

**‘FACE TO FACE’ AND ‘HEART TO HEART’**  
**People of Faith in Dialogue**



**2008 National Meeting  
of  
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

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at Glaziers Hall in London**

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# **‘FACE TO FACE’ AND ‘HEART TO HEART’**

## **People of Faith in Dialogue**

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## **PROCEEDINGS**

Bishop Tom Butler, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting and welcomed participants to it. He said that the meeting provided an opportunity to explore aspects of the 'face to face' (and indeed the 'heart to heart') processes designed to tackle misunderstandings and prejudice and to build good relations. It also formally launched the Network's 'Soundings' programme which would, in the coming two years, be looking in depth at a range of issues in inter faith dialogue in Britain today.

The first speaker was Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, who offered some reflections on the current dialogical landscape and the Inter Faith Network's planned 'Soundings' programme. This was followed by three presentations on 'Dimensions of Dialogue' given by Dr Nawal Prinja of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK) and also Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK; David Gifford, Chief Executive of the Council of Christians and Jews; and Sughra Ahmed, Adviser on Women in Faith and Research Fellow of the Islamic Foundation.

There then followed the opportunity for some 'on the spot dialogue' where participants were able to talk with their neighbours before the plenary discussion. The final presentation before lunch was on 'Dialogue on the Menu' and was given by Stella Opoku-Owusu, Project Officer of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

After lunch there were two presentations on 'Young People and Dialogue' given firstly by Susan Moss, Project Manager of the 'Shared Futures' School Linking Programme of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and secondly, by Jasdeep Singh Degun and Ushna Moghal of the Yorkshire and Humber Youth Interfaith Council. Meeting participants were then invited to take part in one of seven discussion groups on different aspects of dialogue.

After the tea break Stella Opoku-Owusu offered a short summary of the key points from the workshops. Dr Nawal Prinja then invited three of the day's participants to give their reflections on themes that had emerged from the day: Sarah Thorley of South London Inter Faith Group; Dr Manazir Ahsan, Director General of the Islamic Foundation and a Vice-Chair of the Inter Faith Network; and Bishop Tom Butler.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Bishop Tom Butler:**

I will be chairing this morning's session and Dr Prinja, my fellow Co-Chair, will be chairing the bulk of the afternoon session and will also be one of our speakers this morning. So we welcome you to this National Meeting and, as usual, we will start with a brief period of silence remembering in thanks the work of all in this country and around the world working to contribute to greater inter faith understanding.

We are meeting at a time of several Government initiatives. We are expecting before too long a framework document on inter faith dialogue and social action coming out of the Department of Communities and Local Government. Then last week there was a new initiative regarding equality coming out of the Government Equality Office and we have been assured that there will be full consultation, especially with the faith communities, regarding that important initiative.

The theme of our meeting today is 'Face to face and heart to heart: people of faith in dialogue'. It is an appropriate one because we have a lot to contribute. The day has been planned to offer an opportunity for us to explore aspects of this face to face dialogue and the processes that we are building around the country designed to tackle misunderstandings and prejudice and to build good inter faith relations. It also gives us the opportunity to formally launch the Network's 'Soundings' programme which will over the coming two years be looking in depth at a range of issues in inter faith dialogue in Britain today.

## **VALUING DIALOGUE**

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

**Bishop Tom Butler:**

We have a range of speakers this morning and our first speaker is Dr Harriet Crabtree. This is her first National Meeting since taking over last September as Director of the Inter Faith Network. She will be offering some opening reflections on the current landscape of dialogue and describing the planned Network 'Soundings' programme.

**Dr Harriet Crabtree:**

I would like to reflect in the next 20 minutes on aspects of the dialogical landscape here in the UK and on some of the ways that people of different faiths are talking both together with each other and also with secular agencies. I will then conclude by saying something about a number of the complex challenges that we face and about a new programme which the Inter Faith Network is launching at this meeting which is called the Soundings Programme.

**a) The increasing recognition of the importance of working for good inter faith relations**

We are very lucky to have, among contributors to the plenary and workshops and also among other participants, people from different faiths, many organisations and from all four nations of the UK and regions within these, who are currently making a key contribution, through dialogue, to building good inter faith relations.

There has been an ever greater interest in building good inter faith relations in Britain, particularly in the last five years. I do not know about you but I find it rather astonishing how the level of interest that is shown in the sort of work that everybody here is doing has just shot up. Interest and engagement are now coming from many quarters – not least Government. Of course, a lot of people - indeed many of you here - have been working in this area for a long time but now it has become more in the public eye.

There is debate about what factors contribute to better inter faith relations. Some of these are not what you would call purely 'religious'. They include such fundamentals as equality and just treatment of all members of society. Where people feel they are part of a fair and just society this helps inter faith relations and, indeed, community relations generally. Likewise, such factors as good education about the faiths and balanced media coverage help increase the likelihood of good inter faith relations. It is always very important that we keep in mind the political and social context of dialogue because - no matter how hard we all work - if social and political factors are stacked against positive engagement then inter faith engagement and cooperation cannot prosper.

As well as these broad factors which can help create generally positive preconditions for positive coexistence by people of different faiths, there is also, of course, a need for people of different faiths to engage well with each other and to engage with wider society. We have a responsibility and a special contribution to make to engaging well with this process.

### Different modes of inter faith engagement – and key role of dialogue

There are many different ways in which people of different faiths are engaging - for example through joint social action (and I will return to this later) or activities such as sport – for example, inter faith football matches or the now almost legendary Leicester Imams and Ministers cricket matches.

The Government's recent Faith Communities Capacity Building fund administered by the Community Development Foundation supported a range of very different sorts of activities where people of different faiths engaged with each other and their local communities. We are delighted that Anna Allen from CDF is here to talk about some of these later today in one of the workshops. I remember reading about some of the funded projects when these were announced and they included initiatives like women of different faiths coming together to work on sewing projects, for example, and learning about their faiths through doing quite practical projects together, such as projects which brought people together to work on particular environmental issues locally.

Shared social activity involving different faiths is hugely important, but unless we remember the importance of people exploring together their areas of difference and commonality, of speaking and listening as well as acting, we lose a key component of what helps build good inter faith relations. So today I want to focus particularly on valuing dialogue.

Now I know that there are many careful academic expositions of the meaning of the term 'dialogue' with its Greek roots in the words 'dia' and 'logos' – 'through' and 'meaning'. Indeed there are now organisations specifically devoted to considering the exact nature of dialogue and how best to carry it out and developing the necessary skills for it. But, if you will forgive a slightly homespun definition, I am using it this morning to mean a process of 'considered, respectful, open and honest discussion with a commitment to moving together towards greater understanding'.

### **b) Some types of dialogue**

#### **i) The dialogue of daily life**

Dialogue involving people of faith is of many kinds. There is what some have called the 'dialogue of ordinary life'. This is the sort of discussion that people of different faith backgrounds have in passing, with no planning or particular intention, in the workplace, on trains, buses, schools, prisons and other places. Most of the time religion does not come up as an issue. But from time to time it does and real inter faith dialogue often takes place in this context. For example, a day care centre until recently linked to my local parish church had women from Sikh, Hindu and Christian

backgrounds working at it. They found over the time they worked together, first they got interested in talking together about things like the different naming systems for children in their faith traditions and then gradually they came quietly to talk about many aspects of their faiths. They never set out to 'do dialogue'. They simply had an every day encounter that grew into a daily life dialogue.

## ii) Local inter faith groups and dialogue

Then there are inter faith dialogues of a more formal or organised variety. Local inter faith groups offer many opportunities for this. I will take just one example, because of time, although there are so many wonderful examples. Rugby Inter Faith Forum began nine years ago as a gathering of members of Rugby's faith communities with the aim of meeting together regularly to share their faith and to understand and respect one another. It has met almost monthly over this period, welcoming anyone who shares its aims. Its 20-30 members take part in a programme of meetings at each of which one of their members presents a theme from their faith perspective (for example festivals, stories, prophets, prayer, scriptures, suffering, what happens after death).

The group has also explored documents such as a 'A Common Word' and common ground more generally, as well as moral issues such as euthanasia, abortion and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. Its secretary explains that the aim has not been to reach agreement but to understand and respect each other's faith and practice. He notes that there have, of course, been some strong disagreements and in a few instances people have taken offence. But in understanding why this has happened they have grown closer together. And in fact there has often emerged a remarkable amount of common ground. In the last few years the idea of a forum which interfaces more with civil society has been discussed and a number of RIFF members are about to launch a parallel forum to do this.

Sometimes local groups' and forums' dialogues are discussions focused on particular themes or involving particular faiths or age groups. For example, Bedford Council of Faiths as part of its discussion evenings held one called: 'Mind the Gap! How Young people's approaches to faith differ from those of their parents'. After three young people, Hindu, Baha'i and Buddhist spoke about their spiritual journeys, participants broke into smaller groups to share a variety of viewpoints and experiences from different age, faith, and some just personal perspectives. This same local inter faith body has also held town centre meetings on topics such as 'Religion and Politics: Friends or Foes?', 'Islam in Europe: Who Adapts to Whom?' 'Whose Planet? Faith Perspectives on the Environment' and 'Are We Sleep-walking into Segregation' with speakers from a wide range of faiths, Jain, Hindu, Baha'i, Quaker, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, as well as from a non-religious background.

Local groups are also a context in which women are often much more strongly engaged in dialogue than they currently are at regional or national level and some local groups involve particularly women in dialogue, for example at one forum in Oldham and also a women's group in St Albans.

As well as dialogue groups locally, there are an increasing number of groups in an educational context - in schools, in colleges of further education and institutions of



higher education. A number of bodies represented here today, such as the Council of Christians and Jews, Three Faiths Forum, Minorities of Europe and Building Bridges in Pendle, are working to support this kind of engagement. We are also going to be hearing later today directly from some people who are involved in the growing number of youth inter faith forums.

### iii) Faith communities and dialogue

It goes without saying that the involvement of national faith communities in dialogue processes and in preparing principles and resources for use by their followers is of enormous importance.

In one of the workshops later today, Rev Peter Colwell of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland will be talking about the Christian Churches' work in this respect. A number of other faith traditions are also developing their work in this area. For example, the Board of Deputies of British Jews has an Interfaith Officer and has been carrying out, across the last couple of years, a broad programme of work looking at how the Jewish community is engaging with inter faith issues and working to support this appropriately.

Some of the most in depth dialogues being carried forward at national and local level are bilateral ones such as Hindu-Christian, Muslim-Jewish, Christian-Jewish or Christian-Muslim and Buddhist-Christian. Many such dialogues, particularly at national level, involve the scholars as well as other followers of the faiths in question. In the Inter Faith Network for the UK we have multi-faith engagement and many local groups have multi-faith engagement and dialogue, but the place of bilateral dialogue is also enormously important in helping deep dialogue develop.

Dialogue between two traditions (occasionally three) enables people to wrestle with difficult aspects of their past shared histories and to explore commonalities and to talk together in detail about how to carry forward pieces of work and so forth. It is troubling that bilateral dialogues sometimes seem to find it harder to get financial support for their work because they do not involve all groups. I hope that there can be more recognition of the vital importance of bilateral dialogue.

National inter faith structures - and there are many representatives of these here today - also offer extremely important opportunities for reflection and dialogue. For example, the Imams and Ministers Conference held by the Christian Muslim Forum or the recent conference held by the Joseph Inter Faith Foundation which brought Jewish and Muslim scholars together to look at interaction between Judaism and Islam on a range of topics. There are also opportunities for dialogue through publications. Sometimes we think only about the spoken word, but in fact publications like World Congress of Faiths' journal *Inter Religious Insight* and online forums are also key places for dialogue.

### iv) Dialogue on social issues

Some inter faith dialogues arise out of joint action by different faiths on issues such as the environment (a theme which is being explored in a workshop later today) or

regeneration. Blackpool Faith Forum, for example, have produced a very powerful reflection from their faith perspectives on the regeneration of their town. And there are an increasing number of inter faith dialogues rooted also in concern for international peace and justice issues: through national bodies such as Religions for Peace (UK) and One World Week.

While the kinds of dialogues I have spoken about to this point are mainly between faiths, there is also, increasingly, dialogue between faiths and secular agencies such as the Government or other public bodies about social issues. This is not ‘inter faith’ dialogue but I think it should be considered under our heading of ‘People of Faith in Dialogue’. There is often deep and serious dialogue between religious participants in social processes and those within Government or other public bodies with which they are dealing (who may or may not themselves be religious) and this brings its own learning for all involved. This may be, at a national level, in the context of such bodies as the Faith Communities Consultative Council of the Department for Communities and Local Government or the meeting of Scottish faith leaders with the First Minister or that of the Inter Faith Forum of the Welsh Assembly. At local level it may be through Faith Forums or Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) faith subgroups engaging with the local authority and LSP or through any number of interactions with local partnerships.

I have sketched out briefly some of the kinds of dialogue going on and there is much more that could be said – for example about dialogue in the classroom and about work to develop skills and resources for dialogue by bodies such as St Ethelburga’s (and Justine Huxley will be leading a workshop later today); dialogue in public contexts – often through the media – (about which Rev Aled Edwards will be talking in another workshop). But time does not permit further reflection.

### **c) Current challenges and questions**

I have spoken about some of the sorts of dialogues that are happening. And they are just a few. But I’d like to say something also about some of the current complexities and challenges.

As some of you may recall, at the Network’s National Meeting last July, in the context of reflections on the Network’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, participants looked at the rapidly changing inter faith landscape of the UK. Their discussions underlined the extent to which the issues and the ‘players’ in every sector of inter faith engagement are shifting and evolving. This has only become more pronounced in the last twelve months:

- with a variety of new initiatives coming into existence;
- concerns on the part of faiths other than Abrahamic about the risk of their traditions being ignored or marginalised in high profile dialogue and funding contexts;
- the stepping up of debate about how ‘non-religious’ belief groups are reflected in patterns of inter faith dialogue and in consultation by central and local Government on policy and service delivery issues;

- discussion about the pattern of faith communities and belief groups (including less mainstream ones) which are, or could be, formally involved in inter faith dialogue at local, regional and national level;
- the rise of multiple initiatives in certain areas of inter faith work;
- faith communities keen to play an active role in public life but often over extended and finding it hard to respond to the growing weight of consultation at the same time as maintaining their primary functions;
- and, of course, the ever increasing focus from Government with a new framework for inter faith dialogue and social action on the horizon. The increasing engagement by Government brings undeniable benefits but equally it will be important for faith communities and inter faith organisations to ensure that they continue to address their own agendas at the same time as working together with Government on its agenda.

### Planned 'Soundings' Programme

The Inter Faith Network for the UK works on a continual basis to keep up to date with developments and to discuss these with its members: both in terms of the impact of these on their work but also in terms of the overall pattern of the work and membership of the Network. The Network's 'category' meetings for different types of member body and its Executive Committee and National meetings do provide an opportunity to take stock of these issues but the Executive Committee feel that there is a need for more in depth discussion of them and, following consultation with member bodies last Autumn, is initiating a programme of 'Soundings' meetings which will look at a range of current key issues in inter faith dialogue.

It is planned that across a two year period from autumn 2008 to summer 2010, the Network will hold a series of by invitation consultative meetings and seminars to look at particular issues in greater depth. These will help inform the Network's own work and development but they will also have a wider value – giving participants an opportunity to talk through some of the issues affecting their organisations directly and to share good practice and discuss potentially fruitful areas of joint work. In each case there will be careful consultation with the member category in question about the nature of the event and findings from the 'sounding' meetings will be fed back into the Network's Committee and AGM processes. In some cases, but not necessarily all, a report or other publication may emerge from the event.

The first of the Soundings events will focus on young people and inter faith dialogue. A number of bodies in membership of the Inter Faith Network are key players in this field, singly or in partnership. There are also an increasing range of bodies which are secular in basis but which, alongside broader inter cultural work, are also exploring inter faith work with young people. A planning group work will be formed to work towards a day conference on opportunities, challenges, good practice and resources with presentations across a broad spectrum, including youth inter faith activity in schools and in further education and higher education contexts, as well as on an inter community basis.

Linked to the Soundings series will be another day event, currently under discussion with the National Association of SACREs, to look at fruitful joint working between local SACREs and local inter faith bodies on developing young people's inter faith initiatives and the potential for SACREs and local inter faith organisations to work in

cooperation on projects designed to increase awareness about religious traditions in the area.

Planned for Spring/Summer 2009 is a meeting on 'Patterns of engagement in dialogue: some current issues'. The question of the range and pattern of traditions or communities which participate in dialogues, or are engaged regularly in public consultation, is an increasingly complex one and indeed this varies from place to place and context to context. This meeting will be a chance to reflect on some of the factors which can shape the pattern of engagement and also to hear about some dialogues which are perhaps less well known than others, for example involving traditions such as Confucians, Pagans, Rastafarians or Taoists. There will be an opportunity to consider how the Network itself best relates to these wider patterns and to learn how these issues are being handled in other countries.

Also under discussion are meetings looking at a number of other topics such as:

- the development of bilateral dialogues in the UK;
- resources and skills for inter faith dialogue;
- women and inter faith activity;
- dialogue between religious groups and wider society and between the 'religious' and 'non-religious';
- the opportunities and challenges of devolution for faith communities and inter faith working;
- academic engagement in inter faith issues.

These are all issues flagged up by those working within the bodies which the Network links in membership. They reflect your experiences and concerns. And this is vital because the Network is its member bodies. Together we are working to strengthen and deepen dialogue at every level in society.

The Soundings programme is part of our working together to create the strongest pattern possible of inter faith dialogue which can underpin and create a positive, respectful society – one which builds on the remarkable achievements to date and the kinds of dialogue which I sketch out at the outset of my presentation and develops this in new and powerful ways. I look forward very much to working with all of you here and all the Network's member bodies on this as this programme is developed.

**Bishop Tom Butler:**

Thank you Harriet. And you will see from your programme that we have a slot of time towards the end of the morning for more general discussion.

**There followed a short question period:**

**John Tilbury (Leeds Faiths Forum):**

It would be good to have a list of the initiatives in the 'Soundings' programme for our forum committees.

**Dr Harriet Crabtree:**

There was a Network Circular sent out earlier on the initial plans for this programme and a chance for member bodies to offer their suggestions for it. We will certainly be letting members have further details.

**John Murray (Nottingham Inter Faith Council):**

I am very interested in the youth Soundings event, Harriet. We are at present forming a youth initiative with a vision for young people in inter faith in Nottingham and I think it is important that we link up. We would like to feed into the Soundings meeting and for you to be aware of what is going on around the network.

**Dr Harriet Crabtree:**

It is very good to hear about the Nottingham initiative. Once the Soundings youth focused meeting planning group gets under way there will be a very careful reconnoitring to discover other projects so that information can be shared.

**John Murray (Nottingham Inter Faith Council):**

I think that is important to say that we are not trying to reinvent the wheel. We are just trying to network and link all the work that is going on among young people of different faiths around the city already. There is a lot of interest among secular youth organisations in what we are doing.

**Dr Harriet Crabtree:**

It is very interesting that the Nottingham Inter Faith Council is playing this role. In a number of cities the inter faith structures are playing a particularly strong role on the youth front. There are a number of others here today who are also doing so. I think this is one of the reasons that it is going to be particularly fruitful to have a chance to hear about all the different initiatives that are under way and how you are handling them. Thank you.

## DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE

**Dr Nawal K Prinja, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK) and Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK**

### **Bishop Tom Butler:**

We now have three presentations under the title 'Dimensions of Dialogue' which will be exploring a number of aspects of dialogue. The first of our speakers is Dr Nawal Prinja, a Co-Chair of the Inter Faith Network. He is a senior figure in the Hindu community and a writer on Hinduism and he is involved on behalf of the Hindu community in a range of dialogues. When he is not doing that, he is criss-crossing the world for his job with nuclear power development - so he is a busy man! He offers a personal reflection on why dialogue matters and how it is shaped and on the ways in which the Hindu community has contributed to this process and that this process has been of value to it.

### **Dr Nawal K Prinja:**

When Harriet Crabtree asked me to talk about the Hindu perspective on dialogue I remembered reading about an event which took place over 100 years ago – the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. It was a kind of international inter faith event. But imagine the world over 100 years ago. You can imagine the political setting at that time. Then inter faith dialogue was mostly between the Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths. Representation from nearly one sixth of the humanity was missing. Someone among the organising committee realised the mistake and they did a quick fix. There was a young Swami around in Chicago at that time and they said “Ah, we can get him to say something about Hinduism”. That young Swami was Swami Vivekananda. Imagine the situation he was in; imagine the world at that time – a colonial world divided between the rulers and the ruled. Here was this young Swami, a *fakir* from a colony, and he was being asked to address a dialogue that had to start between the ruler and the ruled; between a master and a slave. Those who play cricket would say “Well, that young man was batting on a very sticky wicket”! He had a challenge. There were big barriers for that dialogue to even start. What was he to do? Was he going to stand up and complain about being marginalised or isolated? He resolved that situation in three simple opening words: ‘Brothers and Sisters’. In those three words he enunciated the whole concept of dialogue which Hindus have of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* – the world is one big family.

So, dear brothers and sisters, I would like to present to you a Hindu view, a Hindu perspective on dialogue. A dialogue is needed, of course, for three main reasons here today in Britain. The first, as Harriet mentioned to you, is to understand each other better. Personally, I find that we tend to learn about each other through the media. I think we should learn more about each other directly, by talking to each other. Whether it is the handling of the issue of Shambo the bull or of Hindus wanting open air cremation in the UK, I find flaws in the published statements claiming to explain Hindu views to the general public. Please take it from me as a practising Hindu that

next time you read statements which purport to explain Hinduism, particularly in the English media and newspapers, it is best to take them with a pinch of salt because they may not be correct.

The second reason for having a dialogue is for better cohesion among ourselves. This is one issue on which the Government is very keen and I will talk about it more later.

The third reason, and the most important one, which Harriet also touched upon, is spiritual and political need. It is no good just understanding each other's spirituality, understanding each other's approach towards God, because if you only do that you kind of live in an airy fairy land. You need to understand what actually happens on the ground in terms of practice and of civic engagement. This is enshrined in our Hindu scriptures as well. The most popular scripture is the *Gita*. This tells how there was a conflict between two families as a war broke out between *Kurus* and *Pandus*. The Lord Krishna himself takes over, both as spiritual master and political master. That same message was carried forward even later on by the tenth living Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who in his symbol of *khalsa* had the two swords, known as *piri* and *miri* – spiritual as well as political power. The two have to be balanced and I think a dialogue is needed because when religion enters social societal needs, when religion enters politics, dialogue has to take place.

So, how are we in Britain tackling these issues? In particular, what has been the contribution of British Hindus? I want to mention briefly three or four areas. First of all, Hindu-Christian dialogue. I am very pleased that this dialogue did start a few years ago and is still continuing. There is a Hindu-Christian Forum of which the first meeting was held in Watford under the joint chairmanship of Dr Girdhari Lal Bhan and Revd Canon Dr Andrew Wingate. The reason it started was not so much to do with Britain, but with what was happening elsewhere: global issues which were very sensitive and emotional. Whilst Christians felt that they wanted to share and spread their religion, Hindus felt that this was religious conversion or evangelisation. Whilst Christians felt - and I admire the spirit of service in their tradition - the need to go and help the needy and the poor, some Hindus felt that this was exploitation of poverty for purposes of religious conversion. Whilst Christians felt the needs of the so-called oppressed community, the *Dalit* issue, and related that to the caste issue; Hindus felt that social and political issues were being muddled with religion. Bad societal practices were being used to malign the great Hindu religious tradition. In those circumstances, rather than throw bombshells at each other, what the Hindu and Christian communities in the UK did was to set up a joint group, which together came up with a goodwill statement which addresses these issues head on. That goodwill statement stands till today. If you ever need a copy please do contact us directly or through the Inter Faith Network office and we will be able to supply you with a copy.

Another dialogue initiative in which I have been involved is the Indian-Jewish Association. Just to clarify this is not about Jews who live in India. Perhaps it is better to describe it as a Hindu-Jewish association. It started in London and has opened up branches elsewhere. The one to which I personally belong is in Manchester. Louis Rapaport, here in the audience today, belongs to it as well. It is being renamed the Hindu-Jewish Association. Hindus have looked for some role model of an ethnic minority living in this country. We are great admirers of the way the Jewish community has established itself. They have integrated into the political

system, the social system and the economic system, yet they have retained their religious and cultural identity and without creating too much friction in doing so. That is the pattern that we want our younger generation to follow and this was one of my own reasons for taking part personally in this Hindu-Jewish Association. In Manchester our group holds two very interesting events each year. At a recent one a Jewish and a Hindu family came together and it was called 'The Cohens meet the Kumars'. I was the one that had to crack the jokes for the Kumars! Seminars are also held together with the Manchester Metropolitan University. I believe one is planned for October with scientists from the Hindu and Jewish traditions as speakers. Normally there is a speaker from each community who offers their views.

Another initiative in which I am involved is a local inter faith organisation that I helped start in Altrincham where I live, the Altrincham Inter Faith Group. This has a lot of activities. On the last occasion members took part in the Lord Mayor's parade and I think their float won the first prize. They also hold 'family circles' where families of different religious backgrounds come together and meet for a meal or a social evening. They also organise a picnic and a cultural programme. There is always a particular theme for the cultural programme. Last year the theme was marriage. I remember my son played the role of myself as the father who decides to whom he should get married. There can be a light hearted approach to looking at each other's traditions, but whatever you do in dialogue, important issues cannot be left aside; they have to be tackled, but tackled with sensitivity. That is really what it is about.

Finally, I want to mention the need to have dialogue with the Government and with educational institutions. There has already been a reference to the feeling that when these inter faith dialogues take place they need to cover all the major faiths. There is some concern on the part of the *dharmic* faiths - by which I mean Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism - that they are perhaps not getting their full share of these institutional dialogues, nor of Government funding initiatives compared to Abrahamic initiatives.

Finally, I just want to close by thanking the Inter Faith Network for giving me the chance to share these views. As Bishop Tom was saying, I am busy with work and I have been travelling around the world a lot recently to Croatia, Lithuania, France, Spain and so on. This morning my kids said to me "Where are you going? To work again?" And I said "I am going to London to relax; I am going to be with a lot of good people."

**There then followed a short question period:**

**Mehri Niknam (Joseph Inter Faith Foundation):**

Many thanks for your presentation with which I have no argument. But I have one major question. You spoke at the beginning about religion and politics in dialogue and you made the point that both have important roles and need to engage with each other. The difficulty is that at the moment we are being encouraged, and in many ways pushed, to have a separation of 'church and state'. We are being urged not to bring religion into politics. How do we then make a synergy between what you are saying



and what we are being expected to do? I think all of us who have been involved in that dialogue understand what I am saying. So, I would like some guidance on this.

**Dr Nawal K Prinja:**

I can only say what a Hindu view is on the issue because the specifics of ‘church versus state’ is more an issue with the Church rather than for Hindus. Our scriptures say that you need to live in a society or a country in accordance with what are known as eternal natural laws, *Sanatana Dharma*. There is a need for a body - you can call it government - to regulate how people live and you need laws to which people themselves have to agree and then you need an authority which will make sure that those laws are followed. That is the function of a state. Now, where does religion come into it? The only way that a state and religion can function together is if the principle of what we call the *Sanatana Dharma*, the natural law, is followed. Laws of nature, as you know, are the same for everyone: a fire’s nature is to burn, water’s nature is to flow. Likewise human laws and regulations should have no bias. They have to be fair, democratic and natural. That is the Hindu view on the state and religion.

**Alan Rainer (London Society of Jews and Christians):**

Thank you for your excellent talk. For my doctorate I have for three years been visiting a Sufi group of the Islamic faith, a Hindu Swaminarayan Temple and an Orthodox Synagogue. The way its members have all treated me has just been beautiful. It has underlined for me the wonderful contribution these communities have made to Britain in many ways. In Dr Paul Weller’s 2001 report for the Government on religious discrimination<sup>1</sup>, one of the points that really struck me was that Hindus and Jews treat religion and family as their number one priority and that for Christians it is the seventh priority. You talked about the idea of contribution to society without assimilation. It is interesting that the Chief Rabbi’s definition of holiness is ‘separateness’, which I think has both a good side and a dangerous side. Maybe you could make some comment on that. The third point I would like to mention is that Lord Swaminarayan took on all the elders on the big questions about God and what people thought about God. I think there should be far more open forum debates on these big issues.

**Dr Nawal K Prinja:**

Because of the age and complexity of the Hindu tradition, we are quite used to living with diversity within Hinduism itself. There is so much diversity that if you meet a Hindu today he will explain a matter to you and then tomorrow you will meet another Hindu who expresses diametrically opposite views. That is the diversity to which we Hindus are used. The other point to be made is that within diversity there is always a unity: cows may be of different colours but their milk is always white. It is that kind of unity within diversity that we need to be able to realise.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Weller, A. Feldman and K. Purdem, *Religious Discrimination in England & Wales*, Home Office Research Study 220, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office, London 2001.

## **DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE**

**David Gifford, Chief Executive, Council of Christians and Jews**

**Bishop Tom Butler:**

Now we are to hear from David Gifford who has been the Chief Executive of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) since 2006. CCJ, as you know, is an organisation with a great deal of experience since it was founded in 1942. David will share what CCJ has learned about dialogue and reflect on the wider applicability of this.

**David Gifford:**

As Bishop Tom has said, the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) is one of Britain's oldest national inter faith organisation. We are always told by the London Society of Jews and Christians that they are a good bit older than us! CCJ started in 1942 and people ask whether that was a good time to start. The nation was on rationing and half starved during the last war. We still had concerns about whether there was going to be an invasion, even though historians say that maybe the invasion threat had gone by that time. It seems to me to have been very unusual to start up a national movement in the middle of a war. But it gathered huge momentum from that early start in 1942. In our heyday I believe we had around 75 branches across the country. Where do we find ourselves today as a result of more recent demographic changes? We have about 45 branches of Jews and Christians meeting together.

You have asked me to describe what have we learnt from dialogue over the past 66 years. Looking back, I think I would say a couple of things. First of all, the real pioneers of dialogue have stressed to me that it is not easy. Yet we find the word 'dialogue' tripping off the tongue on television - whether there is going to be a union debate or whether it is going to be about the Churches - 'We are going to have a dialogue about it'. In CCJ we have found that dialogue is not an easy activity. It is in fact a risky business. Do not enter it unless you are prepared for that risk. That is why I often call CCJ's work 'pioneering', because for anyone who is a pioneer, whether in blazing a trail across a new country or in attempting to climb to a new mountain top, there are huge dangers to life and limb.

Dialogue is a risky business and many people enter it too lightly. We have discovered that we need new skills; skills that today people are not too keen to acquire: skills like listening. We all listen, like some of you, I hope, are listening to me right now! But listening skills are few and far between. My experience when I have chaired dialogue situations is that people have been quite keen to tell you their own story, 'Listen to me!' But real dialogue also means listening; not going there with the agenda 'I am going to talk and you are going to listen'. We have found that where dialogue has failed those listening skills have not been there.

At CCJ we have learnt as well that you have to build relationships. That involves meeting regularly. I am very disappointed when I go round the country and find that one or two of the CCJ groups meet only twice a year. I am not so sure you can 'do dialogue' twice a year. I think that you need to spend more time on it than that. If you are going to build a relationship of trust and respect and go beyond tolerance, you have to take time to build that relationship.

We have learned over the years that dialogue cannot have a one-sided agenda. I said that some people come to the dialogue table and say 'I am going to talk and you are going to listen'. Some people say 'I want to talk about this' but it may not be an important issue for the other people around the table. Dialogue means recognising sometimes the agendas that we have are not appropriate.

Dialogue is also a journey, not a destination. That is hugely important. "We have started a dialogue. Right, now we are there!" We started a dialogue 66 years ago and we are certainly not there yet. There is greater understanding and there has been great sacrifice by Jews and Christians in the process of achieving it but we are not there yet. I have just been in Israel at the Annual Meeting of the International Council of Christians and Jews. We were talking about some of the issues relating to Islam around the world today and somebody said "We need to get straight on to the Israel/Palestine issue"; and some people said "Is that the right way to start our dialogue?" Somebody else said, "Take a lesson from CCJ in Great Britain. What did they start with? Did they start with the Holocaust? Did they start with anti-Semitism?" The answer was, "No we did not, as a matter of interest. We did not start with that at all." Someone then said, "Ah yes, you started with Jesus the Jew". "Well, that actually came a bit later." We started where we were. We were not doing what we could not. We started with "Let's meet and talk and share. Show me your *shul*, show me your synagogue, and show me your church. What is that for? What do you eat? What do you do on a Friday? Why do you leave work early? What is that stuff you do around that table with that big cup on a Sunday and little bits of bread?" It started with breaking down misconceptions, not tackling the big issues. It seems to me that this is relevant to dialogue today. Sometimes we try to jump in at the deep end before we can swim.

When we have entered into dialogue over the years we have had to remember that we all come from a particular perspective. We have had to learn that some of us come to the dialogue table or the dialogue room feeling that we are victims. Some of us have come to the dialogue room or the dialogue table feeling that we are full of guilt. And the reality is that is where we are coming from. The dialogue table can be a place where we can be open about those feelings and say why we feel the guilt or why we feel that we are the victim.

Finally, I would say that we have learned more recently that dialogue takes place in a multi faith setting, much more so now than when we started in 1942. The essential nature of what we do is still Jewish-Christian and we guard that theologically and practically in many ways. But we know that we work in our everyday world with Muslims, with Sikhs, with Hindus, with Zoroastrians, with Buddhists and with others. So some of the work that we do on the ground now - particularly our work with university chaplains - does not just include Jews and Christian; it also includes Muslims and Buddhists and Sikhs as well.

What we would say to those who are younger in the inter faith dialogue business is that it is best to go slowly; best to start where you are rather than to start where other people are pushing you to be. We would say it is better to take small steps than to try take the big ones at the beginning.

**There then followed a short question period:**

**Dr Madan Bahl (Arya Pratinidhi Sabha):**

I agree with what you have said about dialogue not being an easy activity: listening, digesting, thinking and implementing what we learn from it.

**Father Phil Sumner (Oldham Interfaith Forum and Oldham's Community Cohesion Advisory Group):**

I like the suggestion, linking back with some of the other two speakers' points as well, of relationships being the most important aspect of inter faith work. I find the word 'dialogue' too cerebral. Both Harriet Crabtree and Dr Prinja talked about the spirituality dimension of dialogue. To me it is 'relationship' and spirituality from which you start. Forget about talking about big issues; allow young people to come together in activities. We took a group of young people to Auschwitz, to Srebrenitsa. They formed a single group together quite naturally and they began to ask each other questions as their time together went on. It is John Paul Lederach's 'community cohesion web': if you can choose the right anchor points then the building of the web will continue naturally. So it is a chemical reaction rather than a physical or structural process. It is very much not cerebral but very much an ordinary relationship.

**David Gifford:**

Thank you for that excellent point. I really agree with that. Sometimes as some of our groups have evolved around the country they have become very cerebral. This worries me considerably. I belong to a CCJ group for my own everyday experiences. We meet regularly but every time we have a speaker who will be a very learned man or woman. This is very stimulating but after it everyone goes home. It is a cerebral meeting and I think that we are missing the very essence of what you are saying. We are missing that relationship where true dialogue, if you will allow me to use the word, really starts.

**Mr Hashim Duale (Leicester Council of Faiths):**

My question is whether we are having dialogue – and dialogue as equals – with the new migrants in our areas. Certainly we are doing so in Leicester. The newcomers have their own background. Are we dialoguing with them or at least listening to them? I also ask what inter faith is doing globally as well as nationwide.

**David Gifford:**

I am not sure how well I can answer your good question. We know very well that in CCJ groups there are always people who have only recently heard about us although we have been going for a long time. To engage new people in the dialogue process goes back to what we have just been speaking about in terms of building relationships. We find that in a lot of churches and in a lot of synagogues the main focus is often

financial, or perhaps declining numbers, as those are real concerns for the communities. For them to start saying, “We need to get into inter faith activity. We need to talk” is a long way down their agenda. Where I have seen growth has been where there has been a group of Jews and Christians meeting together, building relationships in lively meetings. That in itself has created a magnet for others to come in and see the richness that we bring to one another. If there is one goal that I would commend to any kind of inter faith interaction, it is that no one who enters it leaves it poorer. You will leave an inter faith dialogue or inter faith relationship much richer than when you entered.

## **DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE**

**Sughra Ahmed, Adviser, Women in Faith and Research Fellow, Islamic Foundation**

**Bishop Tom Butler:**

Now we are to hear from Sughra Ahmed, who is the Adviser to Women in Faith and she is a Research Fellow at the Islamic Foundation. She will be reflecting from her experiences on the importance of bringing the so-called 'less heard' voices of women and young people to the fore in inter faith dialogue.

**Sughra Ahmed:**

I want to share with you the experience of creating and co-ordinating the Women in Faith course and subsequent network and also let you know about the research on young people that we are currently doing at the Islamic Foundation.

In 2007 the Policy Research Centre of the Islamic Foundation launched a unique network called 'Women in Faith', as many of you will already know, and indeed some of you were present at the launch of this network. This was the culmination of a year long course from which 40 women – 40 Muslim women - across the country graduated. Let me share with you briefly why we chose to focus our efforts on Muslim women in inter faith engagement and I will then explain what the course consisted of and some of the work that is being done now as a direct result of that course.

As an organisation, as well as on a personal level, we at the Islamic Foundation fervently believe in inter faith activity as a means to increase awareness, break down barriers and as a vehicle to bridge the gaps within and across communities. Through our experiences in this field we realised that there is a serious lack of women, particularly Muslim women, who are involved in such work. So we made a strategic decision to try to fill this gap through the 'Women in Faith' course, which was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) through the Community Development Foundation (CDF). After the selection process and a commitment by the women to attend 6 residential weekends over 8 months (and - going back to David Gifford's point - meeting regularly and creating that bond is actually one of the most important elements in engaging any group of people and creating any element of inter faith work), I set about organising the programme for this course with the Advisory Board. In essence it involved training and learning in three key strands. The first of these was faith and faith communities in the UK. This involved learning about the main religions and also about humanism and secularism. Each weekend we also visited a place of worship relevant to that particular faith and in this respect we were quite fortunate to be located in Markfield, which is in Leicestershire, and also very fortunate to be able to take advantage of some of the long standing relationships between the Islamic Foundation and other faith communities in Leicestershire. Synagogues, churches and the like were very open to

welcoming us in their place of worship and explaining to us what exactly happened within that space. I think that was because of the relationships we had in place.

The second strand involved learning about issues relating to Muslims in Britain as well as the wider communities in Britain. The feedback from the participants reflected just how important it was to learn about concepts such as identity and about the existing structures they then can tap into in the world of inter faith activity. So we here today represent many different organisations in inter faith capacities. Many people who actually start their journey in inter faith understanding are not aware of just what is already out there and run the risk of either replicating or feeling quite defeated by the lack of support that there may be out there. So one of the modules actually focussed on inter faith structures within the UK from the grass roots level all the way to umbrella body organisations like the Inter Faith Network for the UK. Finally, each weekend included a lengthy training session on developing personal and social skills such as listening and speaking; understanding personality types; and media training. All of these helped tremendously in confidence building and creating a sense of self-esteem. The idea here was all these three strands would complement one another so we would not have the sort of knowledge of the faith communities and the faith structures in isolation of confidence and self-esteem - an area which, particularly in reference to women, I think it is important to focus on. It was important for us to include that in the training.

The aim now is to encourage Muslim women to engage in inter faith activities through the network called 'Women in Faith'. Its unique factor is that presently it is for Muslim women across the country and is actually led by Muslim women also. We believe that this is a women who are involved and their projects; enhancing inter faith work at grass roots level by direct involvement; and providing training and information on inter faith skills and projects. Again, I would like to emphasise David Gifford's point - I was very pleased to hear in his presentation that it is about starting small, starting with familiarity; not necessarily thinking "Well, we are going to launch a conference, we are going to have a website." These kinds of ideas were proposed by the women in the network, especially the younger women who were very idealistic and very aspirational, which was great to see. But it is important to start small so that you are able to grow steadily and therefore have a greater chance of longevity. It was very useful to have a diverse mix in the Advisory Board for the course. Their insights allowed us to create a broad ranging course which did not seek to replicate existing courses. Likewise the 'Women in Faith Network' does not replicate or duplicate existing networks or projects. Instead the members are engaging in existing groups, existing projects, dialogue groups that are already out there and have been for many years. I know in Leicester we have several dialogue groups that have been going for many years. So the idea is that these women can engage in those groups, in the existing projects, to provide strength and support and manpower which we often complain that we do not have enough of.

I am pleased to have been able to share with you some of the successes of the 'Women in Faith Network'. Many of the women involved in this are actually engaged in inter faith activities at grass roots and also regional level and I am very proud of that. I am very proud of the fact that these women committed their 6 weekends over a year and came to the Islamic Foundation to participate in this course. But, of course, every course and every project has its challenges and I would be naïve

to stand here and share with you the successes without some of the challenges that we have learnt from.

We have learned many lessons. Muslim women are often criticised by other people for failing to engage in initiatives which promote cohesive communities. The 'Women in Faith' members agree that the current level of participation across the country needs to be increased. However, they shared their thoughts on why more women would like to get involved but feel that they actually cannot. These reasons point to issues such as lacking in self-confidence, for example maybe they have been out of the work environment for a long period of time and that is coupled with a low sense of self-esteem. Many women feel at grassroots level that there has got to be somebody out there that is better than them – "Surely I am not the only person that can sort of get involved in this. What do I have to offer?" This kind of comment was very common at the beginning of the course but I am happy to say they did decrease as the course went on. These women feel that others are far more able. These feelings are so strong that they prevent them from participating in local inter faith projects. Other reasons include a need for greater support by way of up-skilling and training on faith related subjects as well as aspects such as public speaking.

I remember some of the women at the beginning of the course were quite reluctant to question the presenters that came. Each weekend we would have one or two people from a particular faith community, so when it came to learning about Hinduism we asked a couple of people to come in from the Hindu community. We did not believe that relaying information about other faith communities was doing that religion justice so we asked the people from that community to come and talk to the women. There was a reluctance to ask questions and in private when we discussed this, they said "You never know whether you are going to be politically correct. I may say something that offends somebody." And it is these kinds of anxieties that are often the barrier to learning and getting to know one another. As the course went on we realised that we feel much more confident when armed with politically correct terminology when speaking with people who are familiar to us, but this then creates barriers in engaging with others.

However, we found that despite providing all of these aspects in the 'Women in Faith' training course, we had to consider other challenges also that many women across the country find it difficult to overcome. These include quality childcare because it is very important that whilst they are learning their children are being looked after and are also learning. So we have put a syllabus together for the young people that would be coming, for very small children, so that they can be engaged in learning activities and making things for their parents. It then makes the women feel more relaxed and able to learn better. Alongside childcare we also try to provide support in other ways, for example travel assistance - pairing people up so that they can travel together, making sure that they are not travelling late at night. These may sound like small details, but when you are creating a course and hoping to launch a network at the end, they are very important in gaining the trust of the women and allowing them to bond with one another. Generally through building relationships with the ladies when they applied for the course, a little encouragement went a long way. The personal touch at times made the difference even as to whether someone was able to attend the course or not. For example, a participant from Slough rang me. On paper she was fantastic - a perfect candidate for the 'Women in Faith' course and she was very eager to



participate. She was about to decline her place on the course because she had never driven on the motorway and she could not see herself driving up and down 6 weekends in 8 months. It was quite a frightening prospect for her, especially with a child in the car. So we had a long chat on the phone and a couple of weeks later when we started the course, she walked into the hall beaming and felt like she had already achieved something before even embarking on the course. She came and gave me a great big hug and said 'I would never have been able to drive on the motorway if you had not encouraged me'. I did not realise that I had been encouraging her, but the fact that we took time to personally engage with each and every woman on the course, made them feel like human beings rather than statistics on a document.

This is only a snapshot of the course and its participants and the 'Women in Faith Network' and I hope I have done the women justice. Just as voices of women are often less heard within our communities and wider society, so too are those of young people. We are going to have a detailed presentation this afternoon by speakers who are far more able to speak about the subject than I. But just before I finish I would like to share with you a research project that I am currently in the process of completing on young Muslims, particularly when it has an inter faith dimension examining the issues that young people face across the Abrahamic faith communities.

The research on young people proposes to map views and encourage a more open engagement with young Muslims especially and has an insight from Christian and Jewish youth workers particularly. One of the aims of this research is to open up a wider understanding of young people and perhaps open the way for collaborative work about young people across many faith communities and beyond. I think there is so much more we need to learn about young people because often we hear of them in negative terms and they are stereotyped in the media. Certainly within our own community we are guilty of stereotyping young people as being incapable of really taking hold of the reins and really stepping into the shoes of leadership. But I am pleased to say that often young people prove us wrong. So I think there is much more scope for research and reflection in this area. The quotations that we include in the research are actually taken from young people and also youth workers who work directly with young people across the country. They have been selected from young people to provide appropriate examples of their opinions and their feelings on topics such as education, religious and non-religious identity, belonging and citizenship, the media, leadership and role models and inter-generational gaps as well as discrimination, delinquency and policing - a wide range of issues but hopefully the report will be able to reflect exactly how young people are feeling about those issues and why most importantly. The recommendations taken from the young people then enable them to have a voice in the wider community proposing solutions for the situation and challenges that they encounter. The research will be published by the Policy Research Centre later this year.

**There then followed a short question period:**

**Hon Barnabas Leith (Baha'i Community of the UK):**

Thank you, Sughra, for a wonderful, very encouraging presentation. There are a couple of points that I found particularly important, 'meta-issues', if you will. One was the importance of encouragement: encouraging people who are not already

engaged to become engaged and giving them the means to be so. The other is the value of what we might call ‘accompaniment’, going with people, as it were, on their journey. We may have already have started the journey but others want to come with us and we want to invite other people. It seems that your course and the way you have approached it very much took those points to heart and made them important features.

**Sughra Ahmed:**

Thank you very much. That is very kind. One of the key aspects to the course was this process of engagement and genuinely making the participants feel that they were important, which to the Islamic Foundation they were. For all the funding in the world and all the ideas involved in developing a course, we cannot actually do it without the participants. That is what we felt would be the added value in this course.

Hashim Duale from Leicester referred earlier to the newer migrants in our communities. That was one of the challenges that we faced. We had a very broad grouping of women on the course from all over the country with ages from 18 to over 60 and a broad range of backgrounds as well. So we had the convert community, the born Muslim community, the Shia, the Sunni and we had different ethnicities within that. Unfortunately, (and I personally feel very strongly about this), two years ago we were not able to get a broader mix of communities and should we ever be in a position to repeat a course like this, those are points that we would learn from.

**Ruth Tetlow (Birmingham Faith Encounter Programme and Birmingham Council of Faiths):**

I too found your description of the course very interesting, not least because it echoes quite closely the ‘faith guiding’ course that we have developed in Birmingham. The same or very similar three elements are involved. We have run a course now which has trained as ‘faith guides’ 15 people from 7 different religious backgrounds - so it is a multi faith course which is different from yours. It is different also in having men and women together on it. The three elements of our course were: (1) faith knowledge, ie knowledge of the participant’s own faith; (2) knowledge and understanding of, and sensitivity to, other people’s faiths (and in our multi faith group a lot of learning went on between its members interacting with each other); and then (3) the growth in personal confidence and skills that you mentioned, which we incorporated very much because we were training people to be guides to their places of worship. The course was accredited by the Institute of Tourist Guiding so we had blue badge guides who offered training in presentation and guiding skills. So it really interested me a great deal to see the parallels between our two courses. Our course was 3 hours per week (in an evening) for 12 weeks, plus a few Saturdays. I would just like to ask how was your course accredited?

**Sughra Ahmed:**

In terms of accreditation we had a ceremony at the end where we provided the women with certificates from the Islamic Foundation. The Islamic Foundation has a very long and rich history, thanks to one or two key personnel in the field of inter faith work, and we decided that we wanted to accredit the participants ourselves. In terms of getting a formal qualification, they are not qualified in the way you describe the participants on your course were as faith guides. The idea is that the women on our course absorb themselves in all sorts of inter faith type activities. So it may well be

that they are not in positions of leadership within their places of worship, but within their community they get involved with, certainly, things like mother and toddler groups. I do not want to stereotype the role of women just to activities with young people and children. But that is an area that is very important to them and thriving. But there are other opportunities - for example where new shopping centres are being built proposing that there is a small place of worship for all faith communities. Civil society does not necessarily think of this without the intervention of dialogue meetings. Also one of two of the younger participants have gone on to develop their own organisations; one is called Youth Wise in Leicester, which is a youth organisation for people of all faiths and none and is doing very well. Another participant is developing a guide to religious education for FOSIS, which is the Federation of Student Islamic Societies – a very young participant who took it upon herself to deliver this. There are women, as I mentioned in the presentation, who are very keen to get involved in this kind of work, but this requires capacity building, giving them the resources that they need in order to be able to do this work. I would make the same point about young people. It is about giving them the self confidence to enable them to do this work. So I think there is much room for growth in this area. We certainly wanted to repeat this project, but were unable to do so because of lack of funding. The fact that different organisations around the country and in different cities are able to invest in faith communities is a great way of us actually sustaining the experiences that we have gone through in capacity building and in our own community.

## **‘ON THE SPOT’ DIALOGUE AND PLENARY DISCUSSION**

### **Bishop Tom Butler:**

Now it is over to you. First of all 10 minutes speaking with your neighbour or those behind you, perhaps sharing what particularly interested you in what you heard this morning or with which you wanted to argue, perhaps also discussing what issues are of particular concern to you. At the end of 10 minutes or so I shall ask for contributions or comments from the floor, not necessarily addressed to particular speakers, but just general comments.

### **Plenary discussion**

#### **Inderjit Singh Bhogal (Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum):**

I have a question following on from Sughra Ahmed’s presentation, by which I was very impressed, and Ruth Tetlow’s question to her about accreditation. I am conscious of a lot of inter faith courses which are developing and inter faith groups and regional faith forums are quite involved in those.

In the Yorkshire and Humberside Forum we work with the Regional Churches Commission and run a course called ‘Faith Matters’ which is now being used by local authorities, National Offender Management Schemes, prisons and so on and we are beginning to get into an important conversation with local universities on validating ‘Faith Matters’. I wonder what is happening in other parts of the country and whether we should not all be getting into conversation with our local universities about the validation of some of these remarkable courses which are now being developed. From the perspective of universities with their agenda of widening participation, this is one way of widening the participation of all the faith communities we represent in increasing understanding. While I am conscious that we do not want dialogue to be all cerebral and it has to happen at different levels, this is an important level.

### **Bishop Tom Butler:**

Thank you. It is a growth industry and, as you say, universities and colleges are quite eager to participate by validating that kind of work.

#### **Rev Alan Bayes (Inter Faith Council for Wales):**

Following on from the last comment, we have recently been invited in Swansea by the university to engage in a globalisation and internationalisation programme with the students. They have come to Swansea Faiths Forum to try to engage their students in wider inter faith work which is very exciting. Also, we recently went through a very interesting report that has been produced on inter faith work in higher education and worked together with the university to build on the points in it. So there has been local engagement in our area which hopefully will be of interest to others.

**Bishop Tom Butler:**

Yes, it is a question really of promoting dialogue at every level, with the people next door on a very 'this is what we do' level, but also the more formal dialogue and validation, as you say.

**Cynthia Capey (Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource):**

Picking up two points about the level of dialogue, I was concerned at the suggestion that conversations have to be kept at a gentle level when you start - because the world is not like that!. This includes references to the problems faced by migrant workers and the desperate situation of asylum seekers and refugees. Also I do not think we can leave issues like Israel and Palestine, for example, alone - because these issues around the world affect the whole of our lives. I think we have actually got to pick them up and go into them despite the pain that is going to ensue.

**Bishop Tom Butler:**

This is a sensitive issue. I think what was being said was that you cannot expect a local group in the first two hours they meet to solve problems from other parts of the world that people have been wrestling with for decades. On the other hand, you are quite right that we cannot ignore issues from around the world because they do impinge upon our lives. The question is how do you handle those without causing problems for the relationships between ourselves and those with whom we are in dialogue.

**Hon Barnabas Leith (Baha'i Community of the UK):**

I happen to chair a group called the Religion and Belief Consultative Group on Equality, Diversity and Human Rights. The group comprises not only representatives of the major faith communities but also of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society - an unlikely mix one might think, but it does work. I think the point about building relationships is absolutely crucial. The group has been at work for about three years now and despite the extraordinary diversity of views and opinions within it, (and it is not just between the religious and the non religious but also within the different traditions and different faiths that are represented there), we actually manage to work together. There is a fellow feeling, if you will, that operates at a human level. I think that is crucial. The group has evolved and developed over the time we have been together. People are now able to speak quite frankly, and in often quite challenging ways, about issues of concern that are of public domain - issues to do with equality and diversity - and yet are able to be heard and to discuss without the group falling to bits. I keep waiting for the big challenge to come that may pull it to bits! But at the moment it works. Relationships, it seems to me, are absolutely fundamental.

**Anula Beckett (Bristol Inter Faith Group):**

I have been involved in inter faith activities for a very long time now. There is certainly no reduction in the work we have to do and there have been a wonderful lot of initiatives mentioned from all parts of the country and from all sorts of organisations. But I have not heard the word 'prayer' mentioned so far today. Somehow in all this activity people find it very difficult to pray together across faiths. But it has been my experience that it is wonderful to do so. It underpins so much. I wonder with all that we can do, and there is plenty of it, whether somehow we need to weave into everything we do a prayerful centre and in that prayerfulness to develop

discernment as to what we as individuals can do, what our local areas can cope with, what individuals can cope with, and make prayer central. I wish there were more occasions when we meet that we pray together, maybe praying first.

**Swadeka Ahsun (World Congress of Faiths):**

I am from London but I want to offer a comment about activities at an international level. I was privileged to travel to Rome to a Vatican meeting on the subject of engaging youth in dialogue around the world. Young people came from all around the world from various religions and countries to take part in discussion on the subject of dialogue. On the point just made about space for prayer, whilst we were in Rome we were all given spaces for our prayers according to our needs.

**Malcolm Deboo (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe):**

Just to take up the point regarding inter faith dialogue in relation to international matters. From my personal experience of dialogue, I think the person who is leading it needs to have certain skills of persuasion at times. This can be very challenging. Often it is the case that without these skills, when difficult issues come up and when suddenly there is a strong reaction from a member of another faith, the whole group can come apart. I think the person leading the group needs to have necessary skills, and to be trained in them, to hold a group together. We all know, religion does not have frontiers, therefore I think there are times when members of local groups can also develop a sense of what they have in common through dealing together with local matters. To give a classic example, say, working on recycling schemes in the neighbourhood or a neighbourhood playscheme. Sometimes trust can be built up on matters of this kind on a small and local basis as distinct from the larger issues which I know affect us all. Trust can be built up on these local matters which are of interest to all of us.

## **DIALOGUE ON THE MENU**

**Stella Opoku-Owusu, Local and Regional Inter Faith Project Officer,  
Inter Faith Network for the UK**

### **Bishop Tom Butler:**

We have just one other piece of input before lunch and very appropriately Stella Opoku-Owusu the Local and Regional Inter Faith Project Officer who is going to look at how a number of local and regional initiatives have been encouraging fellowship over food and developing what some call 'dialogues as you dine'.

### **Stella Opoku-Owusu:**

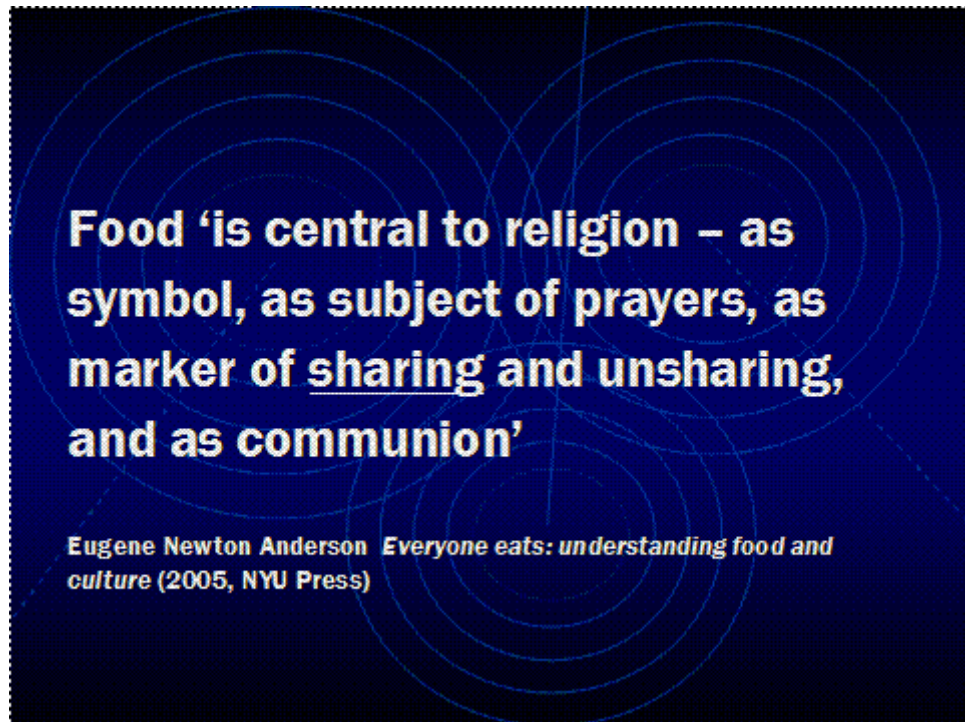
My name is Stella Opoku-Owusu and I am a Project Officer for the Inter Faith Network. My work involves supporting local and regional inter faith initiatives. I would like to present to you 'Dialogue on the Menu'. I plan to give you a taster of how a number of local and regional initiatives have been encouraging fellowship over food and developing 'dialogues as they dine'. Thank you to everyone who sent me stories and photographs and contributed to this presentation.



I am going to talk firstly about the relationship between food and faith. Secondly, I will be talking about how food is used in an inter faith context in a variety of ways. These will include how food is used for social and cultural purposes, some with the aim of encouraging interaction in an informal setting, celebrating diverse cultures or building community cohesion. I will also look at how inter faith initiatives use food

in a more formal and educational way to encourage dialogue and interaction, or to encourage learning about diverse communities.

So let me start with some reflections on the relationship between food and faith. Food is one of the most basic and ‘universal’ human concerns. Eugene Newton Anderson wrote a book called ‘Everyone eats – understanding food and culture’ (2005, NYU Press).



In it he says that food “is central to religion – as symbol, as subject of prayers, as markers of sharing and unsharing, and as communion”. And he notes that “It is food sharing, not solely dogma and creed, that unites them all.”

A number of faiths have particular dietary requirements and traditions, such as Islamic halal laws, the strict vegetarianism of Jains, or the kosher rule, widely observed by Jews, but with differing interpretations. And faiths often have traditions of eating particular foods at particular times of the year - for example eating dairy products during the Jewish festival of Shavuot, or Christians’ celebration of Christmas with a special meal, such as a roast turkey.

As Zaki Cooper says in a recent article in *The Guardian*, it is easy to assume that these strict rules governing what people of faith can and cannot eat are a barrier to good inter faith relations. On the contrary, however, many inter faith initiatives use food as an essential part of their activities to encourage dialogue and networking.

Local and regional inter faith organisations are involved in a range of activities including shared meals. The word ‘sharing’, I believe, underscores the act of encouraging fellowship and dialogue over food. The success of a shared meal within an inter faith context lies to a high degree in the careful preparation of it. At the Inter Faith Network, we have a set of guidelines for catering purposes that take into



consideration the different dietary requirements ensuring that each faith community is catered for adequately.

The act of encouraging fellowship over food is possibly one of the most popular activities shared by all inter faith initiatives. The question is why? And how does it facilitate the aims of inter faith work? Well, food plays an important function in local and regional inter faith initiatives and these could be social, cultural or educational functions.

I would like to begin with the social and cultural examples.

Eating and sharing food together is both a social pleasure and a way of learning about different traditions and cultures. There are many mouthwatering examples here. I will start with the barbecues and picnics which seem to be a common feature for most inter faith organisations. These events not only bring together members of inter faith organisations, but are also an opportunity to extend the gathering to members' families including children and the elderly.



On this slide, we see images of picnics held by Leeds Concord in the 1990s and in 2006, and a picnic held by Altrincham Inter Faith Group.



This next one here is a more recent one held by Redbridge Faith Forum. These are no ordinary barbecues – the various dietary requirements are taken into consideration. As you can see, it's all about the food on the grill, and of course the healthier option!

Now if you wonder what barbecues of this kind can achieve, here are some feedback comments from participants at the Redbridge Faith Forum's barbecue that spell out the achievement as they see it.

This is what the secretary of the Redbridge Faith Forum had to say:

- **"In a world that is dominated by news of race crimes, teenage gun and knife murders, and religious intolerance, the Redbridge Faith Forum BBQ was a welcome sign of the harmony and unity that exists between diverse ethnic and religious communities. At this event, friendships were forged, ideologies discussed in a relaxed environment and a genuine bonding took place which will not only enhance future joint projects but will also contribute to better understanding and respect."** (Secretary of Redbridge Faith Forum)
- **"Sometimes it just takes great food and great company to help us appreciate the core human values we have in common"** (Muslim Participant at Redbridge Faith Forum Barbecue)

Food is used to celebrate diverse cultures and in some cases even as a celebration of itself. Over the last 3 years Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum (YHFF) have organised an annual food festival in which people of different faiths and beliefs are invited to participate.

According to YHFF, the diversity of the Yorkshire and Humber region and its cultures is reflected in food. At the festival, food and hospitality stories from all faiths abound.



Here are several photos on the slide that demonstrate this celebration and diversity.

According to YHFF, the food festival does more than bring people together to share food. "It provides an opportunity for us to share these stories and our distinctive cuisines with each other with pride, and learn from each other."



A Ceilidh and a meal in  
celebration of  
'Our Sacred Earth'

Faiths Together  
(Skye and Lochalsh)

This slide, showing another celebration of culture, is a ceilidh and meal organized by Faiths Together (Skye and Lochalsh) in celebration of 'Our Sacred Earth'

Celebrating cultural festivals using food is another way of celebrating diversity and building community cohesion.



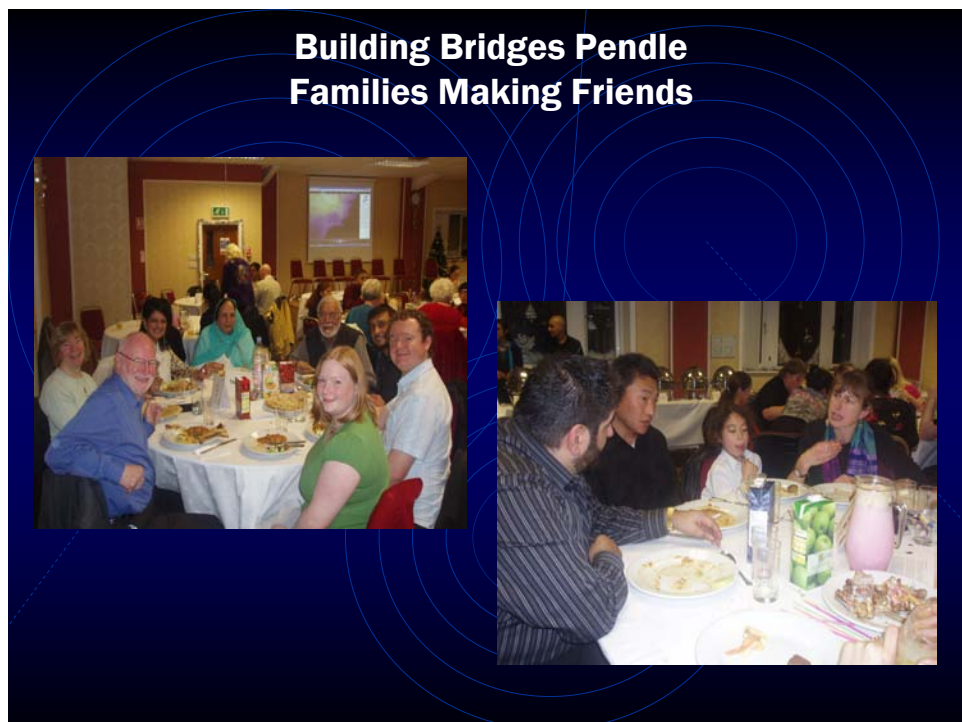
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum  
Chinese New Year 2006

This slide shows a Chinese New Year celebration organised by Coventry Multi-Faith Forum in 2006.



There are other creative food-focused inter faith initiatives all aimed at encouraging interaction and building community cohesion, such as one organised by Hafla, a London-based organisation creating cultural events, celebrating a vision of peace and prosperity in the Middle East. In association with Fertile Ground, Psychosemitic and St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, it organised 'Cooking from the Heart', a celebration of food and culture from across the Middle East. The aim was to bring different people together through the sharing of food and create collaborations between cultures and faiths of Arabic, Muslim and Jewish traditions.

Whereas in some cases food is an accompaniment to inter faith initiatives, such as those mentioned above, other inter faith initiatives draw on its bonding nature, in a more proactive way, to encourage more dialogue and interaction between members.



One such example is the Families Making Friends Event where Building Bridges Pendle has used food in a creative way to encourage interaction not only between members but between their families. The first project in 2006 saw twenty families come together to enjoy a three-course meal funded by Building Bridges Pendle on one condition - that families would invite each other into their homes in order to continue the process of building their friendships and learning more about each other. At the event families are paired together on round tables based on their race and faith backgrounds. Over the course of the evening they take part in fun games which encourage interaction and discussion.

Examples of subsequent meetings, to meet the condition of the three course meal, included an invitation to an English family to join a family dinner on the Muslim festival of *Eid* at the end of December. The second visit took place at a family reunion where an Asian family were invited to an afternoon lunch. It is worth noting that these two visits were organised around food. The feedback from both families was positive in that once they had moved out of their comfort zones, they found that they had a lot in common with each other and intended to keep these links.

## Wycombe Sharing of Faiths Dine at Mine



Another example is a project called 'Dine at Mine' which was organised by two members of Wycombe Sharing of Faiths with the aim of creating opportunities to meet people and neighbours from different backgrounds. Guidelines are provided for participants, hosts and guests to ensure that dietary requirements are taken into consideration. So far 3 small dinner parties have been organised in people's homes and have provided a relaxed setting to sharing food and interacting with people. These have also included a women's only 'Dine at Mine'. As a result of these events, friendships have been formed across different communities and across generations.

So now we have seen a few examples of how inter faith organisations use food in an informal way to encourage fellowship and cross-cultural learning.



In a more formal way it can be used as a recognition of inter faith initiatives in the public sphere, such as this tea party (on the left) which was held and organised by the Lord Mayor of Leicester to congratulate the new elected officers of the Leicester Council of Faiths in 2007. The aim of this tea party was to promote inter faith relations and to influence future policy decisions. While we cannot see any food in this photograph, I am told that the big smiles are testament to sumptuous food eaten before this photograph was taken!

Sometimes food is used in inter faith initiatives in an educational mode. Liverpool Community Spirit delivers adult learner courses called 'Community Spirit' aimed at engaging community members and those from voluntary organisations in Liverpool. Participants take part in interactive classroom sessions about each faith, and this includes tasting traditional foods, followed by a visit to a place of worship. This provides an opportunity for participants to meet with a member of that faith, to ask questions and discuss what they have learnt in a relaxed and informal environment. On the right of this slide are photographs that show participants from the course visiting the United Sikh Association Gurdwara in Liverpool to experience their service and share in the Langar held afterwards on a Sunday.

As part of a European-wide intercultural learning initiative, Liverpool Community Spirit worked with the Network for Intercultural Learning in Europe (NILE) on a DVD project to show how this course can be adopted by other community learning initiatives to engage learners in exploring community spirit and shared common values. What they hoped to convey through the DVD was that the combination of formal learning methods with interactive activities such as tasting food and meeting people, encourages learners who may have had a negative educational experience in the past, and shows that the course is accessible to all. Exploring faith traditions through food is a wonderful example of an ice-breaking activity aimed at getting everyone involved.



This slide is another example of food being used as part of a more formal learning process where young people of different faiths are brought together in an inter faith environment to gain knowledge of leadership skills. United Faiths is a regional inter faith youth council in the UK, initiated as part of Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum's aim of challenging injustice and discrimination. Here we see young people eating together at a residential course at Corrymeela in Northern Ireland organised by the Forum. This is a great way of getting young people to participate and learn from on-going inter faith activities. And you are going to hear after lunch from members of this youth council.

So, as you can see, food is right at the heart of promoting inter faith understanding. Prepared and used carefully within an inter faith context and with specific aims in mind, food has the ability to strengthen bonding, increase understanding of diversity and encourage learning.

As I said when I started, this is just a taster and there are many other creative ways in which local and regional inter faith initiatives use food to enhance fellowship and dialogue and to promote the concept of inter faith.

With these mouth-watering examples, I'm going to bring to a close this appetising section on food and inter faith.

Enjoy your lunch, and please don't forget to 'dialogue as you dine'!



## YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIALOGUE

**Susan Moss, Project Manager, 'Shared Futures' School Linking Programme,  
Board of Deputies of British Jews**

### **Susan Moss:**

The Board of Deputies of British Jews contributes to a nationwide project called the Schools Linking Network which came out of experience in Bradford. The initiative there has been very successful and has linked many schools together. We became part of the national project earlier this year, which has the aim of linking single faith schools together. We kick off in September with our first links and some of our partners are here today. We are already linking with 10 schools of different faiths from nursery to sixth form. I will go through my slides quickly. *[Note They are attached at the end of this text.]* Our philosophy is one of dialogue. We try to work with families, carers and young people so that the extended community is involved as part of exploring identity and diversity. We design the programmes carefully so that dialogue and enquiry happens.

We think it is important that children do learn about their identity and about that of others and what it means to be a citizen, which ties in with a key concern of Government. We give incredible power over us to anything we find it almost impossible to talk about. By avoiding things we find hard, we condemn ourselves to live with all the debilitating tensions that surround race and anything we perceive as different. That is at the heart of why we are all here today. What we are doing is not a black/white issue, a Jewish/non-Jewish, Muslim/non-Muslim issue and it is not about whether you are poor or rich - although all these factors do affect the work that we do. It is about asserting that we all have an identity and live together in a diverse society and that we all need skills to do so in a healthy way. This is what we offer the young people in our programming.

It is now the duty of the governors of maintained schools in England and Wales to promote community cohesion and OFSTED are going to be inspecting this specifically from this September. I think that is why a lot of schools have come on board with our programme. Maybe they needed that little bit of a push to be able to tick those boxes. We are very happy they have come on board because we think the children involved in our programme are going to have a fantastic experience meeting the children from other schools and other faiths. The slides refer to the key points of the guidance given to schools. Community cohesion is an issue in a lot of faith schools, where children come from lots of different traditions, even from different faiths. That is an issue we address in our programmes. We like to link schools that are nearby if we can and quite a few of our schools that we are working with from September are literally across the road from each other but have never had contact before. The teachers are very excited about the prospect of getting to know teachers from another faith school whom they haven't met or worked with before.

We are very aware that this work is not always easy. We have had wonderful support from other colleagues who are here today and I would specifically mention Rabia Lemahieu from Alif-Aleph with whom we have had wonderful times in working together and Stephen Shashoua and Rachel Heilbron from the Three Faiths Forum who are here today. I am also working with JCORE which is the Jewish Council for Racial Equality and the Association of Muslim Schools. We are partnering with the other faith bodies to make sure that the schools are really comfortable with the programme that we are mounting and in working out how it can best fit into each school.

The programme works across a year, starting in September and ending in July. We aim to link children of the same age from two faith schools, ideally in the same area. We do a lot of training with the teachers so the first step that happens each term is that all the teachers taking part in all the programmes meet with those from their partner schools for joint training where we can talk about all the issues that are going to confront them and about what is working really well and to do some training on issues relating to dialogue. How can we make the dialogue even better? What are the young people coming up with? How can we improve what we are doing?

So there is a lot of preparation before the children even meet because we want to make sure they have the necessary skills to have conversation with those from their partner school. We get them to keep a journal, to write or email each other, to send pictures, to make artefacts, if they like, and to have that interchange before they meet so that when they do meet for the first time they know quite a bit about each other. Throughout the programme they have four or five more meetings.

There are all sorts of programmes we have prepared. In the one we are doing with the Three Faiths Forum we are looking at festivals, so we have three schools in Kilburn, in north west London, a Muslim, a Jewish and a Church of England school for Year 5 pupils. They are going to visit each other's schools and do some work about festivals, to join in, learn some songs, make a peace tree, (which is going to move round the different schools so that all the children can add to it). There are going to be children giving presentations at each school and getting to know other children. At the end of it the three schools hopefully will know each other very well and can start planning the next project. We are aiming for a big celebration at the end and we have talked about having a celebration together for all those on the different programmes, which will be roughly 600 children and 100 adults this time next year. We will keep you in touch with our progress.

**There then followed a short question period:**

**Dr Natubhai Shah (Jain Samaj Europe):**

What advice would you give to those faith communities with children from numerically smaller faiths like Jainism? We do not have any faith schools so how can we become part of this programme? What advice would you give to help develop our children's sense of identity?

**Susan Moss:**

That is an interesting point. Some of the schools with which we are working have got children from a variety of faiths and are not faith schools. If there is an area where there is a school which has a lot of pupils of the Jain faith, we would be very interested to see if there is another faith school nearby with which they would like to link and then we can bring Jainism in as one of the themes of their work together. We would very much like to hear from you about this. Please send me an email to [susan.moss@sharedfutures.org](mailto:susan.moss@sharedfutures.org).


**Father Philip Sumner (Oldham Interfaith Forum):**

We have similar linking schemes in Oldham. I wonder if you have used a programme that has come from America called 'Philosophy for Schools' or 'Philosophy for Communities'? This is one of the tools that we use to help the process of linking up. We find that adults enjoy joining in with that programme. Using it, children begin to develop a language for discussing issues from their own perspective. This helps them to get on better with each other.


**Susan Moss:**

I am really interested in that. That approach would be a perfect fit for this programme so I would like to be in touch with you and find out more about what is going on in Oldham.


## Slides from the presentation by Susan Moss




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK



### Introduction to the Schools Linking Network and Shared Futures




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




### Introduction to the Schools Linking Network

- New organisation set up to support schools and local authorities to fulfil the new duty to contribute to Community Cohesion
- Provides CPD, support and resources for school linking within authorities, nationally and internationally
- Shared Futures works specifically with faith schools


[www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk)  
[www.sharedfutures.org.uk](http://www.sharedfutures.org.uk)




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK



### Aims and Philosophy of Schools Linking Network




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




### Aims of Schools Linking Network

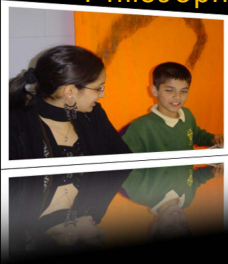
- Providing opportunities for children and young people, their families and carers to meet.
- To start a journey of exploration and to begin a dialogue about identity and diversity.
- Providing shared learning experiences where skills of enquiry, communication and participation can be developed.



SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK



### Philosophy of the SLN



Children have a right to learn about identity and diversity and a responsibility to understand what it means to be a citizen.




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




### Thought for the day.....



Anything we find almost impossible to talk about openly, we give incredible power over us. By avoiding things we find hard, we condemn ourselves to live with all the debilitating tensions that surround race ...and anything we perceive as different




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




is not:

- A black/white issue
- A Jewish/non Jewish issue
- A poor/rich issue



It IS...about embracing that we all have an identity and that we all live with diversity and that we ALL need skills that can help us to live with it in a healthy way.



SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK





### The new duty to contribute to community cohesion

## The new duty to contribute to community cohesion



- The Education and Inspections Act 2006 inserted a new section 21(5) to the Education Act 2002 introducing a duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools to promote community cohesion
- This builds on the RRAA, which supports equality for all pupils and positive race relations
- Ofsted will start to inspect this from September 2008

## Diversity and Citizenship

- "... we passionately believe that it is the duty of all schools to address issues of 'how we live together' and 'dealing with difference' however controversial and difficult they might sometimes seem."



» Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review  
» February 2007

## DCSF Guidance

### What Can Schools Do?

"As a starting point, schools build community cohesion by promoting equality of opportunity and inclusion for different groups of pupils within a school. But alongside this focus on inequalities and strong respect for diversity, they also have a role in promoting shared values and encouraging their pupils to actively engage with others to understand what they all hold in common."

## Community Cohesion

### Not a new idea

Consider community cohesion in the light of what is already happening, draw on current good practice, make it more explicit where necessary, or use it to start mapping and identify where to go next...

- What does it mean to you?
- What does it mean to your school?




## All schools are different

Each school needs to develop the appropriate approach depending on and reflecting their community/ies.

Each school needs to consider the different layers and kinds of community they serve.




## From a school's perspective

### Community can mean...

- the school itself
- the community the school serves
- the whole district
- the whole country
- the whole world!





## Not always so easy

Schools may be at the heart of their communities


**BUT**

Schools have to deal with tensions from factors outside of their control





## What can we do?

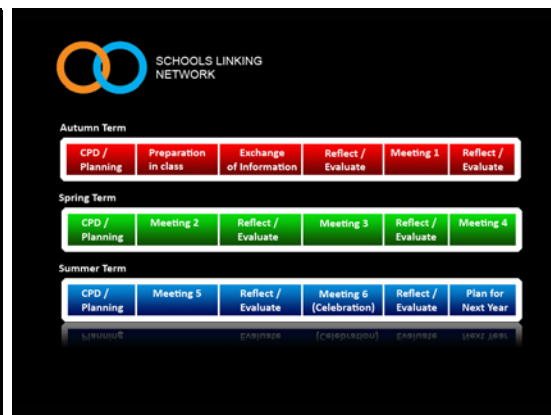

1. Teach children to explore identity and diversity and provide them with opportunities to challenge prejudice
2. Develop links with other schools to engage with other communities... ..




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK



## Overview of a typical linking year


SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




## Today

We are covering the red band, i.e. the first term's work where you will:

- Start your project and map out your year.
- Prepare with your class, school and community.
- Exchange information
- Set evaluation process in motion.
- Plan at least your first linking day in detail.



SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK



## ICT Support

- *website*
- *local CLC*
- *how they will use ICT in their linking work*



SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




## Getting Started Preparing to Meet




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- Contact Details
- Introducing the linking project to your class, school, parents and governors




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




## Activities with your class

*Work on Who am I?*  
*Who are we?*  
*Where do we live?*




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




## Exchanging work

- What work will your class send to each other?
- When?
- How?
- Be honest and realistic with your shared decisions




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




## Evaluation

Recording the Learning Journey




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK




## Charting The Learning Journey

How can we reflect and evaluate with children




- Post It Walk
- Emotion Graphs
- Video Diary
- Scaffolding for Thinking
- Carousel Interview
- Predicaments and Problems
- Statements Game
- P4C




SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK

Where will this reflection work be recorded?

- Big Book
- Using ICT
- Display
- Wallpaper
- Mind Maps
- Personal Notebooks
- Learning Journey Maps
- Cartoon Strips



SCHOOLS LINKING NETWORK



For Further information about school linking  
Please contact  
Susan Moss  
[Susan.moss@sharedfutures.org](mailto:Susan.moss@sharedfutures.org)  
Information available about resources for  
school  
linking on [www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk)

## **YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIALOGUE**

### **Jasdeep Singh Degun and Ushna Moghal, Yorkshire and Humber Youth inter faith Council**

#### **Dr Nawal K Prinja:**

The next presentation is a double act, by Jasdeep Singh Degun who is the Sikh Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Youth Inter Faith Council, and Ushna Moghal, who is a Roman Catholic Christian member of the Council. The Youth Council was launched last year and is linked to the work of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. The new Council will be working to engage young people from across the region in inter faith dialogue and activities.

#### **Jasdeep Singh Degun:**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Inter Faith Network for giving us this opportunity to talk here. I am Jasdeep and am the Chair of United Faiths which is the Yorkshire and Humber's first regional inter faith youth council.

#### **Ushna Moghal**

I am Ushna Moghal and I am the Coordinator for United Faiths. I am a Roman Catholic and am from Pakistan.

Let me tell you a little about United Faiths. [*Note: Slides from the presentation are attached at the end of this section.*] It consists of 15 young people from across the Humber region and from seven different faith communities. The idea of United Faiths came from the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum as an initiative to challenge all forms of discrimination and injustice against persons or group of people, particularly where these are on the grounds of their religious beliefs. The aims of United Faiths are to:

- Act as ambassadors to provide a voice for young people of faith
- Challenge negative faith related stereotypes by educating the youth
- Celebrate our religious and cultural differences and share our commonalities as young people.

The Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum identified youth as one of the most misrepresented and misunderstood groups in our society. So they found one young person (me!) to work from their office and try to help put together a group of young people to form United Faiths. Our aims are first of all to act as ambassadors to provide a voice for young people of faith. The Forum has started working with schools and universities as well. I recently went to York St John University. They have a module on Islam in their theology course and we took a couple of Muslim people from our Council who talked about how Islam is practised and about their beliefs and ideas and about many important issues. Our second aim is to challenge negative faith related stereotypes by educating young people.



We have been working with the media as well. We have an upcoming conference about media and music. We have linked with the *Yorkshire Post* and several local newspapers and have tried to get our work reported in them, talking about faith and making it one of the topics which people talk about in every day life.

Our final aim is to celebrate our religious and cultural differences and share our commonalities as young people. There are 15 young people in our group and they are all very much involved in their faith communities. They have gone round to the local inter faith councils in their areas to talk about what we share with other communities, as well as celebrating our differences, which we feel is really important too.

**Jasdeep Singh Degun:**

We went to Corrymeela in Northern Ireland in October 2007 which was where we first got together as a group. During this residential we explored issues directly related to young people, such as faith and identity. We were able to share experiences of injustice and discrimination and knowledge of other faiths and how living among people from different faiths affects our personal relationships and of those of our faith communities. And we also got hot chocolate and toast as well!

For many of us this was probably the first time that we had spent so much time with people of different faiths. We were able to ask questions and celebrate our similarities as well as our differences. As 16 year olds we do not really get to mingle much with people from different faiths. We do have friends in school, but we do not really go up to them and say, "Hello, do tell me about your faith." It is more like "What is the football like?" and stuff like that. But in Corrymeela we were up until 4am just talking about different faiths, our differences and our similarities.

There is a lack of spaces where the youth can actually get together and share their personal experiences, voice questions and raise issues that face young people of faith. What emerged was a mutual agreement to work together on contemporary issues that face the youth. When we came back from Northern Ireland, we also explored ways in which we can continue to engage young people in activities to work together on challenges that face us. As a result we were able to start up our own work with a clear direction and have begun delivering results for young people for the benefit of all our communities. I think that the youth can have good experiences with other young people of different faiths if they are given opportunities where they can express their ideas and opinions. I think one way of doing this is through United Faiths.

**Ushna Moghal:**

I am going to talk a little about the projects we are developing and how they tackle our aims, such as religious literacy and about our upcoming faith, media and music conference. We feel that these projects are very important because they are an excellent way to increase interaction between communities. Outside of school and work, as Jasdeep said, a young person becomes aware of, and learns about, other faiths and it is really important to reduce racism and bigotry. Just the process of sitting down and talking about these issues is important to us.

We believe that the experiences that young people go through between the ages of 16-25 strongly influence their perception and relationship with other people, in ways

which they carry with them for the rest of their life. Therefore, we feel it is critical to intervene and educate young people about other faiths, especially at that age.

Furthermore, as we all know, the media representation of the youth is becoming continuously negative. There are many young people who are looking for opportunities to go out and use their skills and contribute well to society, but because of the prejudice against them, they are unable to do so. Therefore, it is imperative to involve people in inter faith activity and dialogue, as it provides them with the opportunity to get involved in meaningful engagement. Dialogue between young people, even if faith is not important for their own personal growth, eradicates media stereotypes. If we want young people to continue participating in inter faith dialogue, we need to spark their interest. One of our projects, for which we hope to get your support while we are here, is our planned conference on youth, media and music, which is hopefully going to be held this autumn or in spring next year.

### **There followed a short question period:**

#### **Dr Prinja**

I wish I had been part of that group which went to Northern Ireland! But any questions from the audience?

#### **Dr Bahl (Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)):**

I must congratulate you. I think it is a very worthwhile project which will pay dividends in the long run. I would like to know how much the rest of the community or your parents are involved in this. Do you get their blessings for the programme to be successful?

#### **Ushna Moghal:**

Definitely. Both my parents were involved in inter faith work from the same age as I was. They really believe in it and are really supportive. That is definitely very important. For example, coming from an Asian background, for me to come all the way to London by myself is an issue. We understand the barriers to that. Therefore, we want our parents to support us in this because we are actually doing something new. When I go home I actually feel that I have made some difference.

#### **Jasdeep Singh Degun**

I think my parents have benefited as well. Because as a family we had not previously got involved in any kind of inter faith work or anything of the sort. Basically, when I first heard of this new council coming up I just leapt at the chance to be involved. In this way my parents have also benefited too because they are now even more aware of different faiths and communities.

#### **Rachel Heilbron (Three Faiths Forum):**

I am really inspired by the work you are doing. How long do people stay on the Council and is there a rolling programme to involve more young people? How can we help set up more youth councils such as yours in other parts of the country?

**Ushna Moghal:**

We were just launched in December and are always looking for more people to get involved. With young people one of the biggest factors is that they move on to their universities and move out of Yorkshire. So getting young people involved in this kind of activity is an ongoing process. New people come in and old people leave. For the time being our officers hold office for a year. After that hopefully we will have new elections. On setting up new faith forums for young people – do get involved with us. We will definitely try to help you set these up. So do get in touch with me.

**Jasdeep Singh Degun:**

It would be great if we could have youth councils in the different regions because this one has worked well.

**Ushna Moghal:**

What I have found is that it is really important to have support for a project of this kind. We have had Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum helping to set it up and supporting us. It was their idea. I got involved because I found the opportunity which was being offered. I have been in touch with all local inter faiths forums in Yorkshire and Humber trying to get them to work with us as they do with the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. You can contact us through the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. Their phone number is 0113 245 6444 and the email address is [info@yorkshireandhumberfaiths.org.uk](mailto:info@yorkshireandhumberfaiths.org.uk). The details are also in the Network's inter faith directory.

**Dr Prinja**

You can also contact them over the tea break later on and get more details.

Slides from the presentation by Ushna Moghal and Jasdeep Singh



From Left:

Rev Inderjit Bhogal, Nikita Alden, Tariq Bashir, Patricia Farrell, Jayesh Mistry, Ushna Moghal, Helen Brand, Shazia Shah, Xhristien Ward-Farrell, Robert Smith, Jasdeep Singh Degun, Imran Hafeez, Nora Mayer, Nasar Fiaz, Lydia Barlow, Akeel Hussain, Sue Holmes.





Intercultural and  
Leadership School (ICLS)  
-Mirror Wall

What are the barriers to  
dialogue between faiths?

What do others' say about your  
faith or community?



Tour of Belfast: understanding the religious  
conflict in Northern Ireland



ICLS training  
Discussing local and global  
injustices







Meeting with Norman Richardson of Northern Ireland Faiths Forum at **Strainmillis University College** – Putting Northern Ireland conflict into perspective – talking about issues such as segregation in schools, listening to Northern Irish young people's experience of the Catholic/Protestant conflict from each perspective – relating to participants own faith – Sunni/Sheya conflict

**United Faiths at Corrymeela, October 2007**


This week has really been beneficial to me. I've studied Theology at both 'A' level and as my degree, but this week has enabled me to talk to real people and to challenge misconceptions about faiths.

 **Lydia, Christian (20)**


I have never sat down and had a mature conversation with people of different faiths and traditions. Why can't everyone have this experience?

 **Jasdeep Singh Degun, Sikh (16)**


I switched on my iPod after leaving Corrymeela and I heard the words 'You give me something...'. Staying at Corrymeela for a week with people I didn't know was good, but leaving with everyone as family was amazing.

**Jayesh Mistry, Hindu (22)** 

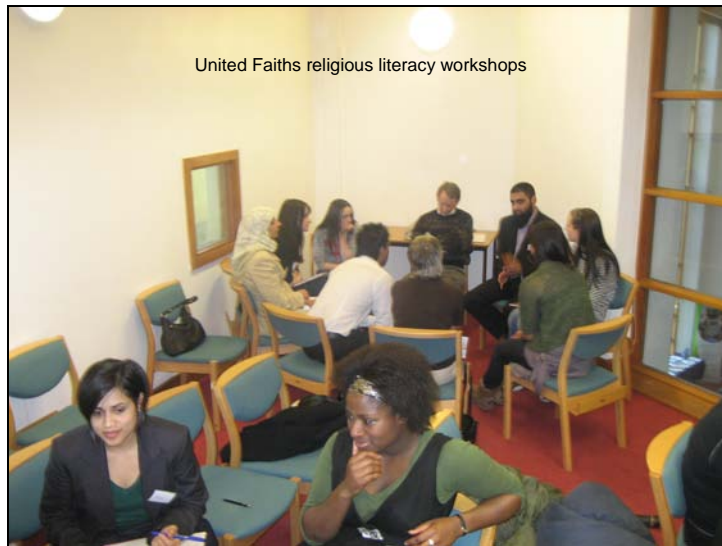
I have realised that although we come from a diverse range of faiths and backgrounds, this does not prevent us from working together.

 **Shazia Shah, Muslim (23)**

It's been a really eye-opening experience spending so much time with young people of different faiths. I used to think that I was fairly well informed about other religions but I have definitely learned a lot over the last 5 days

**Nora, Bahá'í (23)** 





## KEY POINTS FROM WORKSHOPS

These points were fed back by the workshops to Stella Opoku-Owusu, who reported them to the meeting.

### Group 1 – The Art of Dialogue!

- \* It is time to talk to those outside the current circle of dialogue, including secular world.
- \* The St Ethelburga's centre is an important resource for peace and reconciliation in the inter faith context. They have many tested resources and models for this work and wish to be more widely known.

### Group 2 – Dialogue in Public Life

- \* It is very important to build relationships with the media and training is needed on how to build those relationships.

### Group 3 – Why Dialogue?

- \* In newer communities there is distrust of dialogue as they feel pushed to align their thinking with that of the dominant culture.
- \* We need to talk together informally to break down barriers.
- \* For dialogue to be effective, trust needs to be apparent from the start and maintained throughout.

### Group 4 – Faith Communities and Dialogue

- \* Dialogue between faith communities must at every level be genuine and not tokenism.  
Three suggestions:
- \* Dialogue at street level to encourage neighbours and friends to eat together and not necessarily recruit them to any inter faith group
- \* Dialogue at group level – liked the inter faith week idea as this would really make an impact in communities – with events at several levels
- \* Concerned by anti-intellectualism and danger of divorce between spirituality and theology. Want to nominate theologians from faith communities to dialogue at a profound level at least at the level of the dialogue going on within faith communities about, for example, how scripture is read.



#### Group 5 – Young People and Dialogue

- \* It is very important to create more good resources for teaching and learning about inter faith issues in schools and colleges.
- \* It is also very important for SACREs and local inter faith groups to work well in partnership.

#### Group 6 – From Action to Understanding

- \* How do you assess inter faith expertise, particularly in relation to funding applications?
- \* How do we make sure inter faith activity is progressive and has a positive impact in the wider community and not just on the ‘inter faith island’?

#### Group 7 – Dialogue on a Theme

- \* As individuals we need to take personal responsibility to effect change.
- \* Faith leaders should take responsibility spiritually for the ‘internal environment’
- \* We should pass the message collectively to the public on the care of the natural world and the environment by reducing wastage and the use of natural resources.

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

### **Dr Prinja:**

I am now going to invite our panellists to join us here at the top table. We had planned to have three panellists but Ravinder Kaur Nijjar is unwell and cannot be with us. We send her our good wishes and hope she will be better soon.

### **Sarah Thorley, South London Inter Faith Group, Religious Education teacher and writer**

We have heard a wonderful variety of inter faith experiences today. Last year I completed a year's work on a survey of inter faith activity in South London. I found that there were Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) doing wonderful work, there were local authority initiatives, there were inter faith groups and there were local faith communities, but many of them did not know what the others were doing. Harriet Crabtree flagged up this morning the issue of communication. Often there are a lot of good initiatives but those involved do not know about each other's work in the same locality and this leads to duplication and no sharing of best practice.

We are hugely grateful for all that the Inter Faith Network does at national level and in its engagement with Government. What I picked up today is that we are all of us very involved at our grassroots local level and that is what our focus has been today. I think it was David Gifford who said, "Start where we are". I really agree with that. Probably we cannot start with the most difficult issues, which very often have a political side to them, although it is very important that we do get on to those difficult issues, as has been brought up several times. Just a small example. Five years ago I met Firdos Qazi who was Headteacher of a Muslim school near to the Church of England school where I teach. We got into a discussion about the pros and cons of single faith schools and found we did not agree about this issue. But we stopped and said, "We both teach in single faith schools. This is where we are. This is what we need to work with. Let's put aside the pros and the cons and deal with where we are and what we *can* do." And what happened was that we started up a linking between our two schools.

I have been fascinated to hear today about the other school linking projects and I cannot wait to get together with the people who were speaking about them today and swap experiences. In our own case it has been a wonderful five years where every term our children have done exchanges. Their pupils have come to our school and ours have gone to theirs. Over that time I got to know Firdos very well and we are now in a situation where if anything comes up, be it the most difficult or sensitive issue, I can get on the phone to her and say "What do you think about this?" "What am I going to say to my teachers about the wearing of the *niqab*?" or whatever the

controversial issue may be. Over these five years, having started off by not plunging into the most difficult issues, I now feel that I can ask her anything. I am sure there are many people here who have had that same kind of experience.

Another point that came up again and again today, and was particularly emphasised by Jasdeep and Ushna, is the importance of the face-to-face and the heart-to-heart contact in actually meeting people. Somebody talked earlier on about not being too cerebral. Academic work as well as meetings at national level are really important. But what I feel has come out of today is the absolutely essential need to meet other people and make relationships with them. And the value of having done so is never more important than when a crisis comes. We need to have made our relationships of trust before a crisis happens; before a local synagogue is desecrated, before bombs are dropped, before there is an earthquake in China. National or international events can still impact on our local area. We need to have made those relationships of trust in our local area so that we have something solid that can withstand the events that happen beyond our control out there and the reactions of the media. Catriona Robertson, who is one of the founder-members of the Clapham and Stockwell Faith Forum, is here today. That Forum had really good relationships in place before the London bombings, before the shooting of the young Brazilian man at Stockwell station. As a result of that, they were able to have very meaningful meetings where these problems arose. People all over the country need to have made those relationships before things happen.

The importance of meeting regularly in order to deepen relationships was another point that came up today, again in what Jasdeep and Ushna said. Just to meet two or three times a year is not enough. You cannot deepen relationships on a Committee if it meets once, twice or three times a year.

One last point. I have been a member of the South London Inter Faith Group for many years and one of the ways in which we have tried to develop local relationships has been through an annual inter faith walk. This was inspired by the Westminster Interfaith walks (and I think Alfred Agius of Westminster Interfaith is here today). We started 13 years ago in South London doing very localised inter faith walks, where on one day we visit between five and seven different places of worship. We walk together and we talk. Many people who come on these walks have walked past, for example, a local Hindu temple hundreds of times but have never been inside. They say, 'I would never have dared come in here on my own'.

I would just like to flag up that we have a dream of having in 2012, the year of the Olympics, a mega inter faith walk where inter faith groups all over London, not just South London, organise their own local inter faith walk on the same weekend. Indeed, having been here today, what I dream of is that that walk will be not just all over London, but all over the country. Can we have a weekend in 2012 where everybody, every inter faith group all over the country organises a local inter faith walk?

**Dr Manazir Ahsan, MBE, Director General, Islamic Foundation, MINAB  
Steering Committee, Vice-Chair Inter Faith Network for the UK**

May I start my presentation with an Islamic greeting, which is peace and blessings of God be with all of you.

I must congratulate Harriet Crabtree and her team for choosing today's theme. We know that the CLG has carried out a consultation under the title 'Face-to-face and side-by-side'. But here I think we have gone a number of steps further with the thought that our encounter is not only 'face-to-face', but 'heart-to-heart'. I have felt after this morning and afternoon that we have a group of people here who have assembled with great enthusiasm and sincerity. They want to share their experiences and, of course, their wisdom. In this way we have now come to a place where we can have heart-to-heart discussions, a heart-to-heart confidence, because we not only respect one another, but also have the enthusiasm to go forward together in such a way that we can achieve our goals.

My own association with inter faith work goes back over half a century and with the Inter Faith Network for almost 20 years. I feel very proud that I have been associated with a number of organisations involved in inter faith dialogue. I have learned a lot from this experience and this inspiration in working with different types of organisation. I want to give a couple of examples of how I have been able to use my own knowledge, experience and skills in building up other initiatives. For example, the Muslim community has now embarked upon the creation of a new organisation called MINAB - the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board. There are at least 1,500 mosques in this country. To have their imams and the mosques' management come and work together is not an easy task. In setting standards for mosques, it has been accepted that inter faith dialogue is of paramount importance. We have said that mosques need to offer an open space. They need to invite people to come and observe what we are doing in our mosques and to engage in inter faith dialogue and discussions as far as this is possible.

My second point is more indirectly related. As you know, Saudi Arabia is a conservative country. We are delighted that, a huge amount of work having gone on there behind the scenes, Saudi Arabia has announced that inter faith dialogue has to be a pillar in the plans for its future activities. We are now seeing an increase in the number of seminars, conferences and meetings on the subject. Only a couple of months ago one of the leading universities in Saudi Arabia, Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah, created a Chair of Dialogue and Civilisation. The Islamic Foundation is playing an important role in helping them with information and ideas and thoughts as much as possible.

So I feel very happy that, in these ways, I have been able to put into practice the experience I have had in working with the Inter Faith Network and others, both directly in the UK and indirectly elsewhere. Many leaders from Muslim and other countries have come to the UK saying that they want to practise inter faith dialogue and discussion and asking how to go about it. I always give them information about the Inter Faith Network, its leaflets, its books and materials and suggest that they follow that route. I am delighted to be able to do this because of what we have learned from our colleagues.

We also know that when faith groups unite, this can play an important role in the public sphere. I always give as an example the 2001 census. I and several colleagues were trying to persuade the Government that we needed a question on religion in the census, but it did not agree to this. However, when all the faith groups combined together, and tackled the problem with a great deal of wisdom, then we were able to get agreement to such a question even if it was a voluntary one. As a result we now know the numbers of those of different faith groups living in the UK. So when we are united we can really do wonders; divided we fall, united we stand.

Today I was also moved by two presentations: firstly by Sughra Ahmed on Women in Faith, and the other by the two young people who talked about the youth programmes in Yorkshire and Humber. These are areas to which I feel we need to devote our energies more so that we are not only able to motivate them, but also to train them for future leadership. Many of us are on the way out! So we need to give proper attention to the younger generation and to the new families so that when we are gone, there are those who are properly trained and motivated and able to take over whatever work we are leaving behind. I also thought that the presentation on dialogue and food was very interesting. We have experienced today that we were dining together, as well as partaking of dialogue and discussion, but there are many other areas of encounter. In Leicester, the imams and the clergy played a football game (and the clergy lost!) - there have also been cricket matches. These are some of the ways in which we can engage with the younger generation too. There are many festivals in each and every faith and I hope we can invite other people to join in them, to give them inspiration as well as encouragement. As we all know, there are challenges of course, but we need to turn these challenges into opportunities to take forward the vital work of inter faith.

Today some of you may have seen an article in *The Independent*, written by journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, suggesting that Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are creating a problem by joining forces against secularism. I do not know where she has got this idea from. We need to be alert to all of those people who do not want to see inter faith work flourish or take root in the community. The building of relationships, which has been mentioned by many people today, is work which we need to do. It can only be done when we meet each other heart-to-heart. Instead of paying lip service to this, let us have a genuine dialogue and try to come heart-to-heart as close as possible and work together. This is my dream.

## **Bishop Tom Butler, Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK**

Dr Ahsan, you are not on your way out yet! I am happy to say that you are on the slate of Executive Committee members for next year. So you have not yet got time off for good behaviour!

I said at the beginning of today's meeting that it was Harriet Crabtree's first National Meeting and AGM as Director. It is good that Brian Pearce is able to be with us and is continuing to work for the Network in a part-time consultancy role. We might have wondered with Brian retiring whether our links with the Government and with the civil service and that kind of national involvement would be weakened, because Brian had a good deal of experience of this world in his professional career. But in fact, before Brian retired Harriet was invited to be a member of the Commission for Integration and Cohesion, which reported to the Secretary of State of the Department for Communities and Local Government and I know how much her contribution has been appreciated. No doubt that was one of the reasons why she was awarded her OBE in the latest round of honours, not only for the work she does for us, but also the work that she does now for the much wider community. But the truth is that Harriet's heart is first and foremost in developing inter faith work. This first National Meeting under her guidance has been framed in the way it has been because she very much wanted to focus on local inter faith work, as well as inter faith work at other levels and to have the cross fertilisation between different areas of work which we have had today and from which we have all gained. This has been a very good meeting and we will go away the richer for it.

In terms of the national scene we will obviously continue to try to keep our members informed of what is on the horizon, including the framework for inter faith dialogue and faith based social action which the Government will be presenting in July. What I am expecting, although we have not yet seen the document, is that what we have been doing for the last 10 or 15 years will be presented as brand new ideas for the future! But every Government does that. That is politics! But we should welcome the fact that inter faith work, community building and cohesion are now very much on the agenda of politicians, both nationally and local. The truth is that the Inter Faith Network has a wealth of experience and that one way or another we do manage to feed in that experience.

Thank you for coming today. Do stay for the AGM which immediately follows. But above all thank you all for the work you do in your home communities and with your own faith groups. It is that work which is a major contribution to the life of our nation and the world and of our faiths.

### **Dr Prinja:**

I think I started the day by saying that I came here to relax. It has been not only relaxing, but also very enjoyable and very educational. I have met so many good people and learned so many good thoughts and ideas. I believe that all of us here believe in dialogue. That is the very reason why we are here. But as you go back home a bit of homework for all of you is a challenge to bring those to the table who do not wish to have dialogue. That is a real challenge for us. Dialogue is to do with attitude and somehow you have to turn negative perceptions of it into positive ones.

I now bring this National Meeting to a close and on behalf of the Executive Committee thank all of you for sparing the time to come here. A particular thanks to all the speakers, workshop facilitators, workshop presenters, workshop note-takers and to Bhupinder Singh, who is always there to help us out, and to Harriet Crabtree and her colleagues at the Network office for the work they have done in the preparation of this meeting. This brings our meeting to a close. I hope those of you who are leaving now have a safe journey home.

# **WORKSHOPS**



## **Workshop 1: The Art of Dialogue**

Inter faith dialogue is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. Good dialogue demands the inter personal skills of observing, listening and mediating and such organisational tools as conflict resolution, meditation, and working well with group dynamics.

*Facilitator: Regina O'Callaghan, Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum*

*Presenter: Justine Huxley, St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation*

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### **Key points from the presentation by Justine Huxley**

*What makes good dialogue?*

Justine Huxley spoke from three years of experience working in the St Ethelburga's tent where they are systematic in researching and evaluating different methodologies of dialogue.

Inter faith dialogue is just one dimension of humans coming together in relationship. While context and subject matter are important, space must be created for people to be comfortable and real.

There is a need to pay attention to connecting people by a wise use of, for example, tea-breaks, ice-breaking and sharing food. There is a 'spiritual etiquette' to be learned and practised: timing meetings, listening for what is not being said and who is not saying it or is looking grumpy. Are women dominating the conversation? Is thought dominating feeling?

Good ground rules promote safety especially in situations of potential conflict and tension. Since the quality of collaboration is the key, there is a need for power-sharing, coming with no fixed personal agenda and transparency.

### *Tools for Dialogue*

The following examples were mentioned: the native North American Talking Stick, World Cafés, Interfaith Youth Core [www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org), Philosophy for Communities, Appreciative Enquiry, Speaking from the Heart, Suspending Judgment, Conflict Trees, the Public Conversations model, the methods of Dr William Isaacs and 'speak outs', 'fishbowl techniques', eliciting narrative and personal story, working with traditional tales and with scripture.

### *Dialogue Facilitators*

These should provide a non-anxious presence, demonstrating and eliciting self awareness, hospitality, sincerity and by their own example encouraging participants to say how they feel and naming and 'inviting' what is missing.

### *A Power Exercise*

The workshop participants were lined up shoulder to shoulder and asked a series of ingenious questions inviting them to step forward or back to indicate their power or lack of it. The results were very interesting.

#### **The following points were made during the discussion:**

- It is time to talk to those outside the current circle of inter faith dialogue, including the secular world.
- We must accept, however, that there are some who just will not dialogue.
- There are materials available to help deal with extreme political views. An example would be the material produced by the Methodist Church.
- In Birmingham an affair between a Sikh girl and a Muslim boy had led to inter religious strife. A member of the West Midlands Faiths Forum had not intervened but had offered both parties a space for dialogue. St Ethelburga's follows the same approach.

## **Workshop 2: Dialogue in Public Life**

In the time of global digital media with instantaneous news coverage, faith leaders face a dilemma about how and when to speak about key issues in public life. On one hand their views need to be heard through the media for impact; on the other, there is always the danger that what they say is misheard or taken out of context or that it contributes unhelpfully to relationships between their faith community and another.

- How can the media be managed effectively in expressing inter faith dialogue between faiths.
- What might rules of engagement/protocol look like for religious spokespeople?

*Facilitator: Barney Leith, National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is and Chair of the Religion and Belief Consultative Group on Equality, Diversity and Human Rights*

*Presenter: Rev Aled Edwards, Chief Executive of Churches Together in Wales/ CYTUN and member, Inter Faith Council for Wales*

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### **Key points from the presentation by Rev Aled Edwards**

He introduced the theme with particular reference to his experience of relations with the media in Wales.

A major pitfall is that faith communities have little understanding of how the media and agencies of Government work. They require speed, they like conflict, they want simplicity, they do not do 'subtle'. And the Government increasingly responds to what happens in the media.

We need to know the rules of engagement with the press and media. We can never claim to speak for anyone outside our own faith community. It is hard enough to represent the diversity of one's own faith community, never mind the diversity of any multi faith group; if ever the press/media ask what another faith community thinks, we must resist the temptation to answer and must tell them to go and ask them for themselves. Never speak disparagingly of another faith community or any elements of one's own faith community. In relation to other faith communities we can say, "I am willing to be your friend, but do not ask me to share your enemies." Having a 'code of conduct' for faith community representatives speaking to press/media would be helpful. Try not to respond to crises, try to tell narrative stories instead – humanise what would otherwise be mere statistics.

We should engage with politicians in a way that enables them to do good. They usually want to, but do not know how. We can help them by being thorough, professional, fair and never shouting about them in public.

### **The following points were made in discussion:**

- Structures should be in place to ensure that if there is any request for comment or response, it goes through the right channels, rather than the media interviewing people ad hoc in the street.

- Faith communities need to train journalists so they know who they should contact.
- It is worth remembering that nothing is ever ‘off the record’.
- The Government often wants to consult communities, but wants the information *yesterday*. It would be helpful to have tips for managing this.
- It is helpful to be able to communicate with the politicians *before* the process of formal consultation starts.
- The process of ‘dialogue’ needs to be extended beyond the faith communities to include media and Government figures.
- It is not just elected politicians who change posts, officials do too. It often seems to be the case that once an official begins to understand what they are doing, they get moved on! This means being involved in dialogue with systems and structures as well as with individuals.
- It cannot be presupposed that faith communities have an adequate level of resources to enter into this kind of engagement.
- Faith communities and inter faith workers need to provide themselves with the same gifts that the professionals have.
- It is worth remembering that the media seek out and court the mavericks, in order to get a contrary point of view.
- It is necessary to be very careful with the press. Some inter faith meetings that were for women only had been held in Harrow and someone from the press had been invited to be present. The group had been anxious about this but hoped to get good coverage. Unfortunately, the coverage had turned out to be bad.
- The golden rule is that the agenda must belong to the group. There should be a clear idea beforehand of what should be said to the press and this should be done professionally.
- A ‘faith greeter’ course was held in Birmingham. There should be similar courses for local faith community press officers.
- The right person with whom to develop good relations is the editor.
- The Baha’i community underwent a media storm surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly in 2003. The first question asked was “Does the Baha’i Faith condone suicide?” as if they were intending to portray the Baha’i Faith as some sort of “suicide cult”. The answer, of course, was unequivocally, “No”. After that was established, the kind of questions that were being asked

changed and the Baha'i community were no longer dealing with religious correspondents alone. In the end, *The Scotsman* commissioned an 800-word piece, which was a real landmark in the Baha'i community's relations with the media.

- The art of 'killing' a story should be more appreciated, especially if the topic is one that one does not want to be drawn into. It can also be helpful to prepare a response in advance to a story that it is known is coming.
- Government agencies can be poor at assigning or inviting people to events (e.g. consultation meetings). Faith communities can help make such things work better.
- Is it possible to trust organisations such as the BBC to represent views accurately if people phone in with comments? Situations must always be judged on a case-by-case basis and one must always be wary of being set up. It is important not to waffle in media interviews, but rather to know in advance what you would like to say and to stick to it.
- It is not true that bad publicity is better than no publicity!
- An example was given of a royal visit to a Hindu Temple when the press had picked on one throw-away line from the royal visitor, which was taken out of context to the detriment of the Hindu community.
- Are there any training bodies that will train representatives of faith communities on media matters? The Jewish community has used such services, but they are provided by private organisations who charge for it.
- In any relations with the media, it is good to do as Jesus said: "Be wise as serpents, as innocent as doves."
- An 'old Chinese proverb' is also helpful to remember: "Speaking without thinking is like shooting without aiming."

### **Workshop 3: Why Dialogue?**

What are the reasons for dialogue? What motivates people and groups to initiate or take part in dialogue or to refuse to be in dialogue? Is dialogue just about protecting the interest of one's own faith? Learning more about each other in a spirit of tolerance. Finding similarities between faiths and resolving the differences as written in all major religious texts. To progress inter faith matters does one have to compromise about one own faith?

*Facilitator: Yann Lovelock, Inter Faith Co-ordinator, Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK), Vice-Chair West Midlands Faiths Forum and member, Birmingham Council of Faiths*

*Presenter: Brian Pearce, Adviser, Faith and Public Life, Inter Faith Network for the UK*

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The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to share their experience of inter faith dialogue and to offer their reflections in the light of this.

#### **Key points from the presentation by Brian Pearce**

In the response to the question “Why dialogue?” it was important to recognise that people would enter dialogue with different motives. Some might do so out of what might be described as ‘theological curiosity’, seeking to understand more about the tradition and beliefs of people belonging to other faith communities and perhaps hoping to find their understanding of their own tradition enhanced in the light of this dialogue; others might be ‘seekers’ exploring the relevance to their own lives of different religious traditions. Others might have less personal motivations, for example pursuing dialogue in the context of working to improve community relations and, more generally, community cohesion; or working to encourage greater co-operation between people of different faiths. There will also be those who enter dialogue in the light of their understanding of a missionary impulse within their own faith tradition. It went without saying that dialogue takes place at many levels: neighbourhood, local, regional, national and international.

He himself had initially become interested in inter faith issues as an Anglican Christian, as a result of a developing interest in faith traditions other than his own and seeking to understand what it means to be a Christian living with integrity and with respect and understanding for others in a religiously plural world. But he had then become interested also in the broader community relations dimension of inter faith work and exploring from this perspective the kind of society we should work to develop in this country.

Finally, he suggested that those who engage in inter faith dialogue find that they do not need to compromise their own personal integrity (as some of those who hold back from dialogue might fear) but rather that it brings enrichment and a strengthening of one's own religious commitment.

The facilitator reminded the group that the theme was to give reasons not only for why people engage in dialogue but also for why they might not.

**The following points were made in discussion:**

- It is important to know with whom you are talking and what you are going to talk about with them.
- People have different motives for entering dialogue, for example in order to build coalitions on common concerns; or in the case of religious 'explorers' in order to 'test out' different religions.
- A Muslim imam said he wished to find out about the beliefs practices of other faiths both for his own education and to inform his congregation afterwards.
- Dialogue is long term commitment. It begins with people getting to know each other better and this gradually leads to a deeper relationship. There has to be sufficient confidence in one another to be able to risk making oneself vulnerable through one's openness.
- Mutual support for those engaging in dialogue which comes from those in other faith communities who are also committed to dialogue is very important.
- Each faith tradition has valuable wisdom to offer.
- In some areas there are few non-Christian faith communities but all Christians need to learn more about other faiths. Dialogue is seen by some as a dangerous liberal activity. Some Christians do not want to be involved in inter faith encounter believing that it is a threat to their faith and integrity. Others refuse to engage in dialogue because they think there is no value in it.
- There is always going to be a dominant culture and it is important for this to include a vision of the possibility and importance of inter faith harmony.
- There is a need to bust myths and to separate faith and culture.
- It is essential to educate children and young people about different religious traditions to help dispel prejudice and stereotypes.
- The United World Colleges have helped to introduce children to dialogue through their sharing educational experiences together and includes the religious dimension in its Theory of Knowledge course (compulsory to all).
- It is desirable to find out more about one's own faith before exploring other's faiths so that one has more confidence for the inter faith encounter.
- It is important both to try to understand different faiths and so deepen one's own faith as a result.

- People who have had experience of inter faith dialogue need to tackle misunderstanding and ignorance about other faiths in their own faith community.
- Some distrust dialogue because they see in it a means to weaken their own culture and religious understanding.
- Majority faiths often set the agenda for dialogue and this can make smaller faith groups less inclined to get involved in it. Where there is a sense of inequality and lack of trust, true dialogue will be difficult to achieve.



## **Workshop 4: Faith Communities and Dialogue**

The UK's faith communities are developing, in different ways, approaches to and resources for dialogue and engagement with those of other faiths. Rev Peter Colwell reflects on ways that the Christian Churches in the UK have been developing this work.

*Facilitator: Dorab Mistry, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe*

*Presenter: Rev Peter Colwell, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland*

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### **Key points from the presentation by Rev Peter Colwell**

Inter faith activity has now become much more mainstream. It has moved from the fringe to the centre both corporately/historically and for him personally. For example, about 15 years ago there was a debate about whether representatives from other faith communities should be welcomed to the United Reformed Church Assembly. This year the Assembly was addressed by an imam.

In some churches there has been a reappraisal of aspects of Christian theology. This is manifested in an openness to dialogue that can be combined with integrity in terms of the distinctiveness of one's own tradition. Some Church leaders are now actively engaged in inter-religious dialogue. Engagement includes challenge. Can we hear the differences? Can we allow ourselves to see ourselves as others see us? Does our own faith become clearer when it encounters the 'other'?

### **The following points were made during the discussion:**

- Honest conversation is needed to work out how dialogue can be deepened.
- There is common ground between different religious traditions in terms of their core values.
- The Church has at times been imperialist in its approach, taking control on hard social issues, for example crime and drugs.
- Where there is bilateral dialogue rather than multi faith dialogue there can be concern that some groups are excluded from the process.
- In inter faith encounter we need to go carefully and respect each other's feelings.
- Visiting each other's places of worship helps us understand each other.
- Fears of 'watering down the faith' are now beginning to give way to seeing the need for respect practised with integrity.

- Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech in the late 60s was partly responsible for starting the inter faith dialogue in Wolverhampton which has now been going 35 years.
- There is evidence of a change in the mindset of the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II. An account was given of an inter faith group from Oldham/Burnley going to the Vatican. This would have been unthinkable 40 years ago and suggests dialogue is now embedded at leadership level.
- From the Jewish perspective an approach to citizenship is structured around a set of laws/way of life.
- Events on 9/11 and 7/7 have led to the setting up of an inter faith walk of friendship in Beeston, involving local MPs and invitations into people's homes. There is dialogue/communication at all levels.
- From *Swansea*: the story of local groups and of an individual who works with each family in her street.
- An inter faith week is already held annually in Scotland when local groups pursue a variety of activities, involve local universities and arrange book launches.
- There is a lot of good inter faith work going on in the English regions and in Wales – moving inter faith into the community by 'down to earth interaction'.

The group made three suggestions for how to deepen dialogue, which should at every level be genuine and not tokenistic:

### **1. Dialogue at street level**

To encourage our neighbours and friends to eat together and not necessarily recruit them to inter faith groups. To encourage people to vote in local, national and European elections, to prevent, for example, BNP members gaining seats. To engage with the 'real issues'.

### **2. Dialogue at group level**

The idea of a national inter faith week is a good one which can be used, for example, to raise the profile of inter faith work and make local government more aware and empower faith communities.

### **3. Dialogue at global and local levels**

Concern was expressed about a rising anti-intellectualism in religious communities and about a perceived disjunction between theology and spirituality. Cerebral dialogue can be very important and must not be divorced from spirituality. Individuals could be nominated to take part in the intellectual/spiritual inter faith work to ensure it happens at the same depth as intra-religious debate.

## **Workshop 5: Young People and Dialogue**

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

*Presenter: Denise Chaplin, Chair, National Association of SACREs*

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### **Key points from the presentation by Denise Chaplin**

NASACRE originally included work with the Welsh SACREs, but now its work focuses just on England and in armed forces schools abroad. A sheet outlining its work is attached. It is a member body of the Inter Faith Network.

Within each SACRE there are members drawn from four constituencies (or 'committees') in terms of the 1988 Act:

- Committee A – Faiths other than Church of England
- Committee B – Church of England
- Committee C – Teachers and professional associations
- Committee D – Local authorities

Religious Education can include the study of inter faith relations and SACREs can engage in dialogue themselves in that activity. SACREs can support projects with funding. Projects should: (a) be needs-led and (b) have a lasting legacy.

She gave examples of work by SACREs in two London boroughs:

- (a) In Newham the SACRE has been involved with work on sex and relationships education. They have produced a DVD which they are now marketing as a resource for schools.
- (b) In Lewisham the SACRE looked at the transition period from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, working with 5 sets of 15 pupils from different schools to explore issues surrounding practising faith in secondary schools, for example fasting or PE kits. A panel, (made up of secondary school students, including the 'Young Mayor' of Lewisham and her advisers, Hindu, Christian and Muslim), answered faith questions from participants. Participants brought their own personal questions and those from their school councils. They also went in to the homes of six people of different faiths to talk about their faith. They learnt new skills through meeting new people. A leaflet is being given to all 'transition' coordinators.

In answer to questions, Denise Chaplin said that SACREs cover statutory education up to the age of 18 but also work with the whole community. The projects carried out involved full days rather than evenings or weekends. The schools involved had links to SACREs and, in the second example, to the Citizenship Network in Lewisham.

**The following points were made during the discussion:**

- The work of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) is often not well known.
- The amount and shape of RE covered in a school very much depends on the school management context. Some schools just cover the minimum level of RE required and others go further. One of the best ways to get schools involved is by offering them help in delivering the curriculum. Schools like practical help.
- In Blackpool the SACRE has been developing a sex and relationship strategy. It is trying to get the local authority to agree to widen the SACRE remit to cover relationship between RE and PSHE. Walthamstow Forest is also working with its local SACRE on sex education and faiths.
- At a Network of Buddhist Organisations conference it had been clear that there was a lot of pressure on RE teachers and that they usually had responsibilities in other areas of the curriculum as well.
- RE teachers quite often do not cover inter faith issues and skills.
- Some authorities include inter faith work in their RE syllabuses, for example Bradford does and Lambeth includes one unit on inter faith issues. It would be better if every level of RE had to have inter faith resources. The goal should be for inter faith issues to be covered at every level of RE and for appropriate resources to be available to support this.
- It is hard to teach about topics of which you do not have experience. Not all teachers have a faith, and need resources to help them.
- It would be helpful if NASACRE could share information about resources nationally. The RE Council is currently looking at DCSF funding to examine what resources are available already.
- People of faith going into schools in person is much better than students reading about religion in a book. This helps to counter the portrayal of religion in the media but schools are often hesitant about inviting faith community representatives into the classroom
- It is good to share stories and to take students to places of worship.
- Inter faith work can be approached through the arts. For example, the Yorkshire and Humber Interfaith Youth Council are holding a music and faith conference
- Working with young people from different faith backgrounds can be very exciting. It is much easier when there is a good level of trust in the classroom and trust between parents and the school as well.

- Alif Aleph has recently finished a Jewish-Muslim faith schools linking project and the need for resources came up as an issue in that. Three key points came from the project: (1) Some young people know very little about different faiths – it is good to go into schools and tell them; (2) it is very helpful to visit places of worship; (3) it is important to provide resources. Differences and commonalities can be shown in a positive light, highlighting what is important for the students. There is little available to give teachers and teachers are interested to work on these topics. One page sheets to copy and worksheets are very helpful
- Faith Awareness produces resources for older pupils and staff to give an insight into other faiths in order to appreciate and respect others, eg “Meeting Sikhs”, “Meeting Hindus”. They are hoping to produce one entitled “Meeting Christians”. The books are about meeting at the level of personal experience and at an academic level. Faith Awareness also produces resources for worship and storytelling, including resources for assemblies.
- Local people are often the best resources and can tell stories about their community. The Council of Christians and Jews has helped students to learn interview skills and in turn they interview older people from faith communities and then go on to do more research. A similar project to this was carried out in Leeds.
- Chaplains in Further Education would also like to be more involved in this week. They could be provided with a resources pack by, for example, CCJ or the Inter Faith Network.
- Minorities of Europe is also producing some materials in this area of work. They have created a forum for young people to discuss faiths. Young people are interested in deeper issues, for example the meaning of life, and need to be offered a coherent vision of different religious traditions. Just learning facts at school is not particularly inspiring.
- The Three Faiths Forum ran an education project which originally focused on faith schools and they have had requests to expand this area of their work. It is not up to inter faith organisations to keep within the prescribed school curriculum. They should be able to offer projects which are relevant to the curriculum but their work should not be limited by it. Tools for Dialogue is another 3FF project where groups of Christians, Jews and Muslims look at scriptural texts on specific issues.
- Islington Faiths Forum have produced a calendar to which different schools in Islington have contributed, including RE teachers, PSHE teachers and Art teachers. The Chair of the local SACRE is on Islington Faiths Forum.
- Partnership working between SACREs, local schools and local inter faith groups is very useful.

- Information given to schools about religions and inter faith work should be agreed by local faith groups.
- When resources are put together one must be careful to make them very neutral. It should ideally be a joint operation with consensus.
- If a SACRE does not have adequate representation from faith communities then it is hard for it to influence the curriculum.
- There is a danger of just “I’m Sikh and need to discuss issues faith and to find



losing focus. It should not be you’re Hindu”. Young people relevant to them, not just their common ground.

## **SACREs**

Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are statutory local bodies. They bring together those who represent the local faith communities including the Anglican Church, other Christian denominations and other faiths in their area to work in partnership with teachers and the local authority.

The membership of a SACRE, if properly instituted and supported, provides a natural source of information about local communities and constitutes a useful partnership group for consultation by local authorities (LAs) when promoting community cohesion. Moreover, SACREs can themselves become significant sources for proactive initiatives and projects, and centres of inter-faith development for the whole community.

## **What is NASACRE?**

[www.nasacre.org.uk](http://www.nasacre.org.uk)

The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) is a voluntary, non-profit making national organisation linking the 151 SACREs in England and the Channel Islands and the Forces SACRE. It speaks for SACREs, organises conferences, issues the termly *SACRE News*, provides advice and support and works with other agencies in the field of Religious Education. It is financed mainly by annual subscriptions from SACREs. Its aim is to raise sufficient funds to pay for speakers, meeting places and administration costs, including the capacity to represent the Association in other contexts

All but a very few SACREs have passed resolutions formally affiliating to NASACRE, and the two or three who have not formally affiliated have paid at least one annual subscription and are deemed to be in membership. While all SACREs have access to the full range of services and publications offered by NASACRE, only those in paid-up membership are entitled to a vote at meetings of the Council or to propose candidates for election to the Executive.

The Executive Committee meets each term to plan events and discuss policy and operational issues as they arise. Officers represent the interests of SACREs at meetings of the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), and the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC).

NASACRE holds membership of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales and the Inter Faith Network UK and is represented at meetings of both organisations by members of the Executive. Officers also initiate and maintain contact with faith community representatives across the faith spectrum and respond to National Consultations, National Reports and published articles related to the work of SACREs;



## MISSION STATEMENT

- **NASACRE** exists to strengthen local SACREs and to support them in carrying out all their responsibilities.
- **NASACRE** stands for the value of RE within the whole school curriculum by supporting RE, which is determined locally.
- **NASACRE** considers that the work of SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) should involve genuine consultation at the local level with faith communities and teachers.
- **NASACRE** seeks to maintain and develop lines of communication with the Department for Children, Families and schools (DCFS) and other relevant bodies.
- **NASACRE** seeks to promote inter faith understanding and sensitivity.
- **NASACRE** seeks to strengthen RE by promoting the key role of well-qualified teachers and advisers in all areas and facets of the subject.
- **NASACRE** seeks to promote professional development in RE through initial teacher training and in-service training.
- **NASACRE** campaigns for adequate levels of resourcing to achieve these aims.
- **NASACRE** intends to play a key role in any future debates about the place of RE and Collective Worship in school.



## **Workshop 6: From Action to Understanding**

Many times, understanding between people of different faiths and good relations between different faith bodies grows out of working together – dialogue arises from action rather than coming first. Anna Allen talks about some of the projects funded under the FCCB programme which demonstrate this dynamic.

*Facilitator: Paresh Solanki, Assistant Director (Communications and Development), Inter Faith Network for the UK*

*Presenter: Anna Allen, Community Development Foundation*

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### **Key points from the presentation by Anna Allen**

Anna Allen spoke of CDF's aim to "empower people to influence decisions that affect their lives". She gave background information about the operation of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund in 2006-07 and 2007-08. She gave examples of funded groups that worked on promoting inter faith dialogue. These examples demonstrated that often understanding between people of different faiths grows out of working together – dialogue arises from action rather than coming first. *[Slides from her presentation are attached.]*

### **The following points were made during the discussion:**

- The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund supported a number of inter faith initiatives across England and Wales. Some applicants were very experienced in inter faith work and others were relatively new to this area of work. What do we mean by 'inter faith expertise' and how can we assess the levels of it? Do funders always need to ensure that the applicants have sufficient expertise in inter faith dialogue or can they fund new or inexperienced organisations to do this kind of work?
- Sustainability of inter faith work is the key issue that needs addressing. Those inter faith organisations that lack experience in securing grants might appreciate support from their existing funders on developing robust fundraising strategies. If this support is not available, an inter faith body might find the whole funding experience challenging.
- It is important to encourage Government to consult with a wide range of stakeholders over funding arrangements. The 'Face to Face and Side by Side' consultation provides an important starting point for the open and direct communication between the inter faith bodies and the Government. In terms of sector's view on funding arrangements, the key issues are the need for longer term funding and addressing sustainability of inter faith work.
- There is a need for improved understanding between public sector and inter faith bodies and groups. There is still a considerable level of uncertainty among civil servants around the ways to engage with faith groups. It appears


that the State sees increasingly the value of such engagement but at the same time still requires that the faith groups adopt a secular approach in their work.

- There is a need to take inter faith work from the ‘island of inter faith activity’ into the wider community.
- Every school child in the UK should have interaction with different faith communities. Many teachers and schools struggle to deliver this because of the time needed for curriculum delivery and organising talks and trips. But there are opportunities for contact with local faith communities and for exchange programmes where there is limited religious diversity.

## Slides from presentation by Anna Allen

**Workshop 6**  
**From Action to Understanding**

Presented by:  
Anna Allen,  
Programme Manager, CDF



Introducing our work:  
Community Development Foundation – CDF

Empower people to influence decisions  
that affect their lives

Community development: analysis, strategy and  
delivery

England, across the UK and internationally

Introducing our work:  
Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund - FCCBF

£13 million awarded

Over 900 organisations

2 rounds of funding (2006-2008)

Capacity building and inter faith priority



Drawing learning out of our work

Better understanding between  
people of different faiths

Start with Dialogue

Dialogue and action

Dialogue arises from action

Dialogue arises from action:

examples of funded work

Pulling Together:  
Faith Icons Tapestry Project



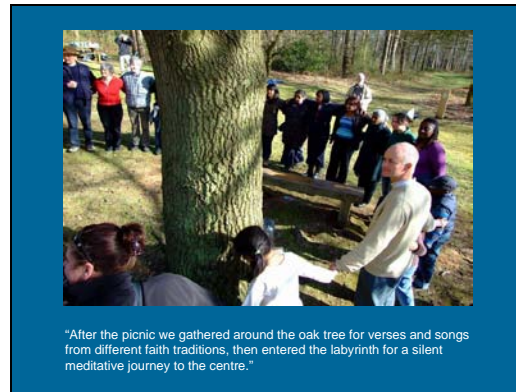


### Pulling Together Project: our learning

Building understanding between communities is not possible without people getting to know one another as individuals

Join action can provide a common focus, which then acts as a catalyst for discussion

### Luton Council of Faiths: Creating the Faith Woodland



### Creating the Faith Woodland: our learning

There is a value in the *process* of creating a space in terms of the relationships created

It is crucial for people to feel comfortable with one another, so that they are happy to begin a dialogue

Social activities often help to create that feeling

## **Workshop 7: Dialogue on a Theme**

Environmental and ecological issues have become increasingly a focus for inter faith working and learning, with members of faith communities coming together to explore their own and each other's teachings on care for the earth.

*Facilitator: Dr Natubhai Shah, Founder President, Jain Samaj Europe*

*Presenter: Anne Vince, Joint Chief Executive (South), United Religions Initiative (UK)*

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### **Presentation by Anne Vince**

The slides from her presentation are attached.

### **The following points were made during the discussion:**

#### Practical joint action on the environment, ecology and faith communities

- To care for the earth in ways which recognise the difference in the situation of richer Western countries and poorer countries elsewhere.
- How to pass on to the wider world the message of just using what is sufficient.
- Sometimes there is deep respect for nature but sometimes an ambivalent attitude to ecology.
- An alliance of religious and conservation interests can enhance environmental impact as faith leaders are trusted.
- We are partners in creation.
- Shift from an individual to a global focus.
- Local churches /places of worship can make an impact collectively if their initiatives are based on practical steps.

#### Faith leaders

- Whilst faith leaders are coming up with an environmental charter at a global level a mechanism is needed to reach the community at grass roots level
- Faith leaders' forums are important as a way to find ways of working with difference.
- There is a need to work on the 'internal environment' of personal spirituality and then to work outwards to tackle global problems in the 'external environment'.

#### Young people

- Nature and the environment are important for young people – work with young people should explore the total environment, making use of the arts.

### Politics

- There is a need to put pressure on Governments. The environmental lobby in the UK is relatively weak.
- The inter faith lobby should struggle for influence to bring about change in government policy and to reduce suffering in the world.
- People want a good environment but do not want to lower their standard of living. There is a tension between these desires.
- Resources should be used in ways which respect the environment.

### Personal responsibility

- We all have personal responsibility to effect necessary change in both the 'internal' and 'external' environment.

### **Summary**

Faith and environmental issues highlight the potential power of shared values but faith helps active awareness of negative influences both within and without.

## Slides from presentation by Anne Vince



### Workshop 7: Dialogue on a Theme

#### **“Same Sky: Shared Earth” Interfaith, Ecology and Environment**



### Setting the Scene

“Religion and belief are motivating forces which guide our existence and make it meaningful. What we can rightly demand is religious freedom, and what we correspondingly must supply are the highest ethical standards of responsible conduct.”

Andrew Clark, General Secretary  
International Association for Religious Freedom 2000-2004



### Environmental issues are forcing faith groups to climb out of their “bunkers”

- “Most faiths have a deep respect for nature
- Many have developed an ambivalent attitude towards ecology and the pressures put on earth by humans.
- Church leaders have concentrated their ethical teachings on the need to relieve human poverty.
- The realities of climate change and the effects it will have on the poor is concentrating minds and causing many to fundamentally reassess their understanding of man's place in the world”  
John Vidal and Tom Kingston *The Guardian* Friday 27th April 2007



### Ecology and Environment is an interfaith issue because...

- Global warming will force 150 million people to move from areas affected by the rise in sea level by 2050  
Climate Institute
- Climate change is already causing the death of 150,000 people every year  
World Health Organisation



### How are Faith Groups Responding?



### Alliance of Religions and Conservation

“Each faith has clear teachings on caring for nature - which they are seeking to implement in practical projects”



### UN and ARC launch programme with faiths on Climate Change

- Faiths are major landowners - they own more than 7% of the habitable land surface of the planet
- The faiths are major providers of education and health care world wide
- The faiths have vast media networks
- The faiths together make up one of the largest investing groups in the world
- The great faiths have vast outreach: and often faith leaders are trusted where government and military leaders are not.



### Operation Noah

- An inclusive group of committed Christians from across Britain.
- People of faith, and none, are welcomed
- Founded in 2001 by Christian Ecology Link (CEL) and later became a joint project of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
- First Christian campaign to focus exclusively on the issue of climate change and this continues to be its mission



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
a forum of many faiths, each retaining their own unique identity

### The Rainbow Covenant

- “there is enormous goodwill and energy to be tapped with Christians in parishes and also beyond...”
- To make connections beyond the boundaries of Christianity with other faiths and people of no faith”

Prof Mary Grey



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
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### “God is Green”

Channel 4 Documentary by Mark Dowd, a former Dominican Friar

- Eco-muslims who unveil the potentially powerful green themes embedded in the Qur'an
- Puts religious leaders on the spot - how man's refusal to obey God's laws in nurturing the natural world has led to devastation
- Asks the question “can faith pull us back from the brink?”
- Explores the issue of “stewardship” and the shift from the individual perspective to the global



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
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### Eco-Congregation

- Developed from a partnership between the Government funded environmental charity ENCAMS (which runs the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign and the Going for Green brand) and the Environmental Issues Network of Churches together in Britain and Ireland
- Now under the management of A Rocha UK
- Aims to encourage churches to consider environmental issues within a Christian context and enable local churches to make positive contributions in their life and mission



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
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### Islamic Foundation for Environmental and Ecological Science

- Participated in “Stop Climate Chaos” rally
- Addressing one of the five pillars of Islam - the visiting of Hajj
- The concept of Stewardship



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
a forum of many faiths, each retaining their own unique identity

### London Islamic Network for the Environment

- The UK's first Local Islamic Environmental Group
- An environmental group guided by Islamic principles
- Regular monthly forums
- Guest speakers
- Open to people of all faiths and beliefs
- Deep dialogue
- Positive action
- Community building
- Recognising humankind's place in creation



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
a forum of many faiths, each retaining their own unique identity

### The Big Green Jewish Website

- Connecting Judaism and the Environment
- The Noah Project, founded in 1997, is Britain's only Jewish ecological group set up to promote “education, celebration and action” for the environment within the Jewish community
- It has support from all five major denominations and from secular Jews
- Partners in Creation, a joint project between The Noah Project and the Board of Deputies, featured as one of four case studies in the Government “Sustainable Development Commission’s” report on UK Faith Groups



**United Religions Initiative UK**  
a forum of many faiths, each retaining their own unique identity

### Interfaith Dorset Education and Action (IDEA)

- Formed in March 2007 by Rabbi Neil Amswych, Principal Rabbi of Bournemouth Reform Synagogue, in the Southern coastal region of England
- With help from a grant Bournemouth Council and some logistics from the Bournemouth 2026 group (set up at the Millennium to “work together for a better future”) he invited over 80 faith and civic leaders to a conference at a local hotel
- IDEA helps people learn about their commonality, and shows that we are much more similar than we may have first thought.



## **The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 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 people of different faiths in this country.

The Network links over 160 member bodies including: national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national, regional, local and other inter faith bodies; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith relations. It works with its member bodies and other agencies to help make the UK a place marked by mutual understanding and respect between people of different religions where all can practise their faith with integrity. It seeks to increase the opportunities for people of all ages to learn more about the importance of good inter faith relations – in schools, within faith communities and in society more widely. It

- provides a trusted neutral, non-denominational framework for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern, reflecting on both the distinctive aspects and the common ground of their individual traditions
- runs a helpline and publishes resources to help people working to promote good inter faith relations
- links, shares good practice between, and supports with advice and information the growing pattern of inter faith initiatives in the UK at national, regional and local levels
- in cooperation with the Scottish and Welsh national inter faith linking bodies and the English regional faith forums, fosters local inter faith co-operation and offers advice on patterns of local inter faith initiatives suitable to particular local area as well as helpful contacts
- assists member organisations and other agencies, such as local authorities and other public bodies, to help strengthen their inter faith programmes and good practice
- fosters joint working by the faith communities on social issues
- arranges seminars and conferences and carries out research to pursue particular issues in greater depth, such as building good relations on campus, educating for shared citizenship, and women's inter faith initiatives

The Inter Faith Network's way of working is firmly based on the principle that dialogue and cooperation on social action can only prosper if they are rooted in respectful relationships which do not blur or undermine the distinctiveness of different religious traditions. In its work, it proceeds by consensus wherever possible and not

making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation.

## MEMBER BODIES OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK 2008-09

### Faith Community Representative Bodies

Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK); Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom; BAPS Swaminaryan Sanstha; Board of Deputies of British Jews; British Muslim Forum; The Buddhist Society; Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland; Churches Together in Britain and Ireland; Churches Together in England; 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); Inter Faith Panel, Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Faith and Public Issues Commission; 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; Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK); Network of Sikh Organisations (UK); Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations; Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB; 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; Faiths Forum for the East Midlands; Northwest Forum of Faiths; South East of 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; International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter); International Interfaith Centre; Joseph Interfaith Foundation; London Society of Jews and Christians; Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme ; Religions for Peace (UK Chapter); St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation; St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society; Three Faiths Forum; United Religions Initiative (Britain and Ireland); Westminster Interfaith; World Congress of Faiths.

### Educational and Academic Bodies

Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme; Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, Heythrop College, University of London; 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 SACREs; Religious Education Council for England and Wales; Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education; Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter; Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths.

### 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; Blackpool Faith Forum; Bolton Interfaith Council; Bradford Concord Interfaith Society; Bradford District Faiths Forum; Brent Inter Faith; Brent Multifaith Forum; Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group; Bristol Inter Faith Group; Bristol Multi Faith Forum; Burnley Building Bridges; Calderdale Interfaith Council; Cambridge Inter-Faith Group; Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action; Cardiff Interfaith Association; Clapham and Stockwell Faith Forum; Coventry Multi Faith Forum; Crawley Interfaith Network; Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group; Forum of Faiths for Derby; Doncaster Interfaith; Dudley Borough Interfaith Network; Elmbridge Multi Faith Forum; Gateshead Inter Faith Forum; Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action; Greenwich Multi-Faith Forum; Harrow Inter Faith Council; Hillingdon Inter Faith Network; Horsham Interfaith Forum; Hounslow Friends of Faith; Huddersfield Interfaith Council; Islington Faiths Forum; Keighley Interfaith Group; Kingston Inter-Faith Forum; Lancashire Forum of Faiths; Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship; Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum; Leicester Council of Faiths; Lincoln Inter-Faith Forum; Liverpool Faith Network; Loughborough Council of Faiths; Luton Council of Faiths; Faith Network for Manchester; Medway Inter Faith Action; Merseyside Council of Faiths; Middlesbrough Council of Faiths; Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes); Moseley Inter Faith Group; Newham Association of Faiths; Newcastle Council of Faiths; Newham Faith Sector Forum ; North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council; North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths; Northampton Faiths Forum; Norwich InterFaith Link; Nottingham Inter Faith Council; Oldham Inter Faith Forum; Oxford Round Table of Religions; Building Bridges (Pendle); Peterborough Inter-Faith Council; Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity Inter Faith Group; Portsmouth Interfaith Forum; Preston Faith Forum; Reading Inter-Faith Group; Redbridge Council of Faiths; Redbridge Faiths Forum; Rochdale Multifaith Partnership; Rossendale Faith Partnership; Rugby Inter Faith Forum; Sandwell Multi-Faith Network; Sheffield Interfaith; South London Inter Faith Group; Southampton Council of Faiths; Southwark Multi Faith Forum; Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource; Swansea Faiths Forum; Faiths United (Tameside); 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 Inter Faith Group; Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group; West Wiltshire Interfaith Group; Westminster Faith Exchange; Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group; Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum; Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group; Wycombe Sharing of Faiths.

Further information about the Network can be found on its website:  
[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

or by writing to its office:

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