally.

If you apply for round two, also look at the priorities of the Fund. You will see that we are interested in working with young people and work with women in faith and inter faith organisations. We need to relate these priorities to community cohesion, and, as I said, make sure as well that it fits in with what your organisation is doing. Be realistic. If you are asking for £10,000 we and the assessors we use know how far that money goes, so do not pretend that you can achieve more than you actually can. That sets you up for failure before you have even started and if we think you have not got that right we may well not fund you. We will not just choose those applications that look as if they are giving best value for money because they cost very little, because we know that life is not always like that. We know the faith and inter faith sector have a lot of volunteers, and can do a great deal for nothing, but actually some things do cost money. My final thought is the need for you to recognise the likely demand. If we received requests for £52 million the first time around I am sure it will be similar this second time. So while you may need £200,000 this is not the Fund that can deliver that amount of money to you.

Now I want to show you some of the photos we have been sent of activities we have funded:

- The London Peace Pagoda had an inter faith event last month which included music by young people. It involved the general public as well. Here are some of the young people on stage
- The Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy Steering Group received a small grant from us. This is an interesting one. One of the priorities of our Fund is about the interaction between faith and inter faith sector and the public sector, which this project achieves because it is about working with construction workers on the site, bringing in the elements of faith and shared citizenship in that local community. So that caught our imagination and received a small grant.
- Middlesborough Council of Faiths. We have funded many inter faith forums and events. I am not sure this particular picture matches the activities for which we have given funding which are about the Council working with the faith communities in the local area to engage more fully in civic life and to support community cohesion through a whole range of different activities. In this picture they are playing an inter faith game.
- Patel Samaj of Northampton. We awarded a small capacity-building grant. We are ready to fund the running of workshops for committee members and the purchasing of equipment. We will give money for a computer if that means that you can get your newsletters and your publicity material out more effectively. Patel Samaj are also going to run some activities with young people in the town.

Four other projects we funded are:

- A joint Muslim-Jewish internet radio project from the Bristol Muslim Cultural Society.
- Flash Musicals, who are not a faith based organisation, applied for some money under the inter faith strand to do a show called the "Spirit of Togetherness" and got a small grant to for it.
- The Network of Sikh Organisations are doing some work around building the capacity for more effective service provision for women. This attracted us because of our priority for women's work.
- Blackburn Cathedral are doing an exchange programme bringing together white and Asian heritage children and their parents, people and parents together from different faiths.

Let me talk briefly about Connecting Communities Plus. This fund is sponsored by both the Race Equality Unit and the Cohesion and Faiths Unit and is for community grants. It is currently open and has two further rounds. It is nowhere near the size of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. There is £3 million to be distributed in three rounds of £1 million each. The first round closes this Wednesday. We are aiming grants at community groups this round. Some of you might have heard of the strategic and project grants that were available last autumn. This fund has four priorities, linked directly to the strategy in *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*. The first two priorities are about improving the experiences, and increasing the confidence, of people from black and minority ethnic communities in their interactions with public sector and service delivery. The other two are perhaps more relevant to inter faith work and are about tackling racism and extremism, bringing together different races and faiths, and promoting a shared sense of belonging. This community grant programme strand is aimed mainly at locally run and managed

voluntary and community groups with an income of less than £50,000 a year and run by volunteers, or maybe with one part time or full time staff member. The upper limit for these grants is £12,000 and we expect most of them to be between £6,000 and £12,000. The geographical allocation of the funding will broadly reflect the distribution of black and minority ethnic populations as in the 2001 Census. While that is out of date, it is about the best guidance that the Race Equality Unit can use at present to try to ensure a reasonably fair pattern of funding. But the first test will be the quality of the applications we receive. The first round is closed. The second round is due to open round about November. If you want information about it you will always be able to find it on our website. You can also just contact us directly. Once we have got your organisations on our database we will be happy just to send you information about these funds as and when they come on stream and we will make sure you hear as well about round two of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.*

I will finish with some observations on the work we have been doing. It is stimulating and worthwhile. It is a very rewarding piece of work in which to be involved and quite a privilege. We recognise the importance of this funding and the impact which it can have. We want that impact to be positive for the sector as well as meeting the goals of the Government. So we are very keen that we make the best use of this funding in a way that works for all of us. We have been overwhelmed by the evidence of the need for it that is out there and the demand for this funding. We will continue to underline that point in the meetings we have with Government, not because CDF itself wants to do more grant administration, but because I think the sector needs and deserves this funding. In the past many people have shied away from funding faith organisations. So we know that you have not necessarily had access to some of the Government funding that there has been around at a local or national level. So we are keen, if we can, to achieve some strategic funding for the sector in a way that suits and helps both the sector and the Government. I am very pleased about the difference this funding is making locally. I hope that many people will get a broader experience as a result so that the Fund makes a difference to their interactions with other people locally, and to the society in which we now live. Finally this Fund is about partnership working. We are here to help you, not just working as the grant administrator and helping the government to distribute this money.

**There followed a short question period:**

**Rabbi Daniela Thau:** Thank you very much. I am from the Bedford Council of Faiths. We had £3,000 through your grant to develop our website. My question is about timing. The last round came out in November 2005 and we have to spend it by 31 March 2007. Now we would like to apply again for a project in 2008. If you are now launching a second round and the timing is again as tight as before, this will be

*[Note The Department for Communities and Local Government announced on 7 August that a total of £4.5 million was being made available for the second round of funding through the Faith Community Capacity Building Fund and that the closing date for applications would be 1 November. Details were placed on the website of the Community Development Foundation at www.cdf.org.uk.]

difficult for us because we already have our plans made for 2007. This cannot be very rare. Most well-run organisations will, like us be planning a year and a half ahead! Is it possible that we can get extensions of deadlines for work under the Fund? Or can you adopt a different kind of timetable?

**Debbie Ladds:** I do recognise the difficulty. The timelines are geared to Treasury requirements and at present the funding is only in annual instalments. Round two will be announced as soon as we can. It will be for spending between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008. So that will give you three months in 2008! I realise it is probably not long enough for you. The present funding was agreed by the Treasury two years ago within their three year cycle of public expenditure for 2005-08. We are talking with the Government about a longer term funding programme but I cannot say more than that.

**Mgr John Devine:** I am from the North West Forum of Faiths. How do you get over the notion that once an organisation gets public funding it changes? I have real problems with sustainability. You create a dependency on very short term funding which is very risky. Of course, we grow accustomed to it, and then what happens? Does the organisation fall apart? You might say that in a sense that is not your problem and that a little is better than nothing. But I think there is a real dilemma here. So much energy goes into worrying about where next year's funding is going to come from, and into meeting all the administrative requests for accountability and transparency that a lot of the resources are eaten up by actually administering what we have received!

**Debbie Ladds:** Money is an issue for all of us. The sustainability issue is a long term one. I would say: if at all possible do not become grant dependent. If you are, then you are in a very difficult position. Part of the Government's approach at present is about making us less grant dependent, funded more from our own income and our own resources. We are trying to say to people to use grants from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund for specific project funding, not long term funding. It will not give you two years funding, let alone three. The groups about which I am most concerned are those that have employed workers, because they have only got the money for a year and then what happens at the end of twelve months? As an organisation we have been having that debate about the funding required for community workers. We do our best to administer our grants with a very light touch. We try to keep our requirements as simple as possible and to ask for limited amounts of information from you. The long term challenge is to work out how you can get secure funding, which you are not reliant on others to give. That takes us into social enterprise models, which may be appropriate for large organisations but I recognise are more difficult for small ones.

# FAITH COMMUNITIES, INTER FAITH ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT

Meg Munn MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for State,
Department for Communities and Local Government

I am really pleased to be here this afternoon and to have an opportunity to talk to people of faith about the Government's plans and also hopefully to squeeze in a few questions before I need to leave.

First, just one interesting fact - the 2001 Census showed that 76% of people in the UK identified themselves as having a religion. That is not the perception that you might get if you were scanning the media – it could be said that people of faith are somewhat of a hidden majority!

**A multi-faith society**

The Government recognises that Britain is a multi-faith society as much as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural one. Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and others form sizable minorities alongside the majority Christian faith.

We acknowledge the important role that faith communities up and down the country play in public life. It was really a sense of that importance which led me, probably about four years ago now, to set up meetings within my own constituency with faith leaders so that I could have regular contact with people who are active in so much of our civic life. The contribution you make to social cohesion through the instilling and application of values that help underpin citizenship - ethical behaviour, respect for others and community solidarity – is a very important one. Places of worship are often used as community centres, providing services to members of their own faith as well as to the wider community.

But we do not just acknowledge the contribution made to public life by faith communities. We are also aware of the particular needs of faith communities and the challenges they face in society. For example, we have to ensure that public services are tailored in a way that respects the differences in belief which influence people's diet, their attire and other aspects of their day-to-day life.

By respecting our religious differences we can engage with each other as fellow human beings, the better to move towards an inclusive society. All of us – central and local Government, public services, the voluntary sector, business, local communities – have a role in helping Britain become more a country of social equality and strong community.

As part of that aim, we are committed to engaging with all faith communities. We want to ensure that members of all faiths - and those who have no particular faith - enjoy the same life opportunities. We will work with people who have different beliefs but shared values, to work together towards common goals.

Discrimination and extremism of whatever kind have to be acknowledged and confronted. Our communities cannot be safe, cannot be integrated, if these evils are left to fester and grow.

**Supporting communities**

Our aim is to build social cohesion, to support communities making this a reality on the ground. The document on our strategy to increase equality, race equality and community cohesion, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*, sets out practical measures across Government to improve opportunities for all in Britain. It can help to ensure that a person's ethnicity, faith or race is not a barrier to their success.

There are three ways in which we believe success in doing this can be judged:

- we have a Government target to reduce race inequality and improve community cohesion and progress will be monitored against that;
- we will publish an annual review of progress against the commitments in the strategy document; and
- our success will be judged by the difference it makes to peoples' lives – stronger communities in a more inclusive society.

The values and activities that underpin good citizenship - altruism, respect for others, ethical behaviour and community solidarity - all are found in faith communities. They contribute to social and community cohesion. So, it makes sense for us to talk with faith communities, and to have a dialogue about policies and projects as we develop these. Our outreach programme will, over the course of this year, be engaging with faith communities in local communities, supporting their contribution to integration and cohesion and building communication with hard to reach groups – in particular women and young people.

**Communication and practical help**

We have regular contact between representatives of the main faith communities and Ministers and senior officials. We also have a network of officials in local authorities in touch with most faith communities in order to support and spread good practice.

A new Faith Communities Consultative Council has recently been established to create a new and streamlined structure for Government to consult and get feedback from representatives of faith communities. It will be chaired by my Ministerial colleague, Phil Woolas, and on occasions, including the next one I think, I might be standing in for him. It has brought together the former ODPM led Inner Cities Religious Council and the Home Office led Working Together Steering Group.

The new Council will address the issues of cohesion and integration, as well as discussing broader Government policy impacting on faith communities. It will monitor and set standards for consultation and cooperation between Government departments and faith communities, identifying and sharing good practice. It will be important not just to deal with what is currently around, but to look for issues that are likely to emerge, and to discuss what policy approaches might need to be adopted to deal with those emerging issues.

Our Faiths Communities Capacity Building Fund will continue to support a diverse range of community initiatives for building capacity. This somewhat strange term is a bit of jargon. What we mean by it encompasses a whole range of issues about our ability to participate in civic and public life and resources and skills that are needed for that. It is also about creating trust and understanding between different faith groups. This building of trust, at both local and national level, is essential for the future. The Fund gives an equal opportunity to local inter faith bodies, and local faith based organisations wishing to work together. Arm's-length distribution of the Fund has ensured that the bidding process is as fair and as transparent as possible.

We do, of course, sponsor the Inter Faith Network to strengthen and increase inter faith co-operation and activity at local, regional and national levels. There is no doubt that inter faith work plays a major role in sustaining good relations between faith communities. The development of inter faith activity is increasingly important since the 7 July bombings last year. We acknowledge the positive work currently being done by local inter faith bodies to promote community cohesion, and we are keen to explore how this can be improved.

As you know, as part of the Government reshuffle in May the Prime Minister announced the creation of the new Department for Communities and Local Government – which I sometimes like to refer to as DeCLOG! I do not think that is its official title but if we could achieve some declogging that would not be bad! This Department now has responsibility for the Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate that was formerly within the remit of the Home Office. It also includes responsibility for women and equality, which is my particular role and a role that I formerly had at the DTI. It also includes community cohesion and really brings it all together in what I think is a very positive and exciting way. Having all these different strands in one Department, with one group of Ministers, should really help us in developing policies to tackle the inequalities in society.

**Breadth of the agenda**

Faith communities bring a richness and diversity to our society. Their willingness to participate in the Government's aim of building a more inclusive, integrated society, where barriers to social advancement are dismantled, is encouraging.

The presence here of people from national and local inter faith organisations and educational bodies, as well as national faith community organisations, really underlines the breadth of the agenda that the Inter Faith Network has. I am confident that the Inter Faith Network will continue to be an effective channel for building lasting partnerships and towards building a more progressive and cohesive society. We are pleased that for the last five years we have been able to offer financial support to help the Network develop. The UK is the only EU member state to have a broad national inter faith linking structure of this kind. It is an important contributor in helping develop community cohesion. I really think that if the Inter Faith Network did not exist we would have to invent it!

**A period for questions followed:**

**Rev Jane Barraclough:** I am concerned that you spoke of a society that must be based on shared values. It seems increasingly clear to me that our values are very diverse, both between the religious communities and secular people and even within religious communities. So I would ask how can you enshrine the diversity of this country and the diversity of those values?

**Meg Munn:** When I spoke about shared values I was talking about the fact that sometimes we behave as if there is greater diversity than there is. Actually, there is a great deal of sharing of values between a whole range of people. That does not mean that it is impossible to have societies within which there are different views and values - of course not. We want to build a strong society which has cohesion but within that recognises diversity and actually celebrates diversity and difference. It is through regular contact with people from different backgrounds, different faiths, different experiences that people develop an understanding of where people are coming from, what they are trying to do, and what their contribution is in society. I would not want to put diversity and shared values in opposition to each other; I do not see them as entirely separate. They both have a role to play within our society and valuing diversity is enormously important.

**Dr Raheem Khan:** Thank you very much indeed. I enjoyed your presentation. I would like to emphasise to you what is happening in this country at the moment. The largest minority is Muslims and we are, rightly or wrongly, being targeted very badly. Many officers in Scotland Yard in our meetings with them frequently correct me, when I say 85% of the Muslim community are law-abiding, mainstream and hardworking, by saying the proportion is 95%! We ourselves are targeting that 5% within our community to reform that group as much as possible. But at the same time our youngsters are being targeted by the police. It is predominantly Muslims that are being stopped and searched - young boys, because with their beards they look like Muslims. In the recent incident in East London, after being shot that boy was dragged by his feet with his head banging on each step. When he arrived at the ground floor level somebody sat on him and he could not breathe. He started begging them, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe" and was only then allowed up. This kind of incident is creating a lot of sympathy amongst the 95% for the views of the 5%. This is having a profoundly bad effect, as it is when we hear from the Prime Minister "If there is a similar incident again because of intelligence information available, we will do exactly the same again and I am going to support the police entirely."

**Meg Munn:** I fully understand the issues you are raising. I have a mosque in my own constituency with which I am in contact regularly. One of the very difficult issues with which we are dealing is how to respond to the situation in which the bombers last July were seen as having come from that faith. Last summer the Home Office set up the Working Groups on Preventing Extremism, (and I took part in one of those), precisely because Government does recognise that it is only a small percentage of the Muslim community who are causing difficulties. In all communities it is a small percentage. But I do understand how it feels to have the spotlight on the Muslim community. We are very keen to take forward the recommendations of those Working Groups and a great deal is going on to put them into effect and to try to tackle those issues. We also have the Commission on Integration and Cohesion which

will be a short life commission to look at many of these issues and to ensure that we move forward as best we can as a society. Having said that, it is also extremely difficult for the police – and I know that you yourself are very involved directly with them – to balance the need to respond to what seems credible intelligence in terms of possible terrorist acts and the need to respect the legitimate concerns of the Muslim community. Ultimately, the Government has to be sure that Government and the police are in a position to do their best to stop terrorist incidents. The real problem we are always going to have in this is that we do not know, and will never fully know, about those incidents that have been prevented. We only know about the ones which have taken place and the ones where the intelligence has not been accurate. That is a very difficult situation but one that in Government we have to handle as best we can.

**Councillor Manjula Sood:** I congratulate the Government on setting up this new Department. You have mentioned community cohesion and community cohesion works in partnership. It is a corporate issue because faith is a way of life for us and unity among diversity can only be achieved through spirituality. Community cohesion needs that. Every local authority has to play a key role but there is insufficient money available. In Leicester I take pride that Leicester Council of Faiths (of which I am a member) has done what it has with scant resources. So what will the Government's approach be now? When it comes to the question of complementary schools, mother tongue is a very important issue for faith communities. The teachers in these schools are all volunteers who do not get a penny, as there is no budget for them. Who will be monitoring this work and ensuring that funding is going to be available where it is needed? It is the Department's job now to make sure that every local authority has an earmarked budget for faith issues since otherwise it is going to be extremely difficult to achieve the aims you have described.

**Meg Munn:** We always have this debate about how much national Government should direct local authorities and in what respect they should say "You must do this. You must do that. You must earmark this budget"; and how much we should leave it up to local people and local politicians to come to those decisions. There will be a White Paper on local government coming out later this year when a lot of those issues will again be explored. I think that will be the time for us to have that particular debate and it is difficult for me ahead of that time to say more about it. However, I would say to you that one of my responsibilities is the work directed towards setting up the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights, which will provide institutional support for issues both around tackling discrimination in relation to religion and belief and also in terms of actually promoting good practice. Because it is a Commission which covers a whole range of issues, it will be bigger than the three existing Commissions put together and therefore it will be able to have a greater presence throughout the UK. We are looking at how it can have good contact with local organisations to make sure that these kind of issues are being tackled. We are in the early stages of the setting up of this new Commission and there will be opportunities to influence how it works. There are lots of consultation meetings and events taking place on this at the moment.

**Rev Malcolm Stonestreet:** I am from the United Religions Initiative. I was speaking with a group of young people in Burnley and we were deciding the kind of inter faith projects in which they want to get involved. The community cohesion argument was clear and also the need for safety on the street. But they were actually looking for

something beyond that, 'out of the bunker' as it were. What they came up with in the end was that they wanted to be involved in an environmental project. There is a huge amount of wisdom to be gained from the different faith traditions all of which have some concept of this being a sacred creation and a huge amount to be gained from young people who have energy and vision and fear what we are doing to the environment. Through the route of inter faith work I believe we could tap into the kind of energy we need in this country to look at environmental issues with some commitment from the grassroots. It would be a huge help to people like me to be encouraged to get the conversation moving on what the different faiths have to give this country, rather than what they are demanding or are frightened about.

**Meg Munn:** In my constituency I spend time talking to young people. The impression is often given that they are not interested in politics, but actually what they are interested in is issues. They do not necessarily label it politics, but they are interested in issues and I think ideas like that are very positive ones. Again, we need to build on what is working well, where there is good practice, so those in other areas can learn from that. There are obviously ways in which we can spread that good practice, not least through your own networks.

## CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY: CHANGING PATTERNS OF INTER FAITH ENGAGEMENT IN THE UK

## FINAL PANEL

### Hon Barnabas Leith, Secretary for External Affairs, Baha'i Community of the UK

My starting point as a Baha'i for engagement in inter faith work is a very clear instruction in the Baha'i scriptures 'to associate with the people of all faiths in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship'. It is also a commitment to freedom of religion and belief and this year is, of course, the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration with a very long name, (and I think there should be a UN Declaration against UN Declarations with very long names!), the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief. The UN's special rapporteur, Asma Jehangir, has called on governments and others to mark this anniversary. So it is a very appropriate year for us to be having another of these wonderful Inter Faith Network National Meetings.

I wanted to reflect on a few themes that I have heard emerging in the day. One is this whole model, or paradigm, of majority versus minority. It is something that is very pervasive in our thinking and I have heard it cited a number of times by a number of speakers. I wonder if it is not actually a hindrance in some respects to good or improved relations between faith communities. I belong to what, by any account, is a minority faith. I would challenge any of you to come up with a smaller faith community, other than that of my Zoroastrian friends, than ours in the United Kingdom. So I am a minority. I definitely belong to a minority. But in other contexts I am part of the majority, whatever that might be. I think we are all minorities in some situations and we are all majorities in others. So I am wondering whether it really is a useful paradigm. I would like to suggest that perhaps we could think in other ways. We might, for example, wish to recognise that all faiths are diverse expressions of humankind's common spiritual resources. We can all learn from each other. I learn a tremendous amount from my dialogue with friends from other faiths and for me that is a more healthy way of looking at it. I am also always a little bit chary about too much emphasis on diversity. We are all human beings ultimately. We share a great deal - we probably share more than divides us. We are living at a time when we have to understand that we are diverse, of course, and we welcome that and we celebrate diversity, just as we celebrate the different flowers in our gardens, if we have gardens. But at the same time it is still one garden. We are all still in that same garden. So that is one theme that I have heard emerge in the day.

I was also very struck by what was said about the importance of language and the risks of language. I think that is something that we really do need to give thought to that as we pursue our inter faith dialogue in the coming year and years. We need to find a shared language, shared languages perhaps - shared meta-language, if I can get philosophical - which allow us to deepen our understanding about each other, about ourselves as human beings and as religious beings, as beings of faith.

Yesterday I was in Birmingham for a conversation amongst Baha'is about human dignity. Human dignity, of course, is held to be foundational for human rights and much else. We had an open ended day long conversation, drawing on our own scriptural resources and other resources, exploring what is human dignity, how we express it and how we nurture it. I think there is room for inter faith conversations, open-ended conversations, finding languages that will allow us to talk about these important issues, such as what it means to be human, drawing on the resources of all our faiths, our scriptural and traditional resources.

One issue that has not been mentioned, or has only been mentioned perhaps in passing - and I am becoming increasingly seized of the potential importance of this area of dialogue - is dialogue between faith and secularity. If you talk to us as people of faith we say that we live in a secular society. If I talk to my humanist friends they say we do not live in a secular society, that there are religious activities going on all the time and that religion informs much of our social life, particularly in education and other areas. I think there is room, in addition to the dialogue we have amongst ourselves as people of faith, for dialogue with secularists, with humanists, with those who have non religious belief systems. I would like to advocate this and it fits very well with the whole issue of freedom of religion or belief. If you believe that a human conscience worthy of its name will investigate the reality around it, will investigate different belief systems and arrive at some conclusions, maybe tentative ones, and will live according to those conclusions, some people may judiciously arrive at non religious conclusions. I think we should be talking to people who have arrived at those conclusions.

Finally, I think that in the 21st century our common task is to create new kinds of relationships amongst ourselves. Above all I hope that we are nurturing human flourishing.

**Rev Daniel Otieno-Ndale, Baptist Union and Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs Reference Group of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.**

As I consider the events of today, two significant issues surface pertaining to the Inter Faith Network and its work. The first is the position that is occupied by those Churches or faith groups, which have so far not engaged fully with the broader, inter faith agenda, and the second is simply why have they not.

The first position, of course, has to do with identity. It is the fear of losing the Churches', or the particular faith group's, identity. The non-verbal question raised is, 'How can one retain one's identity in such a huge conglomerate of faith groups?' This becomes the key issue. Churches and faith groups that have not engaged fully with the inter faith agenda tend to work from the proposition that in any age there is no shortage of people or agencies who have their own agenda for these Churches or faith groups. Such people and agencies are not slow to suggest what these Churches and faith groups should be or do. Sometimes, as was mentioned earlier, it is the Government which is keen to co-opt generic 'faith communities' into their programme for social regeneration. At other times, as you will have noticed, there are ideologues who are keen to hear their own preferred theories played back to them in a religious way in order to assert their dominance over culture. It is from this perspective that faith groups, but Churches particularly, argue that they will not be

truly relevant until and unless they are faithfully what they are called to be. It follows that these faith groups and Churches argue that their identities must be defined, not out of contemporary culture, but out of their own stories as told through their own religious writings, their histories and theologies. So with all sincerity these faith groups and Churches observe that they are only relevant when they are being what they are supposed to be with integrity, so as to preserve their own identities.

The second position of non-engagement stems from the fact that some Churches and faith groups feel they are excluded on grounds of size. This could be on the basis that they are new players in the inter faith field and do not command a lengthy historical tradition like some groups have in inter faith relations. This is true especially of the many independent or free churches, those that feel they have just come on the scene for a very short period of time. A key question raised by these faith groups and churches is, 'How much history do we have behind us to be able to contribute to inter faith work?' Another reason for non-engagement by these groups is the lack of the groups having developed inter faith programmes in their local areas. In areas where there are no local inter faith programmes developed faiths groups find it difficult to begin to associate or to integrate with the inter faith structure in its entirety. This is because there are no local inter faith programmes from which these groups can learn of the benefits that can be derived from inter faith initiatives.

The responsibility for turning things around falls, in my understanding, on the inter faith networks, local and national, to educate and to sell their merchandises. It should be the duty of the inter faith networks to make it plain to these Churches and faith groups that, while the networks represent a wide range of Churches and faith groups, all are engaged in the broader agenda of inter faith work with the desire to make a positive difference in their local communities from a faith perspective.

Time does not permit me to offer a more elaborate version of this reflection to include the processes of diversification, participation and empowerment in community. I do, however, want to say that much can be achieved through the Inter Faith Network. What is required is educating and selling the broader inter faith agenda.

**Mr Nitin Palan, Swaminarayan Hindu Mission**

We have been lucky and privileged enough to listen to some outstanding contributions by our brothers and sisters who are engaged in excellent inter faith work. On a personal level I have sometimes found it rather difficult to maintain the core purpose of what I have been taught to be the purpose of inter faith relationships. With your permission, I would like to offer you three questions and three perspectives in three minutes! I have been lucky enough to be guided by my spiritual master on these questions and answers. I think they sum up the events of the day.

*Question 1: What should inter faith engagement mean?*
To engage in any activity that unites all of us, we must focus on issues that are common to us so that we can learn to love each other. In time, once we have learnt to love and respect each other we can deal with the difficult issues that divide us. This is particularly important when you enter into dialogue with other faiths because, quite rightly, each tradition is committed to its own path just like each wife and husband are

committed to each other. Therefore, first learn to love each other and then respect each other's diversity and then identify common challenges that affect all of us, from parenting to alcohol abuse, problems that affect each and every community. There will always be issues that will divide us. After all, there are 5 billion of us with 5 billion minds and 5 billion hearts and, most importantly, 5 billion egos! So we must always engage in work that unites us and brings us closer.

*Question 2: What should one keep at the centre of one's engagement?*
Remember that we are lucky enough to take birth as humans and the purpose of this life is, first and foremost, to engage in *seva* [service] of God, and God is One. We are all His children and He loves us all equally. To do *seva* without expecting any reward is essential. To do *seva* you do not need any position, any chair, or any body. You simply need a desire and wish to serve with love. The core purpose of inter faith engagement is to change the hearts and minds of individuals and the best way to achieve this is to act with spirituality, holding the Lord's hand with one hand, and always acting being fully aware that God is a witness. It is very easy to be drawn into other people's agendas or the agenda of the day. But each day is different and will bring its own agenda. The only agenda that matters is the legacy that we live behind – the legacy of love, respect and harmony.

*Question 3: How can one achieve a good result?*
By keeping God central to all your decisions and your actions. Let your good work speak for itself. Engage in good work that will shape lives and hearts and minds. Do not engage in negative work or negative discussions because you can spend the same amount of time on positive actions. Remember that we are all His children and He loves us equally. He has made us diverse for a purpose. We should learn to enjoy and love that diversity. Above all, leave time to engage with God daily. Do not become so submerged in work that you begin to think that you are so important and irreplaceable. God will always act in His own time and in His own way.

**Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director, Inter Faith Network**

I was struck today by the sheer abundance of inter faith activities that are happening around the country. The enormous range of activities that have developed across recent years is amazing.

My family on my father's side were involved in the textile industry for many decades and I find I sometimes think about life in the UK in terms of a piece of cloth that we are all, together, weaving. We don't know quite what the design will be but we are each of us as individuals and in our communities weaving a pattern. The projects about cooperation and understanding are like bright threads through the cloth or, if you prefer, in the tapestry. Only time will tell whether the cloth is woven true, strong and bright.

I have also been struck, in today's presentations and conversations, by a mixture of opportunity and anxiety. All these positive chances - funding, new interest from Government, faith communities taking the agenda more seriously – but at the same time deep anxieties on many fronts. There are anxieties and a lot of pain linked to the impact of some overseas events and home events on our lives: inter faith work is not

easy for many of us to carry out at the moment. And then there is the anxiety linked to resources. Funding can I think make us feel we have to jump like seals for the fish that are being thrown. It can lead to uneasy moments of rivalry or dissatisfaction. Yet the discussion at this meeting has been a reaffirmation for me that in the faith sector this might be less of a problem than in some sectors - I have been struck again today by the enormous passion, goodwill and good intent of all those engaged in trying to build good inter faith relations. People here have a profound respect for the integrity of their own traditions and the integrity of others' traditions but an equally profound desire to work together.

We have many tasks ahead of us. A few stood out for me today. They relate to education; to capacity building to enable more people to join in the work of building good inter faith relations; and to finding ways to hear the voices of women more strongly; and to find more ways to include other groupings that are not heard so clearly such as young people (and I might add the elderly who are often also marginalised but don't necessarily attract so much attention or funding).

Lastly, I think I was struck by the idea that we need to develop new paradigms, new ways to work together, new models, new images. I began with the image of the cloth or tapestry of our shared lives. I would like to close with a last and different image - the image of a journey - because I feel that we as people living in the United Kingdom are on a journey together. We each have our own individual spiritual journeys, our religious journeys, but we are on a journey together towards a society of which we can't quite see the contours yet. But I believe that how we live now, the choices we make, and the energy that we put into building trust and friendships and working cooperatively will surely help shape not just our own lives and local communities on the way, but also help determine whether the society on our horizon – that of coming generations - is harmonious and just and characterised by mutual respect and understanding.

# WORKSHOP NOTES

## <u>Workshop 1</u>: Faith communities and their inter faith programmes

***Facilitator:*** **Jehangir Sarosh, Zoroastrian Trust Funds for Europe**

***Presenters:***

- **Neville Nagler, Interfaith Consultant, Board of Deputies of British Jews and Vice-Chair Inter Faith Network**

- **Anuja Prashar, Chairperson, Interfaith and Race Relations, Hindu Forum of Britain**

The workshop began with presentations from Neville Nagler and Anuja Prashar. Each of them looked at how their own faith communities, and in particular the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Hindu Forum of Britain, are working to develop good relations with other faith communities and what issues are important in taking forward this area of work. The full text of their presentations can be found at the end of this workshop note.

In the discussion that followed the two presentations the group looked at how faith communities are developing strategies for inter faith engagement. The following suggestions and experiences were noted:

- Study of each other's scriptures together - in Loughborough there is a dialogue group which studies the *Qu'ran* and *Bhagavad Gita* - in Leicester it has been found that the study of scriptures works better on a bilateral basis
- In the new Tent space at St Ethelburga's in London there has been three-way, open and personal sharing of different spiritual understandings where the spiritual devotion of participants was fully apparent.
- People can be inhibited from joining in dialogue because they feel they lack sufficient knowledge. But we can always learn from one another.
- Within the Muslim community there were initially some misconceptions and suspicions about inter faith relations. Some still oppose this work but are now in a minority.
- In Liverpool some of the Hindu community and the Baha'i community celebrate New Year together
- Religions for Peace (UK) has practical programmes, which can be put on locally, for exploring ways of promoting conflict resolution.
- It is powerful to develop dialogue based on shared experience, for example, of death or sickness

**Presentation by Neville Nagler, Inter faith Consultant to the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Vice-Chair of the Inter Faith Network for the UK**

Board involvement in inter faith

When I joined the Board of Deputies in 1991, inter faith relations were viewed very much as a part of what was described as "group relations". The latter term was used to reflect the Board's relationship with other ethnic communities and hence its involvement with race or community relations. Over the past decade, particularly prompted by a growing emphasis within Government on its relations with faith communities, inter faith relations have assumed a life of their own—closely related to issues of diversity, but nevertheless distinct. The culmination of this process was embodied in the review of relationships between Government and the faith communities which led to the publication of the report "Working Together" in 2004 and the recent creation of the Faith Communities Consultative Council.

The Board of Deputies has been closely involved at every stage of the evolution of this relationship. That is because the Board is recognised as the representative voice of the Jewish community, and has consistently been approached by Government on a growing range of issues where they would like us to supply representatives who can speak on behalf of all sections of the Jewish community. Whilst in some cases it may be possible to field two or more representatives to reflect the different religious strands in the community, more usually there is only scope for a single representative: it is often only the Board which is in a position to provide this.

Why is it important for the Board to be engaged in inter faith work? It is clear that where the Board is involved, it does so in order to provide a representative voice for the Jewish community and ensure that our community's interests do not go by default. As a lay organisation, the Board is not equipped to engage in inter faith dialogue at the theological or spiritual level: such activities are best left to those with the necessary theological expertise. The role of the Board is to promote good relations with other faiths within the framework of Britain's civil society. We seek to work with other faith communities in order to improve society and to provide a communal perspective on a variety of policy or political issues. Given the many initiatives from Government which impinge upon our community, it is important to be in a position to respond positively to such approaches—even though there are times when our direct interest may be tangential.

By the time I left the position of Director General of the Board of Deputies early last year, I was spending about one-third of my time on inter faith issues. My successor was not in a position to do this, and the Board's trustees decided that it would be desirable to appoint a dedicated Inter faith Officer as a member of the board's staff. The role of this officer would be to collate and disseminate information about inter faith work being carried out in all sections of the Jewish community, including local activities. The officer would also set up and maintain a dedicated section on the Board's website as an inter faith notice board. This would cover contact points, events, links and possibly also consultation papers from Government. The first Inter faith Officer—Miriam Kaye—was appointed last summer; she has recently left the

Board in order to work as Education Officer at the Three Faiths Forum, and the Board is now looking for a replacement.

Objectives for inter faith work

In the light of the Board's broader role and activities as the Jewish community's central representative body, it has a number of specific objectives in the field of inter faith activities:

1) To provide a representative input on behalf of the community when approached by Government, public agencies or other faiths;
2) To play an active role in bodies dedicated to promoting better inter faith relations;
3) To encourage friendship, goodwill and understanding among the UK's principal faith communities;
4) To encourage respect within UK society for all the country's faith communities and recognition of the values that they hold dear;
5) To contribute towards celebrating the distinctive elements of the individual faith communities and the diverse strands within those communities;
6) To promote knowledge and understanding of Jewish traditions, practices and teachings among other faith communities and within the wider British society.

Relations with other faiths

Clearly it is important to cultivate good relationships with other faith communities. This is not just out of self-interest. More important, we need to recognise that we have many similar interests to other faith communities and share many common values. We should seek to develop good relations with other faith communities because it is the right thing to do and because it is beneficial to the whole of our society.

Through our work in various multi-faith bodies—including bodies like the Inter Faith Network, the former Inner Cities Religious Council, the Home Office "Working Together" group, the CCJ, the Three Faiths Forum—we have developed good relationships with the leaders of other faith communities. Part of the Board's programme involves building on these relations to develop closer bilateral ties with individual communities. Thus over the past year the Board has had bilateral meetings or discussions with most of the minority faith communities in order to identify where there are shared or common concerns.

In our experience, there are a number of specific areas where we can work together. These may vary from community to community. For example, we have had long-running discussions with the Muslim community on matters relating to the religious slaughter of animals for food and circumcision. We have talked with the Jain community about capacity building. With the Sikh community there have been discussions about provision for young people and care of the elderly. With the Hindu community we have discussed matters relating to the protection of community buildings. These are no more than illustrations. The general point I would make is that the Jewish community is this year celebrating 350 years of life in Britain. Our institutions and our position in British society have evolved over a long period. I don't in any way wish to sound patronizing, but I am conscious that the newer faith

communities are striving to address these issues within a much shorter timescale. So we are very happy to give any help that we can, based on our longer experience of living as a minority community in Britain.

Local initiatives

One of the main aims for the Board's future work in this field is to encourage and promote inter faith relationships and activities at local level. Ideally that would entail every individual synagogue or community making a positive effort to open or develop its relationships with other faith communities in its locality. Some, of course, are already doing this, but others are not. With this in mind, we are on the point of embarking on a major piece of research to find out about the interest and attitudes which members of the Jewish community have towards inter faith relations. This research is being funded by the Home Office and will allow the Board to send out questionnaires and conduct in-depth interviews with members of the community. The aim is to provide a sound basis for encouraging our local communities to engage in inter faith work.

Conclusion

It would be presumptuous of me to suggest what other faith communities should be doing to advance their work in inter faith. Of course, much of what I have been describing is not so much inter faith as community development. We all seek to do the best we can to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities. And there are two general concerns that I believe all faith communities share. One is that we seek to rise above the exclusive interests of our own faith community and recognise a shared interest in the well-being of our society, if not of the world at large. And secondly we seek to challenge the secularist agenda, which would deny a space for faith in society.

There are a couple of more limited points which I would also like to reinforce. First, there is no particular merit in trying to reinvent the wheel. So one message would be to urge other faiths to share experiences and learn from what has already been achieved, particularly by the longer-established Christian and Jewish communities. The other message I would emphasise is the need for the long view. It takes time to establish schools and welfare facilities, to build up charities and to create youth clubs and sports facilities for young people. It's a long haul; but the prize in terms of greater cohesion both within and among our faith communities is well worth the wait.

**Presentation by Anuja Prashar, Chair of the Interfaith and Race Relations Committee, Hindu Forum of Britain**

I have been asked to address three questions in this presentation. So I will start with a broad outline of Hindu participation of inter faith work in the UK, then I shall describe the strategy which is being developed by the Interfaith and Race Relations Committee of the Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB), in line with the ethos of 'Unity in Diversity'. I shall then provide a quick summary of key issues that it may be helpful for Hindus and other faith communities to bear in mind when they undertake work in this arena.

**How is the Hindu community developing its work to build good relations with other faith communities in the UK**?

Hindus in the UK number close to half a million according to the Census data of 2001. HFB have done a projection from these figures using additional immigration statistics since then, and we think there may be closer to 700,000 Hindus in the UK today.

According to the Census data, the great majority of Hindus are of Indian origin and sit within that category in the census data. Only approximately 23, 000 Hindus fall into the 'Other Asians' category, with a nominal number stated as being of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origins, 1% and 2% of those populations respectively.

To describe Hindus as a community, should not distract us from the fact that Hindus are a pluralistic religious group, who embody a variety of religious practices reflected in their cultural traditions and languages, bracketed within the ascribed sociologically construction, of the term Hindu. This pluralistic character is reflective of a *dharmic* foundational tenet and core cultural value of this group. In other words, Hindus enjoy and celebrate their diversity and consider diversity to be a part of their identity.

Keeping in mind both the population numbers and the pluralistic texture of this community will help us understand better where the emphasis of inter faith work has been expressed thus far and where there still remain gaps and a need for more attention to this work.

There has been great progress made, within the area that may be termed "intra faith" relations by some, but which in reality is actually inter faith relations between the various Hindu groups. For most Hindus a pro-active socio-political collective community is a fairly new and recently developed concept, and this reflects the reality for most Hindus, who view *dharmic* traditions not as religious belief systems, but universal ways towards spiritual knowledge.

The fact that Hinduism is not like religions of the kind to which people in the West have been accustomed and that it offers spiritual practices outside of organized belief systems, means that the individual Hindu also has recognised agency and the authority to follow his/her own religious practices privately outside of temples and social gatherings. Therefore, it is of no surprise that there is a growing number of Hindu people who engage with inter faith groups and associations at their local level and

represent Hinduism in this informal role. We know that the inter faith organisations at grassroots level is increasing at a rapid rate and engaging with these individual Hindus will become increasingly important with time.

At the national level, inter faith work has been carried out very ably, by collective Temple based Hindu organisations, the oldest and largest of which is the National Council of Hindu temples. There are also several regional and local organisations, that have both temples and community organisations as members, such as the Hindu Councils of Birmingham, Leicester and Brent, which are all also members of the HFB. There has been significant inter faith work, in both bi-lateral and multi lateral dialogue, carried out over the last few years at this level. We will be seeking to increase this work in both scope and national co-ordination.

The impact of the Swaminarayan mandir at Neasdan cannot be overlooked with regard to inter faith work, from within the Hindu community. The temple has provided an opportunity for other faiths and many organizations to engage with the principles and history of Hinduism through the many exhibitions, seminars and inter religious dialogues held there.

The ISKCON temple have recently produced an educational 'tool kit' that will further enhance the opportunity for understanding of Hindu principles through the educational system. In keeping with the principles of pluralism and as an umbrella body committed to full representation of the various Hindu traditions (or *sampradhaya*) within the Hindu community, the HFB, as a demonstration of how we apply the principle of 'Unity in Diversity', are endorsing the educational 'tool kits' produced by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK), the Vivekananda Centre and ISKCON. I am happy to say that having read all three, I am content that they complement one another and will enable the HFB's educational committee to provide significant support to SACREs.

**What is HFB, in particular, doing on inter faith?**

My own appointment as Chairperson of the Interfaith and Race Relations Committee, four months ago, marks the beginning of the HFB's inter faith work in earnest. The foundation for all our work is framed around the Vedic Mantra that defines the Vedic view of inter faith, that says**: *"Sarva Dharma Saman "*: "Respect** and **value** the diversity, of ideology and cultural practises, of a multitude of paths to self realisation and God the creation."

In the overarching strategy to achieve our key objective of promoting **the Vedic principle of pluralism and unity in diversity,** we have a three pronged approach.
To engage in:

- Inter faith relations to present and share the philosophical and theological Hindu (Vedic) **world view**

- Inter faith relations to address issues of **misrepresentation** of Hinduism (Academic/Media)

- Inter faith and race relations to promote the **Human Rights and Civil Liberties** of all.

How do we intend to do this?

- **Establish a Four Faiths Forum** – comprising of the *dharmic* faiths of Indian origin – namely Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus. We have had a preliminary 'brain storming session' to do a SWOT analysis to assess the benefits and value of this platform for inter faith dialogue.

- Form a partnership with **Board of Deputies for British Jews** to co-ordinate a Hindu-Jewish Programme, for greater sharing of experiences at all levels of the community. We have had a first meeting and identified six possible projects and in future may possibly produce a 'Way of Life' exhibition and/other shared events.

- Devise strategic **bi-lateral and multi lateral talks,** with other faith groups and government departments.

    - We will be holding our first **Hindu-Muslim dialogue** meeting on 5 July, with several members from the MCB and Muslim Parliament, to discuss how best to structure dialogue around issues raised within our communities, reported in the *Connecting Hindus* report produced by Runnymede Trust, commissioned by HFB and sponsored by the Home Office. This report will be launched on 11 July at the House of Commons. We will also be discussing how to initiate some key community initiatives, where we share common challenges.

    - The **Hindu-Christian dialogue** has been underway for a couple of years and we are currently engaged with the **Christian-Hindu listening group** project, sponsored by the Home Office.

    - We are also beginning to scope out the possibilities of **inter faith seminars**, dialogues and exhibitions within the St Ethelburga Centre's Peace and Reconciliation programme.

- Establish strong representation and participation within **Inter Faith Network UK –** hence I welcome this opportunity to speak today and ask members of the Network to please meet with me, if there are any initiatives with which you think HFB may be able support or help your organisation with**.**

    - To develop the **regional and grassroots connections for Hindus**, through the Inter Faith Network

    - The **HFB Ayurvedic Working Group** working in partnership with the Inter Faith Network to assess the impact of regulation and representation of Ayurveda within education and practise with the UK, in order to develop a deeper understanding within inter faith work, of the history of *ayurveda* and *yoga*.

- Engage effectively with preparations for the new Commission on Equality and Human Rights. Currently we are keeping abreast of the developments and Mohammed Aziz's feedback to the Faith Communities Consultative Forum has been particularly helpful. The issues and framework for discussion of Race and Faith are not the same, however on some occasions, issues of race can be masked by faith and vice versa. HFB will seek to engage with these ambiguities and ensure that in all areas Hindus are well represented and that policy initiatives account for these possible grey areas.

- Develop **a Hindu Inter Faith 'Tool Kit' and a programme of** seminar presentations across the country and within all government departments. This Tool Kit will be developed to engage and support, not only the member organisations of the HFB, but also the individual Hindu who is working within the inter faith arena at a local level.

**Particular issues which are important for faith communities to bear in mind when taking this area of work forward**

For this section I will quote from an article I wrote recently, published in the *India Link International*.

How do faith leaders, politicians and business people collectively strive to portray balance and fairness in the increasingly important political interfaith dialogue taking place in the UK today? How can they achieve balanced representation within their own faith groups and yet stand firm on principles and value systems which also reflect religious values and the globalizing reality of the 21st Century? The Hindu/Vedic values of pluralism and self realization make the task for an individual simple and personal. The integration and social success of Hindus in the UK today is a reflection of this value system effectively in operation.

However, there are two key challenges to this enterprise for collective bodies who wish to engage with these issues within the political arena of a globalised world. Unless these two challenges are now faced and owned by leaders of each religious group, political party or economic sector, the inter faith dialogue within the UK is akin to spinning your wheels in a mud track on a rainy day.

The first challenge is the disparity of recognised religious authority across the globe, which leaves an enormous transnational gap of accountability, between what is debated in the UK and what is practised and condoned in other parts of the world. During the era of undisputed national state authority and earlier within systems of colonial imperialism, this globally fragmented institutionalised religious debate would not have been possible.

Nor would the repercussions of actions or words in one part of the world have an impact almost simultaneously in another part of the world, as witnessed by reaction to the 'cartoons' and for our purposes within the UK as witnessed by events following 9/11 and 7/7. Organisations representing religious groups will need to strive to acquire a global or transnational cooperation and collective structure for effective functioning in the future.

The second challenge that is more subtle and yet has an impact that is more profound and far reaching, is that inter faith dialogue today is exclusively framed within paradigms of a Christian Abrahamic tradition, and the socio-economic discourse is dominated by western experiences and reactions, which together negate the possibility of any other world view. These are essentialist approaches in both methodology and epistemology, which contradict the reality and lived experience of an increasingly informed and varied national society in Britain today.

From a Hindu perspective, in the West, we are increasingly witnessing the adoption of various aspects of the Hindu way of life into everyday modern living by all ethnic groups, that is both subtle and profound. The values of *yoga*, a*yurveda* and dietary control are increasingly widespread today throughout the modern urban and western worlds. The seeking for an enhancement of 'quality of life' is a visible 21st century social phenomenon and the pluralistic approaches of Hinduism are today contributing greatly to answering this search. *Yoga*, a*yurveda* and holistic lifestyle choices are also providing large markets and new areas for commercial advancements which have both a religious and economic impact on society and its formations.

The Hindu way of life and its enriching 'quality of life' attributes, I suggest, will have potentially far reaching consequences for all of society in the 21st Century, only if the challenges of dominant religious, social and economic paradigms are acknowledged and overcome, through effective and inclusive interfaith, race relations and socio-economic dialogue.

So in conclusion I would like to suggest to all faith communities who wish to take this work forward, that at all levels - national, regional and local – inter faith dialogue will need to become more open and honest, with the realization that **inter-dependency** is the lived reality of all British society today.

## Workshop 2: Deepening dialogue

***Facilitator:*** **Venerable Tawalama Bandula, London Buddhist Vihara**

***Presenters:***

- **Alfred Agius, Westminster Interfaith (Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster) and Hindu-Christian Forum**

- **Moulana Rashid Musa, Imam of Zakaria Mosque, Bolton**

The workshop began with two presentations from Alfred Agius, Westminster Interfaith and the Hindu-Christian Forum, and Moulana Rashid Musa, Imam of Zakaria Mosque in Bolton, the texts of which are at the end of this workshop note.

In the discussion that followed the two presentations a number of other examples of dialogue were mentioned and discussed:

- Faith Encounter Groups run by Canterbury Inter Faith Action where several house groups involving Baha'is, Hindus and Christians explore issues such as prayer, forgiveness, the use of sacred texts and the application of belief to political and social action. These encourage mutual understanding, respect and trust.
- Christians Aware held a twelve week course in Leicester on "Understanding Hinduism" followed by a course on "Understanding Christianity".
- An initiative held in St Albans Cathedral, backed by the Three Faiths Forum.
- In view of the frequent emphasis on dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths, there have been initiatives in Birmingham to redress the balance by bringing together Buddhists, Hindus, Jains and Sikhs.

**Presentation by Alfred Agius, Westminster Interfaith (Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster) and Hindu-Christian Forum**

At a time when the number of inter faith groups is fast growing and government funding for activities by such groups is rather easily made available, the subject chosen for this meeting is both important and timely.

As was pointed out in the literature we received prior to the meeting, there has been a shift of focus in the understanding of inter faith dialogue. The public agenda has moved from a religious to a more secular understanding. The language too has changed from dialogue to 'engagement', 'building positive relations' and most of all to 'community cohesion'. Canon Guy Wilkinson, in the morning session, referred to the fact that we now face a problem of language. What do we mean by faith? by dialogue?

Government is rightly concerned that after 9/11 and 7/7 acts of terrorism, there is a serious problem of unrest fomented especially by extremist elements within some of the faith communities. Government has taken the right approach of appealing to the leaders of the faith communities to deal internally with these disquieting developments. Government is already helping with and supporting the faith communities in building up good relations among themselves. This is absolutely right and we all need to be engaged in this effort.

But as we focus on the need to develop harmonious relations among the different faith communities, there is a danger of sidelining the religious and spiritual aim of inter faith dialogue. Brian Pearce warned us of the possible danger of 'governmentalisation' of our inter faith activities and Guy Wilkinson spoke of a 'paradigm shift' in the understanding of dialogue. It seems to me that the inclusion of this workshop has the purpose of reminding us that there is another side to inter faith relations that is important and goes deeper than just social harmony.

This second scenario is one of engaging with people of other faiths with the primary objective of getting to know them, to learn about their religion, their religious heritage and their personal spiritual life. This would lead to greater respect for them as persons. Looked at like this, spiritual growth together is the principal aim and community cohesion should normally follow. The end result could well be the same but the aims, means and ways of proceeding are different. In this second scenario no funding, no civic receptions and no political or diplomatic moves are called for. The means are befriending people, spiritual conversations, a willingness to listen with the heart as well as with the head, humility and openness, a willingness to discover the transcendent through your partner in dialogue.

"Bringing people into conversation about their faiths". I am involved in three groups that promote this:

(a) Westminster Interfaith: which is best known for its annual multifaith pilgrimage, initiated by Brother Daniel Faivre 22 years ago. We provide an opportunity for people of different faiths to meet each other and spend a day

together, walking, talking, sharing food and praying in silence together. We also visit places of worship where our hosts tell us about their traditions and where a question and answer session takes place. Some 300 people come from all over the UK, walking to a series of places of worship and having conversations en route which help forge unity and friendships. An informative Pilgrims' Guide with contact details for the places which are visited enables the friendships and conversations to be followed up. Other groups have been inspired to develop similar walks.

(b) The Hindu-Christian Forum is a relatively new group of ten Hindus and ten Christians from the different traditions within mainstream Hinduism and Christianity. We meet four times a year and discuss current issues of mutual interest. We also talk about our religions and share our understanding of common religious themes such as God, spirituality, festivals etc. We are about to start a listening exercise, a nation wide project. A team of Christians and Hindus together listen to what Hindus and Christians have to say about matters relating to their community and religious life.

(c) The Hounslow Friends of Faith. The main characteristic of this group is people who are friends first, belong to different faiths but are not representative or delegates of their faith community though they are supported by them. We engage with each other, meeting regularly and organise projects together such as a local walk open to all in the borough. We also celebrate One World Week in a local community school. We have events for young people. We plan to produce a directory of places of worship in the Borough of Hounslow.

**Presentation by Moulana Rashid Musa, Imam of Zakaria Mosque, Bolton**

I have been the Imam of Zakaria Mosque in Bolton for the last thirteen years. It is the oldest Muslim centre in Bolton. Originally an independent Methodist chapel the whole suite of premises is now purpose-built with many facilities including a conference hall and prayer rooms as well as the mosque itself. The building is used for a variety of inter faith and other activities. Voluntary groups are accommodated free of charge and tea is served to them. Last year 95 members of other faith communities responded to an invitation to join the celebration of Eid al Fitr and to explore the significance of the Ramadan fasting. So many came that another celebration was held the following Saturday.

Women and young people, as well as men, are encouraged to join in the work of the eight year old Bolton Inter Faith Council, creating a space to talk, not just listen to lectures. Independently of the BIFC the mosque is twinned bilaterally with two churches, one Anglican and one Methodist, on a basis of friendship, including annual visits to each other's services. These links began with some initial nervousness but are now strong and trusting. ITV featured the mosque as a place of interest in the North West and it also appears in the Bolton Faith Trail guide and attracts coachloads of visitors.

There is a good local working relationship with Bishop David Gillett, the Anglican Bishop of Bolton, who is chair of the new national Christian Muslim Forum. Change is not very easily absorbed by some members of the community but publicity is given from within the mosque for inter faith events and new initiatives and as it comes from the mosque this makes it easier to be accepted. One of these is the Bolton Civic Service which is now multi faith, which makes a good impact on the community. There was also a joint effort across communities for the recent appeal for funds to help after the Pakistan earthquake. While there is no substantial Jewish community in the area I am involved in inter faith activities in Manchester which include Jewish participants.

## Workshop 3: Women and inter faith initiatives

***Facilitator:*** **Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK**

***Presenters:***

- **Dr Fatheena Mubarak**

The workshop began with a presentation by Dr Fatheena Mubarak on the survey that she had been undertaking for the Inter Faith Network exploring women's inter faith initiatives in the UK. The aims of the survey were: to explore, in short compass, some of the different types of inter faith initiatives set up and run by women and look at examples of good practice which can be useful to those developing these sorts of initiatives; to invite reflections on the role of women in inter faith work more generally; and to provide a basis for further work in future on this important area. She described the methodology of her research and shared her preliminary findings on these issues with the group. The full text of her workshop presentation can be found at the end of this note. The full text of her final report can be found at www.interfaith.org.uk.

In the short discussion that followed her presentation the following issues and points were considered:

- women have a tremendously valuable contribution to make to inter faith work
- the welcome increase in the level of participation by young women in inter faith activity
- the importance of raising awareness and challenging stereotypes
- the nature of barriers and sources of prejudice
- the importance of role models
- the need for guidelines for participants in inter faith activity and for adequate briefing and preparation
- the need to develop a strategy and methodology to engage more women in inter faith work
- the value of one to one dialogue
- the value of training and mentoring opportunities

**Presentation by Dr Fatheena Mubarak**

## Background

The population of the United Kingdom is one of the most religiously diverse in Europe and it includes Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and people of other faiths and beliefs. According to the last Census conducted in 2001, 76.8 % of the people in the UK identified themselves as having a religious faith. In this environment of a growing heterogeneity in religious identification there has been an increase in inter faith activity to bring people of different faiths together in order to learn about each other's beliefs, to foster relationships of trust and friendship and to work cooperatively on social issues.

As the level of inter faith activity increased in the last 10 years, the Inter Faith Network for the UK has documented this in their numerous publications, the most recent of which are titled *Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey*, published in 2003, and *The Local Inter Faith Guide*, which was published in 2005. During the course of conducting research for these publications, it became evident that just as inter faith initiatives in the UK have been rising, there has also been a growth in inter faith initiatives led by women primarily for women. This observation has led to some interesting questions such as:

What types of initiatives have been set up by women?
Where are these initiatives based in the country?
Why have some women felt the need to set up initiatives for women only?
How can women's involvement enhance inter faith activity?

I have been carrying out a survey for the Network which endeavours to open a window into this important, but often overlooked, area of women's inter faith activity in the UK.

## Timescale

The research is being conducted over a period of approximately 10 weeks and I am sharing with you today some of its preliminary findings. A report on the project and its findings will also be produced shortly. The interim findings of this research of course just touch the surface of a rich array of work that is going on in the country but I hope you will find them interesting.

## Research Aims

The research aims could be summarised as follows:

1. to explore, in short compass, some of the different types of inter faith initiatives set up and run by women and look at examples of 'good practice', which can be useful to those developing these sorts of initiatives;

2. to invite reflections on the role of women in inter faith work more generally; and
3. to provide a basis for further work in future on this important area.

This project did not aim to do a quantitative analysis of numbers of women engaged in inter faith activity overall or to do in depth research into the programmes of work of women's inter faith initiatives. These may be subjects of later, linked, research.

**Methodology**

1. Letter and questionnaire

I began by sending out an email, which described the project, with an attached short questionnaire. These emails were sent to:

- member organisations of the Inter Faith Network
- non-member local inter faith groups known to the Network
- women's inter faith initiatives known to the Network

Additionally, I also sent a short call for information to projects involving women's inter faith activity funded under the first round of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire I sent includes brief questions about the aims, activities, structures and resources of each, individual women's initiative. It also invites respondents to offer comment on women's role in inter faith activity, challenges they may face and any other observations on the level and pattern of women's participation in inter faith activity in the UK.

2. Site visits/interviews

In cases where people were unable to fill in the questionnaire, generally due to the lack of time, I carried out telephone interviews. For purposes of clarification, questionnaire responses were sometimes supplemented by telephone follow up.

I also carried out face-to-face interviews with a representative from the following initiatives:

- Thames Gateway Women's Multifaith Forum
- Leicester Christian-Muslim Women's Group
- Faith Awareness initiative of Christians Aware in Leicester

**Results**

*1. Who responded?*

At 7 July there were a total of **36 questionnaires** from various women's initiatives across the country.

*2. Description of the initiatives*

The questionnaire asked responding bodies to describe their women's initiatives according to the following categories:

i. An inter faith group or multi faith forum
ii. A 'project' within another organisation
iii. A small dialogue group
iv. A committee or section of another organisation (such as a faith community body
v. Other

The responses to this question were:

| Inter faith Group | Dialogue group | 'Project' within another org. | 'Project'/ Inter faith group | 'Project'/ Dialogue/ Inter faith group | Dialogue / Inter faith group | Committee/ Inter faith group | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9 | **36** |

The 'other' category is interesting because it includes examples of projects that may not be thought of as 'inter faith' or 'women's inter faith' in their principle aims but which have an important inter faith dimension. These include a Christian ecumenical discussion group which had developed a wider inter faith dialogue, a women's domestic violence service used by women of various faiths, a faith group, a community development voluntary organisation, a co-operative partnership and a national inter faith organisation.

A majority (71%) of the initiatives have come into existence since the start of 2002, some of which have been in response to major international and national incidents such as the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 (such as ***St Alban's Interfaith Group, Interfaith Women's Group*** at the Touchstone Centre in Bradford and the ***Women's Interfaith Network***), the war in Iraq (***Bridge of Peace - Women's Federation for World Peace***) and the bombings in London in 2005 (***One Voice - Keighley Women and Girls' Interfaith Group*** and ***The Society for Dialogue and Action, Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge*** ).

In the questionnaire returns, most respondents have described their initiatives as informal in structure with no paid staff, having no funding other than members' donations and as open to women of all ages. The exceptions are generally those initiatives that are projects within larger organisations, which have sufficient funds to hire staff and pay for venues (for example, the ***Bradford Trident*** and the ***Tinsley Green Community Café***).

*3. Aims*

There is a high degree of similarity in the aims of the women's initiatives. Although most of the initiatives have been set up relatively recently, a majority of the aims mentioned in the survey are 'traditional' inter faith aims, but with a focus on women and with the aim of empowering women within a context of faith:

- to break down barriers, overcome fear and prejudice, get to know one another and build lasting friendships
- to bring women from diverse faith traditions together, to build friendships and to explore how they can work together for a more just and inclusive society
- to offer role models of women speaking and leading discussion in matters of faith
- to increase confidence among women of faith
- to learn from one another, discuss shared issues, such as women's rights, education of children and what it means to be a woman of faith in a largely secular society.

*4. Some examples of successful women's initiatives in the UK*

The survey responses highlight two types of women's inter faith initiatives: firstly, there are activities with specific inter faith aims in mind, and secondly, initiatives that have evolved into inter faith initiatives due to numerous reasons such as the nature of the activity, where it had taken place and how it had been organised.

Examples of Initiative Type 1

A majority of the initiatives described in the questionnaires fall into this first category of women's inter faith initiative.

Some of the most popular and successful activities listed include shared prayer, shared meals, discussion groups about religious and social issues, celebration of different religious festivals, visits to places of worship, peace walks, fundraising events and social gatherings (for example, visits to the Buddhist Vihara in Chiswick and an Islamic Centre in Southall by the ***Women's Interfaith Dialogue Group*** in north London and various walks organised by the ***Oldham Women's Inter Faith Network*** to particularly 'white' areas of Oldham). Many respondents state that these types of events have been vital in drawing women together from diverse faith and ethnic backgrounds to share their individual experiences and knowledge. Activities that are exclusively for women are usually smaller. Occasionally, however, larger events involving both women and men have been organised to increase the profile of an initiative, to make the event more viable and/or to make the event more inclusive of people who come from minority ethnic and faith communities. (For example, the ***Festival of Cultures and Faiths*** organised by the ***Bridge of Peace*** project in Watford in 2005 and the series of seminars organised by ***Interfaith Milton Keynes*** on the subject of women and faith under the title of ***'Different Paths: Women's' Journeys of Faith'***).

Some other activities that have been successful but different to the ones mentioned above have been initiated by the following organisations:

| *Name* | **Initiative** |
|---|---|
| **Women's initiative, The Scottish Inter Faith Council, Glasgow** | An inter faith project to design a banner. It was hugely successful, involving over 100 women from diverse faith traditions who worked regularly together over the course of a year to create a beautiful banner which now is on display at St. Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art |
| **Centre for Bangladeshi Community Studies, Birmingham** | Community gardening by involving women and children from different faith groups in a derelict site in Yardley Green allotment in Birmingham |
| **Faith Awareness – Inter Faith Programme of Christians Aware, Leicester** | Publication of the book 'Faith Offerings' in 2005. It represents the response of Leicester Women for Inter Faith Understanding on essential human experiences. |
| **The Islamic Foundation, Markfield** | 'Women in Faith' course. The course, starting in July 2006, will be run over six short weekends throughout the period of one year and will lead to the launch of a Muslim women's network for interfaith work. A certificate will be awarded from the Islamic Foundation is recognised as a leading institution in interfaith activity. |
| **The Interfaith Volunteering Project, Asian Women's Advisory Service** | 1 year project to train volunteers between the ages of 16 and 25 from the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities to work in the Hackney area. They will raise awareness of these faiths to enable better relations and strengthen links between these faith groups. |

Examples of Initiative Type 2

As mentioned earlier, activities and initiatives that fall into this category have not been organised with specific inter faith aims in mind, but have somehow engaged women from different faith and ethnic communities.

| *Name* | **Year set up** | **Original aims** | **Faiths represented** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tinsley Green Community Café (Timsley Parents and Children's Consortium, Sheffield** | 2006 | - revive local training and employment opportunities<br>- to promote healthy eating<br>- to provide a meeting place for the community | Christian, Muslim, Hindu |
| **Gher-se-Gher (Home-to-Home), Luton** | 1994 | To support all women with a particular focus on health | Christian, Muslim, Hindu |
| **Pathway Project, Staffordshire** | 1991 | To support women and children of any faith who have suffered abuse in the home, through a range of services | Christian ethos, but service users are of any faith |

**Some final observations on women's involvement and contribution to interfaith work**

The last section of the questionnaire gave respondents the opportunity to offer comment on general issues surrounding women's involvement in interfaith work. Responses to two questions on this subject are highlighted below.

***Question 1:*** *Have you any comments or suggestions on how women can play a role in fostering positive inter faith relations? Do you think that women have something quite specific/special to contribute to building good inter faith relations?*

A majority of the respondents (73%) commented on the positive role that women could play in inter faith activity. Some respondents highlight the innate *qualities* they believe women possess that are conducive to promoting inter faith work. These qualities include sociability, hospitability, ability to empathise with others, sensitivity, non-adversarial/non-confrontational approach to solution finding, good listening skills, informality and ability to create a co-operative atmosphere. Although many respondents admit that there are far more men involved in inter faith activity, men are perceived as being less flexible, more concerned with dogma and structure and less sensitive to the needs of others.

Some respondents also stress how the *role* women play as mothers and nurturers can help them be good negotiators. Further, women are also recognised as the centre of the family, and, as such, it is felt that by reaching and involving women of different faiths, one could reach the whole family and then the community.

Therefore responses to this question emphasise the special and valuable contribution women could make to build good inter faith relations.

***Question2:*** *What challenges, if any, do women face in playing a full role in inter faith activity?*

79% of survey responses mentioned at least one challenge that a woman could face in playing a full role in interfaith activity. Three of the most frequently cited problems are lack of time, lack of support from family and the wider community, and the patriarchal attitude of men, which hindered women's participation in inter faith activity. Therefore, just as a woman's position within the family is regarded as positive in enhancing her role as a negotiator, her role within the family could, concurrently, restrict her from participating fully in inter faith activity. A few respondents also mention that since most faith leaders are men, this makes it very difficult for women to act as representatives of faith communities.

Other problems mentioned by respondents include cultural and language barriers, lack of knowledge or misinformation about other faith groups and lack of leadership skills.

**Conclusion**

This presentation has aimed to highlight broadly the growing involvement of women in inter faith initiatives – especially initiatives that have been created for women. By

focusing on some of the results and findings of the survey, I hope that I have managed to give some insight into the interesting and imaginative range of activities that are taking place in the country in relation to women's inter faith work. As some respondents claim, engaging women in inter faith activity has not been easy, but it has certainly been a very rewarding and rich experience to all the women with whom I have had the pleasure to interview.

## Workshop 4: Websites: Windows on the changing world of inter faith work

***Facilitator:*** **Priti Shah, Jain community**

***Presenters:***

- **Bhupinder Singh (developer of the Inter Faith Network's website)**

The workshop consisted of a presentation by Bhupinder Singh, developer of the Inter Faith Network's website. It covered practical issues for web site owners, including website layout and design, legal considerations and examined the different features which could be added to a site, such as search facilities, online donations and blogs. At the end of the presentation the group considered some existing web sites which had been set up by different organisations, including Young Jains, Hindu Youth Universe, Church of England, Muslim Council of Britain, Merseyside Council of Faiths, World Congress of Faiths and the North American Interfaith Network. The full text of his presentation is below.

**Presentation by Bhupinder Singh, developer of the Inter Faith Network's website**

## Web site design and layout

### Keep it simple

When designing or specifying a web site it is important to keep your users in mind and avoid complex site structures or menu systems. It is a good idea to stick to common formats keeping the main menu bar on the left or top of the screen. It is important to keep web pages consistent and use the same basic layout or 'template' throughout the site.

This also applies to the web site's domain name. Avoid abbreviations that you may be familiar with, but your users may not be. Try to choose a meaningful domain name and consider the domain extension, i.e. .com – .org – .org.uk etc.

### Accessibility

It is important to make your web site accessible, i.e. consider the needs of all potential users of the site. At the most basic level you should consider the types of computers that may try to access your site. If you have a large number of users who may be using dial up internet access as opposed to broadband a site full of multimedia effects can be slow to load.

However, more importantly you should consider the needs of users with special needs. Web sites are mentioned in the code of practice which accompany the Disability Discrimination Act and so a web site must offer some basic accessibility. There is as yet no minimum standard to which public web sites must adhere, but it is good practice consider the needs of all users. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Blind or partially sighted users may use a screen reader to access the site and so it is important to make sure that pages are ordered logically and every image is described accurately in the code of the site. In addition you should avoid using images to convey important information or navigation features.

- Users with limited mobility may not use a mouse and so the site should offer 'Access Keys'. These allow a user to access menu items using keyboard shortcuts.

- The site should allow users to change the colour scheme or font size. This can be achieved by using 'cascading style sheets (CSS)'. You should also avoid the use of colour to convey a message.

The UK Government offers a set of guidelines on the Cabinet Office web site and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) runs the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and provides extensive information on its web site – www.w3.org.

**Images**
Images can improve the visual appeal of a web site, so if you use them it is important to use quality images. However, as discussed earlier, do consider accessibility standards.

## Legal considerations

It is important to have an ownership statement and address and other contact details of the site owner or operator on the site. This may help to reassure users that they are at an official web site.

You may consider offering a contact form instead of a general email address. This will help to prevent your email address ending up on 'spam' email lists. However you should ensure that any enquiries are dealt with quickly.

It is also good practice to provide the following set of statements:

a) **Privacy Statement** – This is important if your site collects any information from site users and should explain what you will do with any information provided. For example you may wish to state that you will not 'sell' or pass on any email addresses collected.

b) **Disclaimer** – This will usually explain that your organisation will not be held liable for any damages incurred by using the information on the site and should explain that any information should be verified externally.

c) **Links** – Most sites provide links to other sites, however it is important to explain that your organisation cannot be held responsible for the content of sites beyond its control. You should also ensure that you have permission to provide a link to another site. Most sites welcome links and do not require permission, but certain sites, for example larger brand names may object to a link to their site saying that the link may mislead users about a formal connection between the two organisations.

Usually these statements can be combined into a comprehensive 'Terms of Use' statement which also sets out who is responsible for the site and may provide information to other site owners about linking to the site.

**Copyright**
Websites are also subject to copyright and so it is important to display a copyright notice declaring that the content of the site is subject to copyright regulations. In this way anyone interested in using the information elsewhere must contact you to ask for permission to reproduce any information from the site.

If you have employed a web designer it is important to discuss who owns the 'design' of the site. Many designers will be happy to assign the copyright over, but some may insist that the design of the site is legally part of their intellectual property and the site is provided on a license for use. This may also apply to certain proprietary technologies used on the site.

If you use information, images or design elements from other sites or printed publications you must ensure that you have permission to use these or your site may be in breech of copyright laws. For example if you have provided a map on your site this may be subject to copyright and you should seek permission or pay a licence fee to reproduce it.

## Web site features

Web sites have changed greatly in the last few years and there are many new techniques and technologies being developed which can make running a web site easier and which may help a site to become more interactive.

This has mainly come about with the introduction of database backed web sites. Traditional web sites use static pages which must be changed individually, but a database driven site is made up of a database where the content of the site is stored. The web pages themselves are then made up of a set of templates which allows the site to display the required information in a consistent manner.

A database backed site maybe slightly more expensive to set up, but it allows the site owner to make changes easily without a great deal of 'expertise'. Changes can also be made from any computer connected to the web with the relevant passwords.

Other features you may like to offer on your web site are:

**Site Search**
This allows users to search your site for a particular term or phrase.

**Events calendar**
This provides information about up-coming events. If you provide such a feature it is important to keep it up to date. It is possible to assign passwords to a number of users so that a small team can be responsible for the up-keep.

**Newsletters or News Feeds**
In addition to publishing regular newsletters or news items on your web site the use of 'news feeds' is becoming wide spread. News feeds allow you to provide news items to other web sites or be 'pushed' direct to users of news reader software. On the flip side you are also able to display news from other web sites on your site automatically. For example you could subscribe to a news feed from the BBC news website which will display the latest headlines (with links to the BBC story) on your web site. Or alternatively you could set up a feed which displayed stories with a specific phrase eg: 'inter faith' so that any story with the phrase from a range of news web sites would automatically be displayed on your site.

**E-Commerce**
If you wish to sell publications or any other products from your web site there are a range of easy to use web payment systems available. Paypal is the most famous, but other systems are available. Such systems can be set up within minutes and do not require the payment of any upfront fees. They simply charge a small percentage of the revenue collected. However, for sites with a high turnover it would be cost effective to set up a merchant account with a major bank. Of course once you have

received money via the internet you will have to send out the goods probably by going down to the post office!

**Online Donations**
Online donations can also be made using web payment systems like Paypal or Amazon 'Click to donate' schemes for charities. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) also offers e-fundraising for registered charities. All of these services charge a percentage fee to process credit card donations. CAF can also process Direct Debits for regular donations. Again if the volume of donations is expected to be large it may be cost effective to set up a credit card processing account with a major bank.

**Discussion Forums**
You may wish to incorporate a discussion forum or bulletin board on your site where users can discuss various topics. Once set up these are easy to use, however a busy board can be time-consuming to moderate, i.e. approve every message that is posted to the board. Another type of discussion forum is an email group. Instead of users posting directly to your website their posts are sent by email to all members of the group. Popular email group services are provided by such names as Yahoo Groups and MSN Groups. Again these should be moderated if they are associated directly with your organisation.

**Blogs / Podcasts**
A 'blog' is a public diary or web log. Posting regular news and updates to your site can also be considered a blog. 'Blogging' software allows updating from any computer connected to the internet. Free software such as WordPress enables you to set up your own blog, but you need to 'host' the blog on specially enabled web space.

A Podcast is a regularly updated audio clip. These can be recorded using an mp3 recording device such as an ipod and then uploaded to a web site or blog. Users are then able to download the podcast to listen to later on their computer or mp3 player.

**Web sites by committee**
Naturally it is good to have one person in overall charge of a web site to help keep the site consistent, but it is also important that all content is cleared for use, in the case of a charity, by its trustees or other authorised personnel.

Just like any printed publication you should ensure that the content of the site is proof read. A site with typing errors will not provide a good impression of the organisation.

**Sustainability**
If the site requires regular updating it is important to think through how this will happen. In the case of a static web site information will have to be sent to the 'webmaster' for it to be updated. With a database driven site, content can be updated by authorised users. It is also possible to set up a system where various people can submit content to the web site, but this will only be 'published' after it has been approved.

## <u>Workshop 5</u>: Funding and running inter faith and faith initiatives – nuts and bolts

***Facilitator:*** **Brian Pearce, Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK**

***Presenters:***

- **Dr Doreen Finneron, Executive Director, Faith-based Regeneration Network, and co-editor *Tools for Regeneration: Practical Advice for Faith Communities***

The workshop consisted of a presentation by Dr Doreen Finneron from the Faith-based Regeneration Network about the nuts and bolts of running faith and inter faith initiatives, which included information on: aims and objectives, moving towards a formal structure, becoming incorporated, becoming a charity, fundraising, employing staff and contracts. A full text of her presentation can be found at the end of this workshop note.

During the discussion following her presentation the following points were made:

- The Directory of Social Change has a range of useful publications to assist with fundraising, both directories of funders and books of advice on tackling the fundraising task in practice. They also offer a range of excellent training courses.
- Somebody within an organisation needs to have the responsibility for fundraising as their job. Fundraising requires special skills and knowledge, which is where training courses are important. The person handling day to day finance work is not necessarily the best person to do the fundraising. Most funders will not pay for a fundraiser.
- The best way to protect trustees is by becoming a company limited by guarantee. Being a charity does not in itself give trustees protection, although it offers other advantages to an organisation.
- Whether or not you have to be a charity to receive funding depends on the policies of the funder in question.
- It is very important to convey to funders in plain language, not in jargon, what it is that your organisation is trying to do.

**Presentation by Dr Doreen Finneron, Executive Director, Faith-based Regeneration Network**

The Faith-based Regeneration Network links nearly 1,000 practitioners who work in community development and regeneration from a faith base. It was set up in 2002 by a small group of practitioners who saw the need to get together to share good practice and good ideas, to encourage each other and also to contribute to Government policy agendas in order to link what is going on at grassroots level in communities with policy making levels, particularly given the increasing Government engagement with faith communities. Most of what I will say in this presentation is covered in our *Tools for Regeneration* book in much more detail.

When an organisation moves to a more formal structure it may be for a variety of reasons. If we are moving from an informal structure, mostly using volunteers, we need to think through why we want a more formal structure. Are we doing it because we want to do it? Or is it being forced on us? Are we doing it to get funding? It is important to know why you are doing it, what is the driver and what you hope to achieve; and to be clear how this step relates to your values and beliefs. As we have heard from a couple of speakers in the plenary session, it is very easy to be swayed by funding. It is not bad to have funding but it is very important that what you are doing with that funding fits with your value and belief system.

So what do we need to take into consideration when we are moving to a more formal structure? In my own tradition, which is the Christian tradition, we have a saying 'Singing from the same hymn sheet'. This means that you need to be 'talking the same talk' so that when someone meets people from your organisation everybody is saying the same about what you are doing, about what your purpose is. You need to have an expressed aim or objective so that everybody presents the same face, if you like, or a similar face, to the outside world, the same version of what you are doing, so that people do not get different views of what you are doing from different people within your organisation. You will also want to protect the members of the management committee and your staff, which you can do more easily if you move to a more formal structure. You can protect your trustees, for example, against personal liability.

You may also want, by moving to a more formal structure, to build in better sustainability. It may have been all right in the past to have a small group of people who know each other, work well together and meet regularly and get on informally with what they are doing. But if you want to go beyond that circle of people you may want to formalise membership and involvement in some way so that the organisation will have a longer life than just the current members. You will also want to communicate effectively to others what you are doing. So you need to think about how you are communicating your message, both externally to other people but also internally. Because if your structure is going to get larger and more complex, then you are not going to be able to deal with everyone on a friendly one-to-one basis and you need to think about how your organisation is going to communicate internally, how people are going to know what the others are doing.

You probably need to start with your aims and objectives. People can get confused about what these are and why it is important to have them. The aim is the overall purpose of your group. Why do you exist? Objectives are what you are going to do in order to fulfil the aim. So, for example, if you are a group whose aim is to assist the homeless in your area, your objective might be to set up a day centre, to set up a hostel and to lobby the Government. Those are your objectives. But your aim is to tackle homelessness. It is also useful to have a short sentence about what you do, sometimes called a strapline, which you can use on your headed paper: a short sentence which communicates exactly what it is your organisation is doing. It is the 'cocktail party' test! I never go to cocktail parties but people say to me that this is what people do at them: people come up to you and say "So what is it that you do?" You have to have a short sharp sentence that says what you do, that hooks people into wanting to know more about your organisation. It must not be a great long description which switches a person off before you have finished. It has got to be a short sharp sentence or a phrase that grabs them. Then you can reel them into a more detailed description of what you do. This is a particular challenge to those of us who work in the complex world of faith, community cohesion, regeneration and community development.

What you then need to think about is what sort of structure you are going to need. There are two basic types. There is the unincorporated organisation which is the less formal one in which a group of individuals hold joint liability. So you might have a constitution, some sort of rules about what you do, but it is not registered anywhere. It is not a legally binding entity and in fact all your members then hold joint liability. So, for example, if you receive funding or if you enter into a contract to purchase equipment and are then not able to pay for it, all the individuals who are part of that organisation will be personally liable. What organisations do when they want to move to a more formal arrangement is usually go for some sort of incorporated status. In this case the aim is to create almost a 'virtual person', who is the company, which bears the liability for what you do. But nothing in law can protect you against negligence. So although the trustees of an organisation would not, for example, normally be personally liable for the employees' wages or for an unpaid bill, if they are negligent and do not exercise proper oversight of the financial aspects of what they are doing then they are still liable financially in law. It is a widespread misconception that having incorporated status can exempt you from negligence, but that is not the case. The most useful types of incorporation for faith groups, and in fact for the voluntary sector more generally, are the company limited by guarantee, which is the most common model, and two new forms of incorporated association, which are the community interest company and the charitable incorporated organisation.

Charitable status is a separate matter. You can become incorporated and not be a charity or you could become a charity and not be incorporated. Why might you want to go for charitable status? The main advantages are that you are exempt from some forms of taxation and have to pay lower rates. My organisation rents a property and has to pay rates, but we get quite a substantial reduction in them which makes a big difference to us. Many charitable trusts and many Government bodies insist that they will only give grants to registered charities. The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund is one of the few funding sources where you do <u>not</u> have to be a registered charity to apply, which is good because this encourages much smaller organisations to apply to it. If you are a charity you can give the wider public the

reassurance that you are being monitored by the Charity Commission. To secure charitable status you must have exclusively charitable purposes and these are tightly defined by the Charity Commission. The staff of the Commission are helpful and are used to dealing with small organisations. They will discuss your situation with you and help you to word your Memorandum and Articles of Association appropriately. They produce an excellent series of leaflets written in plain English. So if you are thinking of becoming a charity I would encourage you to go to their website, to get their leaflets and to make contact with someone in their office who will help you. If you become a charity you do have to accept a limit on the political and campaigning activity, and your trustees are not allowed to receive financial benefit from your organisation. They can be reimbursed for expenses which they incur but they cannot be paid for their services.

In moving to a more formal structure you will need to put into place financial management systems. You will need a designated person who has oversight of these, normally called a Treasurer. You will probably need a bank account and it is usual to have at least two signatories for cheques, at least above a certain amount, as a safeguard against mismanagement. You also need robust income and expenditure records. You need to establish a system whereby you record all the money that you spend, and all that you receive by way of income. This can be quite time consuming and may seem to be a distraction from what your organisation has been set up to do. But at the end of the day you need a proper financial system both to produce your Charity Commission or company accounts, and it is in any case important to monitor your finances and have adequate systems in place internally. You need to: establish a procedure for dealing with cash and cheques, set a budget, and report to the trustees at regular intervals because they have final responsibility for the finances. You will need, if the organisation is above a certain size, to have an independent audit.

Fundraising is a big topic, often the subject of an all day workshop just in itself. I shall have to touch lightly on only a few key points. The main sources of fundraising are: charitable trusts (like the Baring Foundation, Cadbury Trust); corporate funders who will give funding to voluntary sector, including inter faith groups; central Government, of which the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund is an example; local and regional government, which increasingly have funds; and the European Union. To apply for European funds you need partners in other countries. You also need to have sufficient funds to be able to spend the money before you get it paid to you. So applying to the European Union is probably not an option for a smaller organisation, as distinct from a larger one or a consortium of organisations that can spread the risk.

Some “do’s and don’ts” for fundraising. Do have a strategic plan. Even if you are only a small organisation and only want a small amount, plan ahead what you are going to do with it, how it is going to fit in with the rest of your work and how it sits alongside other streams of funding that you have. Do not see it as being completely separate, but plan it as an integral part of your overall strategy. Only approach funders which are appropriate ones for your organisation’s work. I know from having worked for a funder that you will get a certain proportion of applications on which people have completely wasted their time, because they have not looked at the criteria and have not really matched what they say they do to what the funder has said they will fund. So you need to check out that you are approaching an appropriate funder. Use

personal contacts. Again, some people are anxious about this. We have had Debbie Ladds here today and, as you have seen, she is human! You can telephone CDF and speak to someone there. They are very friendly and helpful. So are many other funders as well. Do not forget it is their business to fund you. If you think that you might want to apply to a funding charity, or do telephone them. But have a clear picture in your mind of what you want to do with the funding and roughly how much you want. At least when your envelope arrives in a big sack of post then they will remember having spoken to you, which just helps a little. You need to be realistic in what you ask for and establish credibility in terms of your track record so far. And don't forget to say thank you if you get funding and to keep them in touch with your work.

Don't ever use a blanket or scatter gun approach with a standard letter with is not tailored to the funder you are approaching; ask for unrealistic amounts; or assume that a funder will understand what you are doing unless you explain it carefully. Tell them what you are doing and don't use jargon but do use words people not working in your field will understand. And, finally, don't beg!

If you are seeking project funding you may find that there is a standard form for you to complete. But key elements in an application will be to have a clearly defined aim, with a statement of the project's objectives and goals. For example, the objective of a project of FbRN may be to run a series of seminars this autumn, while the overall aim to which this objective is linked is to promote good practice and the development of skills for effective participation of faith communities in regeneration and community development. You need to show how you plan to evaluate the project, to provide a detailed budget and to indicate what the future funding plans are to ensure the project is completed. It is best to put more detailed information in an appendix which the funder can consult if they wish.

When an organisation starts to employ staff there are a number of key considerations. Ask yourself why you want to employ staff and whether to do so is sustainable. What impact will doing so have on the relationship with your volunteers? Do you need a permanent staff or temporary or casual staff or a consultant? Does the employee need to be from a specific faith? Who will manage and support the staff? How will you deal with payroll, tax and national insurance and employers liability insurance?

When you move to the stage of recruitment and selection you will need a job description and a person specification; to consider where you are going to advertise; to make arrangements for short-listing and interviewing; and to make proper arrangements for the employee's induction. When you employ staff you will need to have a contract with appropriate terms and conditions of service; written statements of employment; key personnel policies and procedures; arrangements for training and professional development; and arrangements for supervision and appraisal. You also need to have in place, in case things go wrong, disciplinary and grievance procedures and procedures for dismissal and redundancy. It is leaving it too late to deal with these only when problems arise.

It is important to have a basis for evaluating how well your organisation is doing and whether it is effective, so that you can adapt or change accordingly. You will need to be able to demonstrate to others (often funders) that you are effective in what you are

doing. Evaluation arrangements must be put in place early in a programme of work so that you collect the material you need as it proceeds, rather than waiting until it is finished and then discovering that you don't have it!

Partnerships with other organisations are increasingly common and important. Here is a checklist for good practice in partnership: make sure that everyone has something to gain; that there are clear outcomes and shared goals; that there is an agreed lead agency for specific tasks; agreement and clarity about who is funding what; a communication strategy; a capacity to adapt to change; and a programme of regular meetings between the partners to monitor progress. But what cannot be put into a checklist is the need for personal skills to ensure effective human interaction of the kind which partnerships need if they are to be effective.

Inevitably, given the range of topics I was asked to cover this has been a very rushed survey of key points. So to get a fuller picture do look at *Tools for Regeneration* which you can read at greater leisure!

## Workshop 6: Young people and inter faith bridge building

***Facilitator:*** **Dr Maureen Sier, Scottish Inter Faith Council**

Becky Hatch and Hannah Clayton of the Diversity and Dialogue project gave a short update on the background to, and the latest activities of, the project, which was initiated in the wake of the 11 September attacks on New York and Washington D.C. in 2001. The advisory group of the project is made up of: Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD); Christian Aid; Citizenship Foundation; Islamic Relief; Jewish Council for Racial Equality; Muslim Aid; Oxfam; Save the Children and World Jewish Aid. The project is based at Save the Children's headquarters in London, but also has staff working in Leeds and Manchester.

The main aim of Diversity and Dialogue's activities has been to build understanding among young people of different faiths and counter the negative effect global issues can sometimes have on local communities in Britain. As part of Diversity and Dialogue's activities, a group of young people from seven different faith traditions created a faith trail at the British Museum. The theme of the trail was "Living in a multi-faith society". The Diversity and Dialogue team has also conducted a set of discussion groups with students in London and Manchester to get their opinion on growing up in a multi-faith society. The majority of the students attended multi-faith schools in an urban setting and were very positive about their own personal relationships across faith boundaries. However, when asked about the relationships between faith groups in general in Britain the picture was rather different. About half of the students were optimistic that relationships between different communities were getting better, while the other half were negative, mainly because they worried about the impact of global conflicts and politics. Diversity and Dialogue has in addition worked with a group of young people that has developed a video resource for use in schools to encourage young people to talks about their faith and what it means to grown up in a multi-faith society.

More information about Diversity and Dialogue can be found on their website at www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk.

Dr Maureen Sier then provided an update on the Scottish Inter Faith Council's activities involving young people. The SIFC has set up a dedicated Inter Faith Youth Steering Committee responsible for planning an annual retreat for young people and an Inter Faith Youth Conference. All the young people involved in this work are volunteers. A desire from the young people to get involved in a practical inter faith

activity will see the SIFC embark on an environmental project. The environment was picked because it is sacred for all faith communities and regarded as a politically 'neutral' topic. Two volunteers from Global Xchange will be assisting SIFC with the project.

Anne Breivik briefed the group on the Inter Faith Network's Faith and Citizenship project. The project commenced in autumn 2005 against the background of the 7 July bombings in London as well as the Network's work with faith communities in their engagement with wider society. A main strand of the project looked at education, particularly Citizenship Education and Religious Education. The aim of the project was to look at how RE and Citizenship Education address issues around faith and citizenship, and how this work might be improved. One of the main activities of the project was a one day seminar held in February 2006. The seminar titled 'Faith, Identity and Belonging; Educating for Shared Citizenship' brought together experts within the field of RE and Citizenship Education with representatives from faith communities. The aim of the seminar was to get perspectives from people working in different parts of the field on the current state of play and hear suggestions for improvement. The overall impression was that a lot of very good individual projects take place, but there is an overall lack of suitable materials and resources to teach about faith, inter faith and citizenship as well as a lack of teacher training. A follow up meeting of key educational bodies in July will look at how best to take forward the suggestions that came out of the 7 February seminar.

The report of the 7 February seminar is available for download free of charge at the Network's website www.interfaith.org.uk.

After these brief updates, the group focused on a set of key challenges to youth inter faith work. The following key points were noted:

**How do you define 'young people'?**

Some groups might operate with a definition including 13-16 years old, others 16-30. The age group involved is important for deciding on the type of incentives which will spur engagement among the target audience, as well as the type of activities in which a project will seek to involve the targeted young people.

**How to engage young people in inter faith activities**

While some participants mentioned very successful initiatives, there was a general consensus that faith communities struggled to involve young people in this work. Faith communities have got a 'problem' with young people as one participant phrased it. This was underlined by Osman Sheikh from the Community Development Fund (CDF), responsible for administrating the new stream of funding for faith communities – Faith Communities Capacity Fund and Connecting Communities Plus. The former focused specifically on women and young people and even provided consultancy and language support free of charge to groups of young people wanting to

apply for a grant to support a project. Despite this, the CDF received very few quality applications from women and young people.

Discussion around the lack of young people involved in faith community activities suggested that faith communities have a bias towards older males and that moves ought to be made to try to change this culture. It was highlighted that young adults could be used as a bridge to engage young people as they are closer in age, as well as life experience, than are older adults. During the discussion it was also mentioned that existing structures are usually dominated by the older generation and it might be difficult to engage younger people in these structures. However, if one wishes to change the culture dominated by greater age and maleness, it is necessary to work to change the structures from within to make them more accessible to young people.

Some suggestions from the group on how to engage young people provided by participants

- Organise a social event with music and dance and set up a work shop to address inter faith issues
- Focus on 'non-political' topics such as the environment
- Possible to involve young adults to help reach out to the younger group – they are closer in age and experience to young people and might be better suited to connect with the younger group
- Existing structures already involve older people, which might make it difficult to engage young people
- In activities that involve students and teachers, teachers can be asked to bring younger pupils along

**Young people and responsibility**

Given the opportunities, young people are fully able to organise events for young people by young people. They tend to pay less attention to existing prejudice and barriers than adults and are able to come up with themes and topics that easily engage their peers. While organising events themselves will give young people ownership of the process, it is important to follow this up with 'real' commitment from the grown ups' side. It is important that adults listen to what young people have to say and take it on board. Paying 'lip service' to youth engagement might in the long term lead to cynicism and disappointment among young people and make it even harder to engage them in future projects.

**Young people's contribution to inter faith work**

It was noted that young people's creativity and energy create a dynamism which the inter faith movement will need in order to grow and develop its activities. If young people are provided with the necessary structures and given space to be creative they are able to bring out new ideas and insert fresh energy into inter faith work. Involving young people in inter faith activities is important for the sustainability of, as well the further development of, inter faith dialogue and activities.

# The Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to link inter faith initiatives and to develop good relations between people of different faiths in this country. Its members include the representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith relations. It is run by Trustees of all the faiths whose representative bodies it links.

With its member bodies, the Network works to "advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground" and "to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths". It does this by:

- Holding meetings of its member bodies, where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together
- Setting up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue particular issues in greater depth
- Proceeding by consensus wherever possible and not making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation
- Fostering inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Running an information and advice service
- Publishing materials to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- In consultation with member bodies, helping to provide contacts and participants for inter faith events and projects and for television and radio programmes

Further information about the Inter Faith Network can be found on its website: www.interfaith.org.uk or obtained by writing to the Network office.

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E-mail: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk

# MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR 2006-07

**Faith Community Representative Bodies**
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom
Board of Deputies of British Jews
British Muslim Forum
Buddhist Society
Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland
Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
Committee for Other Faiths, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council (UK)
Hindu Forum of Britain
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park, London
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
Muslim Council of Britain
National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Interfaith Subcommittee
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

**Inter Faith Organisations**
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Scottish Inter Faith Council
Inter Faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru

East of England Faiths Council
Northwest Forum of Faiths
South East England Faiths Forum
South West Council of Faiths
West Midlands Faiths Forum
Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum

Alif Aleph UK
Christian Muslim Forum
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Council of Christians and Jews
East of England Faiths Agency
Interfaith Foundation
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
London Society of Jews and Christians
Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme
Religions for Peace (UK)
Three Faiths Forum
United Religions Initiative (UK)
Westminster Interfaith
World Congress of Faiths

**Educational and Academic Bodies**
Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation
Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
National Association of SACRE's
Religious Education Council for England and Wales
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter

**Local Inter Faith Groups**
Altrincham Inter Faith Group
Barnet Multi Faith Forum
Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Inter Faith
Brent Multi-Faith Forum
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Burnley Building Bridges
Calderdale Interfaith Council
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Interfaith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Forum of Faiths for Derby
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network
Gateshead Inter Faith Forum
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Greenwich Multi-Faith Forum
Harrow Inter Faith Council
Hounslow Friends of Faith
Huddersfield Interfaith Council
Islington Faiths Forum
Lancashire Forum of Faiths
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Leeds Faiths Forum
Leicester Council of Faiths
Loughborough Council of Faiths
Luton Council of Faiths
Manchester Interfaith Forum
Medway Inter Faith Action
Merseyside Council of Faiths
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)
Moseley Inter Faith Group
Newcastle Council of Faiths
Newham Association of Faiths
Newham Faith Sector Forum
North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council
North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths
Northampton Faiths Forum
Nottingham Inter Faith Council
Oldham Inter Faith Forum
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Building Bridges (Pendle)
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Preston Faith Forum
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Rochdale Multifaith Partnership
Sheffield Interfaith
South London Inter Faith Group
Southampton Council of Faiths
Southwark Multi Faith Forum
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Group
Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum
Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum
Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network
Warrington Council of Faiths
Watford Inter Faith Association
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths