

PARTNERSHIP FOR
THE COMMON GOOD:

*interfaith structures
and local government*

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

This good practice booklet looks at some of the issues involved in working with and helping establish multi faith initiatives. It takes into account in particular the context of partnership working between inter faith structures and local government.

The booklet is one of the outcomes of a six month survey in 2003 which mapped local inter faith activity around the UK. It reflects and builds on existing good practice that was found in the course of this. The survey was carried out by the Inter Faith Network for the UK with funding from the Community Cohesion Unit of the Home Office and in partnership with the Home Office, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Local Government Association.

For in depth discussion of the issues involved, and examples of a range of other types of local inter faith projects, see *Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey*; *The Local Inter Faith Guide: Faith and Community in Action*; and *Faith and Community*. Details of these and other useful resources are given at the back of this booklet.

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Faith matters

In the 2001 Census, 76.8% of people in the UK identified themselves as having a religious faith. The figures for many towns and cities show the considerable religious diversity of their populations. Even in areas not considered as particularly “multi faith” or “multi cultural”, there are adherents of most major faiths.

People of faith have much to offer to their areas: their traditions encourage work for the social well being of their neighbourhoods and commitment to a just and equitable society. This has been increasingly recognized by central and local government which are exploring ways to gain the input of people of faith.

This has been happening, for example, through consultative bodies such as the Inner Cities Religious Council of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Inter Faith Council for Wales (chaired by the National Assembly’s First Minister) and through faith representation on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in many local authorities in England and Wales.

In some local authorities multi faith forums are being formed to help ensure that input to LSPs and other strategic initiatives reflects the variety of faiths in their areas. The public sector more widely is also making use of advice and assistance from faith communities.

Relations between faith communities – and in turn between faith communities and local government – can make a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion.

Foreword to Faith and Community

Inter faith understanding and cooperation

Relations between faiths are also a focus of increased interest. Faith communities recognize the growing importance of ensuring that members of different faiths are well educated about each other’s traditions and able to coexist harmoniously. All the major faiths in the UK now have personnel with responsibility for inter faith relations and at local level in many areas individual Baha’is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and others are actively engaged in working for good inter faith relations.

There are now over 130 local inter faith groups, councils and forums in the UK. There are also many branches of national bilateral and trilateral inter faith organisations such as the Council of Christians and Jews and the Three Faiths Forum as well as other initiatives involving particular faiths such as the Christian-Hindu and Hindu-Muslim dialogues in Leicester and the Hitchin Sikh-Christian Forum.

Where local inter faith initiatives work well, they make a significant difference to their area. They bring people of different faiths together to learn more about one another’s faith and to co-operate in giving advice on religious issues to local public service providers. They also ensure that key members of the different faiths in a locality meet regularly at meetings or special functions. These personal links are crucial to ensure rapid and effective response if occasional problems occur such as attacks on places of worship or tension between different communities.

This bringing together of the faiths, in meetings and in civic contexts, also has symbolic importance – not to be undervalued – giving a visible sign of principled peaceful coexistence and co-operation within our society.

Community cohesion and good inter faith relations

The Local Government Association's *Guidance on Community Cohesion* highlights the importance for local authorities, as part of their leadership role, to "build cross-cultural networks and inter faith structures" and to help facilitate an agreed vision which will have as one outcome a reduction in racial and inter-religious tension and conflict.

The guidance notes that: "At community level it is important to foster understanding and respect between different faith traditions as well as between different cultural and ethnic groups".

Defusing tensions

Following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in the USA, there were serious concerns about some communities such as Muslims, and to some extent Sikhs, being targeted because of their physical resemblance to those who perpetrated atrocities, for abuse and violence by some misguided people who were being swayed by far-right groups. Verbal abuse, damage to property, offensive graffiti on some places of worship were some of the incidents reported by individual faith communities.

The Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group took the initiative to organise a number of meetings in partnership with the City Council, Police, the local Race Equality Council and the local media for minority communities at the receiving end of racist assaults. The events were very well attended and received considerable publicity. The outcome was that the positive relations between communities were successfully sustained. That work still goes on.
Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group

This year, as hostilities in Iraq were declared, a meeting was arranged at short notice with both mayors, our MP, representatives of all major faiths, schools, voluntary workers, police and fire services, to sign a declaration... that we would all support one another.
Watford Inter Faith Group

Celebrating diversity

Our "Who are we in Luton?" exhibition was an opportunity to meet other different cultural and ethnic groups who live in Luton and to learn from their diversity. Each community's history, culture, faith tradition, customs, art, food and clothing was well depicted and articulated for those who did not know much about them. *Luton Council of Faiths*

"The development of effective local inter faith structures, bringing together representatives of different faith communities in a local authority area, can provide a valuable framework both for promoting mutual understanding and co-operation between them and as a mechanism for consultation by the local authority and other public bodies.

Local authorities can provide valuable encouragement and support for the launching of initiatives of this kind in areas where they have yet to be established and also in helping to sustain existing local inter faith structures."

Guidance on Community Cohesion

Types of local inter faith initiative

The different types of local inter faith body and their work are described in detail in *The Local Inter Faith Guide: Faith Community Co-operation in Action*, published by the Inter Faith Network with the Inner Cities Religious Council in 1999. Extensive examples of all of these types of local inter faith body can be found in *Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey*.

There are a variety of options. These include:

- A relatively informal inter faith group, association or network where people of different faiths come together for discussion.
- A “council of faiths”, with more formal representation from all the main faiths in the area. Such councils usually have a programme of events to deepen inter faith understanding and cooperation but, because of their representative nature, can also be used as policy sounding boards by outside bodies such as local government.

- A multi faith partnership. These are usually set up by or with the assistance of local authorities to create a mechanism for nominating to the Local Strategic Partnership and giving input to this and to other initiatives. Some have a significant role in regeneration or neighbourhood renewal. Sometimes multi faith partnerships also act as a forum for inter faith discussion between local faith groups.

What kind of inter faith initiative is needed or wanted will vary from area to area (and across time) and it is possible to have more than one in a given area. For example, in Leeds and on Merseyside inter faith bodies with somewhat different roles work together in a complementary way.

Most local inter faith structures are autonomous bodies even though they may be consulted by and receive support from local authorities or other public sector bodies.

Two East Midlands Cities

Nottingham City Council has helped fund a part-time worker for Nottingham Inter Faith Council since 2000.

“Nottingham City Council’s financial support through grant aid for Nottingham Inter Faith Council was to enable the development of the Inter Faith Council’s role in disseminating information or available resources to assist with the initiation of multi-cultural education programmes. This work has contributed towards a growing understanding of the different beliefs and practices, and fostering growing trust and respect between communities in the city.” *Service Manager, Voluntary and Community Sector, Nottingham City Council*

In 1986, members of different faith communities in **Leicester** met at the town hall at the initiative of the Lord Mayor and went on to form themselves into a council of faiths. Leicester Council of Faiths’ members represent, on a faith community basis, the eight principal faiths in the

City: Baha’is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus (including Swaminaryan representatives), Jains, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs.

The Leicester Council of Faiths (LCF) has retained a strong link with Leicester City Council. It is consulted by the Council on a range of issues from education to neighbourhood renewal and community strategy. The Council provides funding, via the Education Department, towards the rent of LCF’s Welcome Centre, some running costs, and the salary of a part-time coordinator.

This is one of the resources which enables LCF to carry out a wide programme of work to promote good inter faith relations in Leicester, including events, publications (such as the directory of places of worship in Leicester), diversity training, and assistance to a wide range of bodies such as the Police, schools, universities, hospitals and the Fire and Rescue Service.

Setting up or developing a local inter faith initiative

When thinking about what sort of initiative may be needed in an area, some important questions to ask include:

- Why is an inter faith council or forum needed?
- What area will it serve?
- Who will be involved?
- Is it being envisaged as a local authority consultation mechanism?
- How representative does the body need to be?
- Which local faith organisations need to be on board at the outset to ensure that the initiative is well backed and high profile?
- How will it be serviced?
- Where will financial support come from?
- Will “in kind” support be available (such as local authority staff time or venues)?
- Will it need an office or centre?

The issue of what area a new body may serve is an important one. Some local inter faith

structures serve a wide area embracing a number of local authorities: for example, South London Inter Faith Group. Others, such as Oldham Inter Faith Forum, serve primarily one local authority area. There are few examples of fully county-wide inter faith initiatives (these presently exist just in Gloucestershire, Lancashire and Suffolk). However, regional inter faith forums or councils of faith have emerged in England’s East, West Midlands, South East, and South West Regions and possibilities for such forums are being explored in the East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber Regions.

It is important to check what initiatives may already be in place or under development and how a new initiative may dovetail with these.

Some preliminary mapping of the faith organisations in the area will be useful before meetings to discuss any inter faith initiative.

Religions in the UK: A Directory 2001–3 is a useful resource, containing listings for faith

Multi faith networking and consultation in two London boroughs

Forum of Faiths Kensington and Chelsea has been running since early 2002. It developed out of the Chief Executive of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea’s meetings with Borough Deans and has now become an independent, multi faith body which is used as a sounding board by many different Council departments (and by others such as the Police) who are given slots to come and speak with the Forum at its meetings. It has a five person multi faith steering group. All its meetings are open ones. Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea volunteered the time and support of the Community Relations Section’s Information and Initiatives Officer who has, since the outset, had responsibility for servicing the Forum.

In February 2002 the first **Wandsworth Faith Communities Meeting** was held. Representatives from the main faith communities in the borough, identified through the Census, were invited to meet with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

The aim of the meeting was:

- To update and inform representatives about important developments such as the Local Strategic Partnership
- To develop the group’s links to the Local Strategic Partnership and hence provide a “voice” for faith communities into the LSP
- To explain the various consultation exercises planned where faith communities’ input would be helpful.
- To discuss any issues of mutual interest.
- To provide an opportunity to resolve potential concerns or tensions quickly and effectively.

Three meetings have now been held. Representation now includes the following: Christian; Muslim; Sikh; Hindu; Buddhist; Jewish; Baha’i. The group has also become formally established as a sub-group of the Wandsworth Local Strategic Partnership.

community and inter faith organisations around the country and also a chapter about each major faith.

Any local faith umbrella bodies (such as Churches Together and Jewish Representative Councils) are vital to have involved at an early stage and also the main places of worship of the various faiths.

Successful local inter faith initiatives take time to build. Thorough consultation is vital, as is scheduling of meetings on days and times that do not clash with religious festivals and observances. The annual *Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals* is a vital planning tool and comes with a booklet explaining the significance of each festival. It is also helpful to choose times when key faith community figures who have day time commitments can attend. If catering is provided at planning meetings, it is important to make sure that provision is made for the dietary requirements of participants.

If it is hoped to launch an initiative with long term prospects, the involvement of key people from the outset is crucial so that they can help make it work or – if they are too busy for that – at least give it their blessing. It is far better to take longer at the planning stage than to move too fast and risk launching the council or group without careful advance preparation.

The Local Inter Faith Guide

Drawing on good practice at the start up stage

Bradford Vision has recently appointed a Faiths Forum Development Worker to assist with the development of a broad based faiths forum for the Bradford District which strengthens and reflects the contribution of faith communities and faith leaders.

Bristol City Council is exploring the possibility of a network for faiths to come together to respond to policy issues at local authority and sub-regional level and through which the faiths might proactively encourage faith community action on social issues. The social action focus of such a network would complement the work of the longstanding Bristol Inter Faith Group which has done much to promote good inter faith relations over the years.

As part of this exploratory process the Council has recently held a small meeting with members of local faith communities and other interested voluntary and community umbrella organisations. They invited to this a member of Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum to hear of the experiences of a faith forum in another major city and also the Secretary to the Inner Cities Religious Council. Participants welcomed the idea of a

network. Consideration is now being given to the next steps. As a first practical step, an experimental “Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day” is being organised to supplement the long established national “Open Doors Day”. This will give an opportunity for people to visit local mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues and temples and will strengthen their understanding and appreciation of the diversity of the community of Bristol.

The County Councils of East Sussex and West Sussex and the **Sussex Police Authority** have recently set up a steering group with Churches Together in Sussex to plan a conference to engage the faith groups in Sussex in dialogue. The hope is that a forum will emerge which can be used for consultation on policy issues and feed into the community planning process.

Calderdale Faith Communities Partnership has recently appointed, with funding linked to the Community Facilitation Programme, an Inter Faith Development Worker. The Development Worker’s programme of work will include developing and assisting with the launch of the Calderdale Interfaith Council.

Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum

Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum serves as a forum for faith communities to enter into dialogue with each other and with relevant organs of government, including the City Council, Yorkshire Forward and the Regional Chamber for Yorkshire and Humberside.

It has a strong focus on issues such as regeneration and faith based social action and it presently has Council members serving on the Leeds Economy Strategy Group and on the Neighbourhood Strategy Group (of the Local Strategic Partnership). It has a special concern for activity and policy development that addresses social exclusion and religious discrimination. In November 2002 it was a sponsor, with Leeds Initiative, of the launch of Community Cohesion work in Leeds.

LFCLF developed out of a process which began in 1998 with a series of open forum style meetings. Its emphases complement those of Leeds' longer established inter faith body, Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship (which in general has more of a focus on spiritual dialogue), with which it has worked in partnership on various projects.

LFCLF is steered by a Council which was launched in March 2001 and includes Baha'is, Buddhists (from the Leeds Buddhist Council), Christians (Anglican, Catholic, Free Church, and the Black-led Churches), Hindus (from the main temple), Jews (from the Leeds Jewish Representative Council), Muslims (through the Leeds Muslim Forum), and Sikhs (through the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras (Leeds)). Leeds City Council is represented by a Councillor.

Secretarial assistance is provided by Leeds VOICE and Leeds Church Institute have provided 2 days a week of staff time to assist the Forum.

Merseyside – a place where faith meets faith

Merseyside is an area rich in inter faith initiatives. Since the mid 80s, Merseyside Inter Faith Group has worked to promote friendship, understanding and cooperation between individuals from different faiths in the area. In 2001 Merseyside Council of Faiths came into existence, with the assistance of Merseyside Inter Faith Group, to contribute to this and also to articulate concerns of religious minorities and provide channels of consultation with other groups and agencies and local government.

Recently, Liverpool Community Spirit has been commissioned by Liverpool Council for Voluntary Service and Merseyside Council of Faiths to facilitate a faith community network specifically for Liverpool.

In April 2003 over 80 members of Liverpool's faith communities came to a meeting to hear about and participate in discussion on the new faith network.

Now in its early stages, "Liverpool Faith Community Network" is independent, Liverpool specific and has a strong focus on regeneration issues. It meets every six weeks. Its work spans a wide area, with participants from Liverpool and also from surrounding areas such as Knowsley, Sefton, St Helen's, and Wirral.

The Liverpool Community Spirit Co-ordinator is the Faith Network Facilitator. With Community Empowerment Funding a Network Administrator has recently been appointed.

Contributing to a shared future

The process of establishing an inter faith initiative can at times seem complex and challenging but it has significant rewards. Effective local inter faith groups and councils have an important contribution to make to their local communities:

- strengthening social cohesion through promoting better understanding between members of different faiths
- being a practical and visible example of cooperation between the major faiths for the good of the wider local community
- bringing the faith dimension in constructive ways into the shared life of the wider local community

Many Faiths, One People

Common Statement of the Faith Communities of Cardiff

We bring greetings from the faith communities to the Lord Mayor, Council and the people of Cardiff.

We offer to Cardiff our commitment to seek to live together in peace and goodwill.

We affirm our desire to promote respect and tolerance for the integrity of each other's beliefs, cultures and traditions. This desire arises not only from our common humanity but also from our being people of faith and prayer.

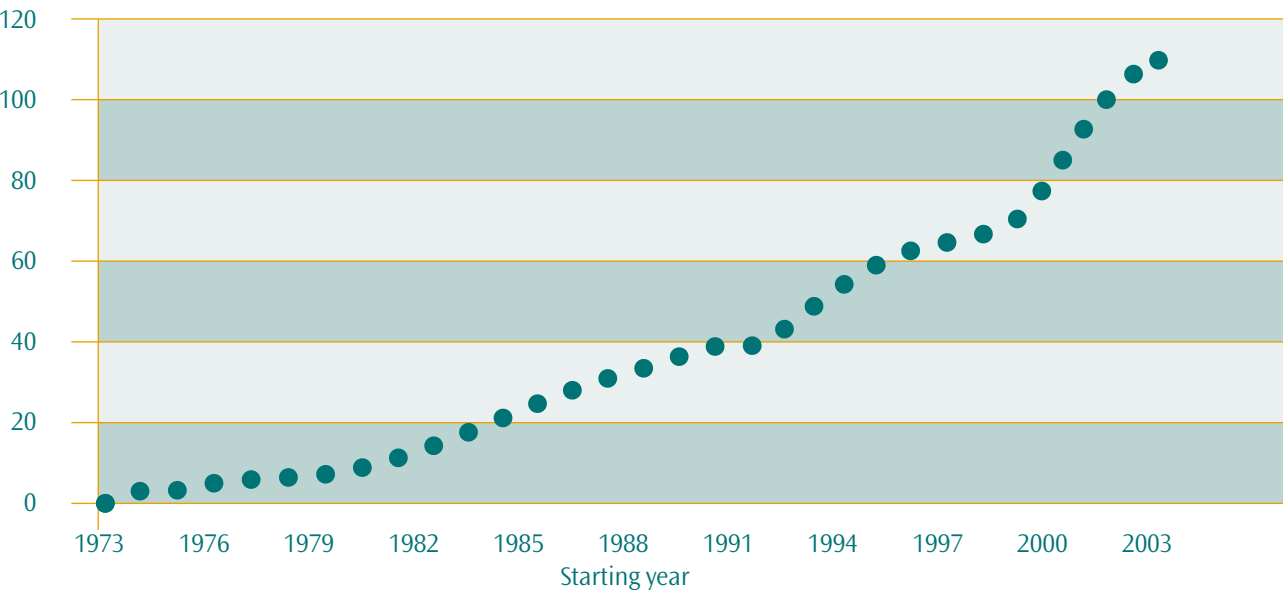
We recognise that as neighbours we have responsibilities to the community, the world and ourselves.

We urge all our fellow citizens to put aside intolerances, malice and strife, in order to attain peaceful and fruitful coexistence and cooperation.*

**This declaration was the focus of a large event bringing together civic and faith community leaders. Similar civic greetings and statements of commitment have been made by faith communities in a number of towns and cities such as Brighton and Hove and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (where the first declaration of this kind was developed).*

Growth of local inter faith activity

Cumulative number of groups



Based on questionnaire returns for the Local Inter Faith Mapping Project

Publications

Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs. Short guidelines for inter religious encounter and dialogue. Printed on A5 card and suitable for group discussion use. ISBN 1 902906 03 9 Single copy 20p; £3.00 for 20 copies; £10.00 for 100 copies. Available from the Inter Faith Network.

Faith and Community. The Local Government Association in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Active Community Unit of the Home Office, and the Inter Faith Network, 2002. Available on line at: www.lga.gov.uk.

Guidance on Community Cohesion. The Local Government Association in association with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Inter Faith Network, 2002. Available from the Local Government Association available online at www.lga.gov.uk.

Inter Faith Co-operation, Local Government and the Regions: Councils of Faith as a Resource for the 21st Century. Report on the June 2000 conference held by the Inter Faith Network in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council. Published 2000 ISBN 1 902906 05 5 Price £4.55 including postage and packing. Order from the Inter Faith Network.

Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey. Report on the local inter faith mapping project carried out in 2003 with support from the

Community Cohesion Unit. Published by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2003. Price £8.95 including postage and packing from the Inter Faith Network.

The Local Inter Faith Guide: Faith Community Co-operation in Action. This guide, published in 1999 by the Inter Faith Network in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council, gives advice on setting up and maintaining a local inter faith group or council of faith and includes ideas for successful events. Available online at: www.interfaith.org.uk.

Religions in the UK: Directory 2001–2003. A comprehensive guide to the United Kingdom's faith communities, their organisations and places of worship. Published by the Multifaith Centre at the University of Derby in association with the Inter Faith Network. Order from: The Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby DE22 1GB Tel: 01332 591285 Fax: 01332 621333. Price: £20 including postage and packing (quote special offer "LIFMP").

Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals 2003/4. Price £5.20 including postage and packing. Available from the Shap Working Party, PO Box 38580, London SW1P 3XF Website: www.shap.org.

Inter faith education resource centres

Inter faith education resource centres such as Bradford Inter Faith Education Centre, Plymouth Religious and Cultural Resource Centre and Suffolk Inter Faith Resource (SIFRE) can play a key role in helping good relations in their area, providing resources and training and hosting inter faith events and groups.

Contact details:

The Inter Faith Network for the UK,

8A Lower Grosvenor Place, London SW1W 0EN.

Tel 020 7931 7766.

Email: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk.

The Network links 97 member organisations including: representative bodies from the different faith communities; inter faith organisations; local inter faith groups; educational and academic bodies. It provides information on faith communities and on inter faith affairs; advises on multi faith projects and inter faith issues; publishes materials to aid work in the religious and inter faith sectors; fosters inter faith co-operation on social issues; and holds regular meetings where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together. Further information about its work can be found at www.interfaith.org.uk.

The Local Government Association,

Local Government House, Smith Square, SW1P 3HZ.

Tel: 020 7664 3131. Email info@lga.gov.uk

As the national voice for local communities, the LGA speaks for nearly 500 local authorities. Its mission is to secure the conditions in which local government can thrive; promote local government's achievements; and help councils improve. Website: www.lga.gov.uk

The Home Office Faith Communities Unit,

Allington Towers, 19 Allington Street, London SW1E 5EB.

Tel 0870 000 1585.

Email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

The recently formed Faith Communities Unit in the Home Office leads on the Government's engagement with faith communities. Its purpose is to ensure that policies and services across Government are delivered in a way that is appropriate to faith communities and that these communities' experience and skills are recognised and utilised.

Inner Cities Religious Council, Urban Policy

Directorate, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister,

4/J10 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU.

Tel 020 7944 3704. Email icrc@odpm.gov.uk

ICRC is based in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is chaired by a Government Minister and provides a forum where faith communities and government can work together on urban renewal, social inclusion and community cohesion.

Further information from ICRC's webpages at:

www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=3006&l=2

As the LGA is the voice for local authorities in England and Wales, the good practice examples referred to in this booklet have been drawn from these two countries.

Examples from Northern Ireland and Scotland will be found in *Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey*.

Information and advice on local inter faith activity in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can be obtained from the following Network member bodies:

The Inter Faith Council for Wales/

Cyngor Rhyng-grefyddol Cymru,

Secretary, Inter Faith Council for Wales, National Assembly for Wales Building, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF99 1NA.

Tel: 029 2089 8673.

Email: interfaith@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

The Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum,

c/o Mr Norman Richardson MBE, Secretary Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum, Stranmillis University College, Stranmillis Road, Belfast, BT9 5DY

Tel: 028 9038 4328

Email: interfaithni@stran.ac.uk

The Scottish Inter Faith Council,

St Francis' Centre,

405 Cumberland St, Glasgow, G5 0SE.

admin@interfaithscotland.org.

Tel: 0141 429 4012.

Website: www.interfaithscotland.org



**Promoting mutual respect and
understanding between the
faith communities of the UK**



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