

**TIME TO TALK:
FAITHS AT THE TABLE OF DIALOGUE
IN TODAY' S UK**

**Report on the
2003 National Meeting of
the Inter Faith Network
for the UK**

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**2003 National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 03 July 2003
at the TechnoCentre
Coventry University**

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THE THEME

Growing cooperation on the faith and public life agenda

Across the last fifteen years in the UK there has been steady progress towards greater cooperation between different faiths on the “public life” agenda. It is now the norm, rather than the exception, for representatives of different faiths to sit around the consultation table offering their advice or support on issues such as community cohesion, neighbourhood renewal or health policies. There is, increasingly, sharing between faiths of know how and ideas for social action projects and, in a few cases, cooperation between faiths on particular projects. These developments are helping create a UK where there is involvement of all faiths in helping bring about a shared vision for living together as citizens of this society. This joint involvement in public life and social issues is one of the vital dimensions of creating good inter faith relations.

Deepening understanding between and about faiths equally important

Alongside this dimension of joint involvement in public life and social issues, however, there remains the crucial – and ever more significant – task of enabling the members of our respective faith communities to address centuries old histories of misunderstanding, misrepresentation and prejudice.

Discussion between faiths – “dialogue” as it is often called – is sometimes dismissed as “just talking”. But talking is becoming daily more important. Social cooperation alone does not overcome inherited myths and prejudices about other faiths or untangle skeins of suspicion and fear. At a time when developments abroad have contributed to growing levels of antagonism and in some cases have led to attacks on places of worship and individuals, and at a time when extreme right wing organisations are exploiting potent and unpleasant images of particular religions to sow hatred and distrust, it was timely to focus at the Inter Faith Network’s 2003 National Meeting on the questions:

- Why is talking together – and listening to one another - so important?
- Who is talking with whom?
- How are prejudice and misunderstanding between faiths being tackled?
- What developments are taking place in inter religious dialogue here in the UK?
- What are the urgent questions on today’s agenda for inter faith dialogue?
- How can we, as members of our various historic faiths, enable the various vital dialogues to deepen and grow?

PROCEEDINGS

Mrs Rosalind Preston OBE, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting and welcomed participants to it. She said that it would be focusing on the need, alongside the joint involvement of faith communities in public life and social issues, (on which the Network had done a good deal of work in recent years), to deepen and strengthen the dialogue between different faith communities, addressing their shared agendas and drawing on the personal relationships of mutual respect which the Network had helped to develop through providing a safe and secure environment for conversations together. She paid tribute in particular to the work of the staff of the Network office over the past year which had been an arduous one, including a recent move to new premises.

Mrs Preston invited **Dr Harriet Crabtree**, Deputy Director of the Network, to provide a preliminary account of the findings of the Network's fact-finding survey of local inter faith activity across the UK which had been supported by a grant from the Community Cohesion Unit in the Home Office. There then followed three speakers focusing on the special role of dialogue between particular faiths and the in depth encounter which they make possible. **Revd Jonathan Gorsky**, Education Director of the Council for Christians and Jews, was followed by **Kuldip Singh** and **Revd Pamela Wise**, Co-Chairs of the Hitchin Sikh-Christian Forum. Following questions and comments, **Dr Ataullah Siddiqui**, Head of the Inter Faith Unit of the Islamic Foundation, reflected on the various dialogues in which members of the UK's Muslim community are currently involved and on the need for further dialogue. The morning session closed with contributions from **Ashmi Gangani, Kiran Banga and Sophia Ayres**, three students from the Blue Coat School Coventry, who described an inter faith post-16 conference held at the school earlier in the year and reflected on the importance for them of faiths coming to understand each other better in multi faith cities such as Coventry.

After lunch **Bishop Tom Butler**, Network Co-Chair, introduced two further contributions from speakers reflecting on the contribution to inter faith dialogue of their communities: **Bimal Krishna das**, Secretary to the National Council of Hindu Temples, and **Revd Canon Dr Michael Igrave**, Secretary to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's Commission on Inter Faith Relations and to the Inter Faith Consultative Group of the Church of England.

Before the meeting broke up into workshops, **Harun Rashid** presented to the Network Co-Chairs two publications of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group (which had been in existence since 1973): the latest edition of its *Directory of Places of Worship in Wolverhampton* and *Faith Lives*, an information pack describing the life and belief of faith communities in Wolverhampton.

There followed five workshops on: Principles of dialogue; Dialogue between two faiths or three faiths; Dialogue in a multi faith context; Inter faith encounter: the personal dimension; and Social cooperation: the best starting place for mutual understanding?

In the final plenary session, chaired by **Bishop Tom Butler**, there were contributions from a panel of speakers: **Jehangir Sarosh**, Moderator of World Conference on Religion and Peace (Europe) and member of the Zoroastrian community; **Maureen Sier**, member of the Baha'i community and Scottish Inter Faith Council; **Paul Seto**, Director of the Buddhist Society and Inter Faith Coordinator for Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK); and **Bishop Charles Henderson**, formerly in charge of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy's relationships with other

faiths. A presentation of a book was made to Bishop Charles to mark his long involvement with the work of the Inter Faith Network by **Rosalind Preston OBE**, who wished him joy, happiness and good health in his retirement.

The National Meeting closed with some final reflections from **John Battle MP**, Adviser to the Prime Minister on faith community matters.

LOCAL INTER FAITH MAPPING AND GOOD PRACTICE PROJECT

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

Background

I would like to tell you a little about a project that the Network is carrying out at the moment. It is, I think, one of the most important we have been given the opportunity to do in recent years and we are grateful to the Community Cohesion Unit in the Home Office for the grant they have given to help towards making it possible.

The project is a short and rather daunting one! Its purpose is to map local inter faith activity. To take a snapshot at a time of rapid change - an exciting but in many ways challenging time for people working to bring about greater understanding and cooperation between members of different religions in the UK.

The project findings will be feeding into a report. Not a report that simply analyses or a report designed just for reference (valuable though such reports are) but an action orientated report pointing forwards, we hope, towards an even stronger pattern of inter faith cooperation and understanding at local level. Partner to this will be a short leaflet on good practice to help those setting up and developing local inter faith initiatives.

So, the local inter faith mapping project is about extending knowledge of inter faith initiatives – where they are and how they work - but it is also about sharing news of these to help deepen inter faith understanding and cooperation at local level.

To take the project forward a steering group was formed. This has representation from the local inter faith sector (Alan Schwartz of Cardiff Interfaith Association and Fawad Bhatti of Blackburn Inter Faith Council) as well as from the Home Office, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Local Government Association. We are also benefiting separately from the valuable assistance of the Inter Faith Council for Wales, the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum and the Scottish Inter Faith Council and we have been grateful for the ongoing encouragement and support of John Battle MP, who is speaking later today.

Questionnaires have been sent to all local inter faith groups and councils known to the Network asking about many aspects of their work. A different type of questionnaire has also been sent, with the Local Government Association's assistance, to all local authorities in England and Wales and we have sent this additionally to selected authorities in Scotland. These questionnaires focus on how local authorities are responding to the faith and inter faith dimension of community cohesion. The questionnaires are being supplemented by a small number of visits to “good practice” areas.

The project also wrote to a wide range of faith community personnel of all the faiths linked by the Network, to regional inter faith structures, RDAs (Regional Development Agencies), SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education), Race Equality Councils, CVSs (Councils for Voluntary Service) and One World Week groups. The response has been almost overwhelming - far greater than we had anticipated. Many of you here today have

taken part and I want to thank you for the detailed replies you have sent, fitting this into your busy lives. It is this commitment which keeps inter faith work thriving.

The presentation which I am offering today is a brief one which will highlight just a few of the project's findings but I hope it will give you a flavour of the information which has come in. I shall begin with some overview reflections, then look at some of findings relating to local inter faith groups and local authorities, leaving for another occasion other areas of the project. I will then conclude with a few thoughts on next steps.

Overview

So let me begin with some preliminary overview reflections. The overall tenor of the replies that have come in is what I would characterise as hope for the future, tempered in some cases with deep anxiety about the impact of overseas situations and home political and social factors on inter faith relations in the UK.

One race equality council respondent in the South East offered the personal view that: "For as long as Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq, probably followed by Iran and such situations remain, to expect and hope for good interfaith relationship is a dream. These are the kind of views expressed regularly here in our town. People cite examples of 100s of people being killed very day (and here he named various conflicts, reflecting in his choice, of course, his own views). Under these circumstances [he says] it is extremely difficult to bring different faith communities together." Although others were not so blunt, there was an undertow of anxiety in a number of responses related to the impact of overseas events and also related to problems in the UK. These include responses commenting on areas where the BNP are very active or whether there are other difficulties, such as in East London where members of the local Three Faiths Forum and others had been responding to the desecration of nearly 400 graves in the local Jewish cemetery.

On the other hand, most respondents remained resolutely upbeat, emphasizing the many positive developments in their areas.

The project's findings reflect the rich pattern of inter faith activity in our United Kingdom: from chaplaincies in prisons, hospitals, universities and airports, to regeneration programmes, joint action on social projects, inter faith work in schools, to multi faith civic events and services, local initiatives by individual places of worship, fully fledged inter faith groups and councils. And more.

So, for example, we hear of Gwent Emergency Planning Committee working with Gwent faith communities on responding to major incidents. In Swindon the inter faith group reports on work with the local hospital helping to produce a ward guide to special needs and sensitivities of people of all faiths. In many areas, multi faith work to assist refugees is mentioned. A number of Black and Ethnic Minority organisations, such as Crawley Ethnic Minority Partnership, talk about how they have faith communities actively working on local issues alongside ethnic minority organisations.

Inter faith work in schools is a growing area of great significance. From Oldham comes news of an important scheme to help students of different faiths relate to each other in a school badly scarred by inter group rivalry and conflict. News of many interesting inter faith projects came back through the SACRE returns. At the moment 350 pupils in ten East Sussex primary

schools are holding conversation by email with pupils in inner city schools in Leicester on topics related to their work in RE. This innovative scheme was started by Dr Julia Ipgrave from Uplands Junior School, Leicester. Very interesting inter faith events and conferences are also happening at secondary level and we will be hearing later this morning from students of Blue Coats School Coventry about an example of this.

Inter faith education for adults is also an increasing feature of life in many parts of the UK. Inter faith organisations such as the national and local inter faith bodies in membership of the Network play a key role in this as do educational bodies like the new Multifaith Centre at the University of Derby. There are also many other initiatives carried out by particular faiths, some of them in places where inter faith work is perhaps less common. For example Clonard Monastery in Belfast, home to a religious community of 21 Redemptorist priests and brothers, this year ran a well attended series of Lenten talks on different world religions and faiths that have a presence in Northern Ireland. For many it was their first experience of inter faith encounter.

It is clear that dialogue groups are becoming far more common than they once were, particularly those of the Abrahamic faiths but also, as we will be hearing later, other dialogues such as Buddhist-Christian, Jain-Jewish, Hindu-Christian, Hindu-Muslim and Sikh-Christian dialogues. Although some bilateral and dialogue groups are formalised, notably the longstanding branches of the Council and Christians and Jews, the majority of dialogues that have come up on the project's radar are relatively informal. Typical are small Buddhist-Christian groups in Glasgow and Birmingham. Some dialogue groups have a particular dimension. For example some are for women, such as the Daughters of Sarah group which has been meeting for the last 6 years under the auspices of the Maimonides Foundation.

In addition to dialogue groups, individual initiatives involving particular faith organisations are becoming increasingly common. In a few cases these have been going for some while and some are on a relatively large scale – for example cooperation between the Anglican Diocese of Blackburn and the Lancashire Council of Mosques. As well as explicitly inter faith initiatives, many places of worship are making an increasing effort to welcome visitors of other faiths and to encourage their involvement in events at their centres. Typical in this regard is the Gujarat Hindu Centre in Preston and Hounslow Gurdwara in London.

There is no doubt that the events of 11 September 2001 were a trigger for a rapid increase in awareness of the importance of good inter faith relations and for an increase in activity. From areas such as Exeter, Leeds, Llandudno, and Newcastle came news of special events and programmes which developed from these sad events.

The conflict in Iraq produced a similar acceleration of inter faith encounter and commitment to joint working. Building Bridges Burnley wrote of an inter faith Prayer Vigil which was held in Burnley's Peace Garden on a bitterly cold Saturday morning in February when the war with Iraq seemed inevitable. In Bolton, for example, a special meeting was held on possible implications of Iraq war for faith communities. Similar meetings took place in many other places from Epsom to Glenrothers.

Local inter faith groups and councils

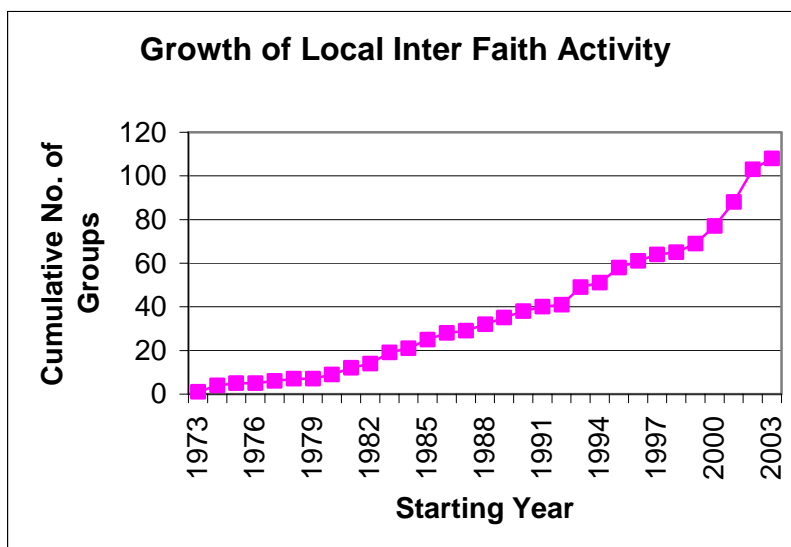
I would like to turn now to look particularly at multi faith inter faith groups and councils because they have a special importance. Where local inter faith initiatives work well, they

make a great difference to their area. They bring people of different faiths together to learn more about each other's faiths and to co-operate in giving advice on religious issues to local public service providers. They also ensure that leaders of the different faiths in a locality meet regularly at meetings or special functions. These personal links are crucial to ensure rapid and effective response if problems occur such as attacks on places of worship or disagreements between young people of different communities. This bringing together of the faiths, in meetings and in civic contexts, also has symbolic importance - not to be undervalued - giving a visible sign of principled peaceful coexistence and co-operation within our society.

In this section of my talk I am going to draw on some of the data that has been collected and analysed for the project and to look at some of the specific aspects of how inter faith work is carried out. I should say at this point that we are very grateful to Diane Toothill, a temporary colleague at the Network, who has been assisting with data entry and management of return data and to Dr Rose Crabtree of Oxfordshire County Council who has volunteered her time and expertise to analyse the data.

a) Numbers and distribution of local inter faith groups

The survey to date shows 118 fully operational multi faith groups and councils in existence in the UK of which 110, ie 93% (a very high response rate), have sent usable questionnaire returns.¹ That are a further 11 under formation.



This graph, based on the 110 groups which returned questionnaires, shows the rise in the number of active groups between 1973 and 2003.

¹ By the end of July over 130 had been identified.

Area	Number of Groups	%
East	8	7.3
East Midlands	12	10.9
Greater London	17	15.5
North East	4	4
North West	16	14.5
South East	14	12.7
South West	11	10
West Midlands	10	9.1
Yorkshire and Humber	12	12
Wales	2	1.8
Scotland	4	3.6
Total	110	100.0

This table shows how many there are in each English Region and in Scotland and Wales. No multi faith local inter faith groups are known to exist in Northern Ireland.

b) Groups' activities

What are groups doing?

Activity	Groups	%
Multi faith dialogue	90	82
Promoting harmonious race relations	87	79
Discussion meetings on religious topics	86	78
Discussion meetings on social topics	73	66
Inter faith awareness raising	69	63
Assisting in multi faith civic ceremonies	66	60
Social gatherings	66	60
Shared prayer/ worship	63	57
Shared meals	58	53
Acting as a consultative forum on local issues for local govt	57	52
Educational events/ exhibitions	55	50
Peace multi faith pilgrimages/ walks	53	48
Providing advice/ assistance to public bodies	53	48
Making statements on current issues	45	49
Sending representatives to serve on local govt strategic initiatives	48	44
Sending speakers to schools	37	34
Involvement in regeneration/ neighbourhood renewal work	36	33
Events for young people	26	24
Bilateral dialogue	25	23
Diversity training	20	18
Trilateral dialogue	17	16
Women's meetings	13	12
Environmental projects	8	7

This table shows you the relative popularity of particular types of activity about which we asked. As you might expect, discussion meetings on religious topics and multi faith dialogue are most common along with promoting harmonious race relations.

Around half the groups, such as Bradford Concord, Coventry Interfaith Group, Edinburgh Interfaith Association, Redbridge Council of Faiths, and Westminster Interfaith run annual inter faith walks or pilgrimages.

Educational work is an important part of the life of many local inter faith bodies, such as Gloucester Inter Faith Action, Harrow Inter Faith Council and Suffolk Interfaith Resource, with 50% organising educational events and exhibitions and 33% sending speakers to schools.

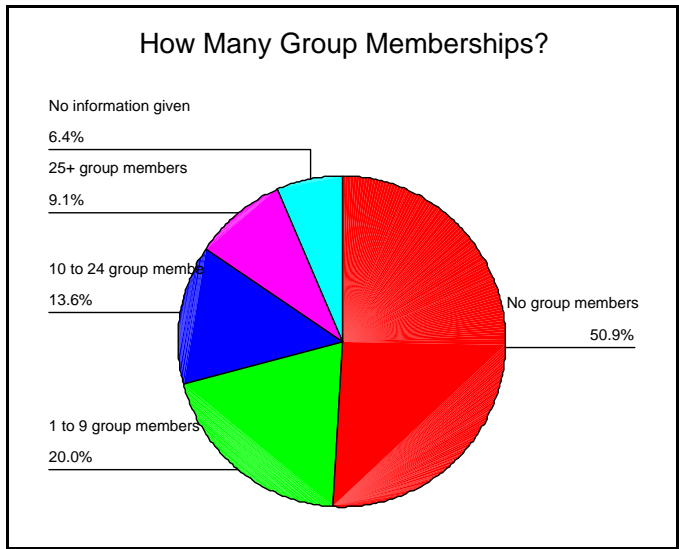
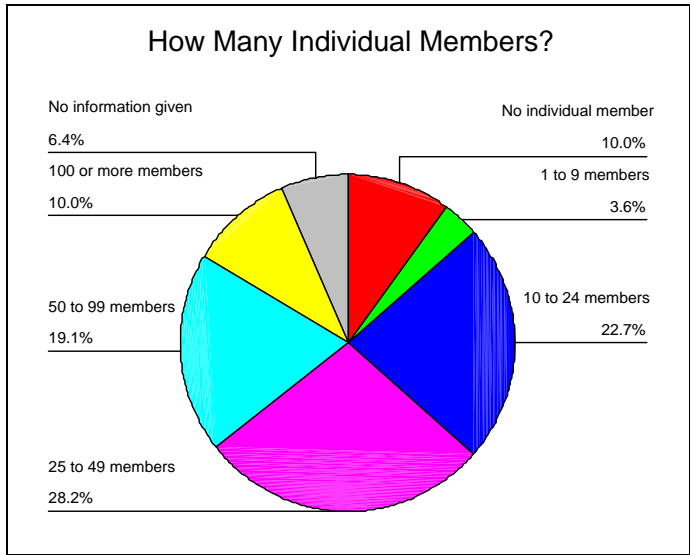
A high percentage of the groups play an active role in civic life. 51% say they act as a consultative forum for local government; 48% provide advice and assistance to public bodies; 60% assist in multi faith civic ceremonies. A rather lower percentage record involvement in regeneration/neighbourhood renewal work but that is perhaps because there many are in areas where little work of this kind is happening.

Inter faith initiatives started, and in some cases run with, local authority assistance seem more likely to act as consultative forums for local government. Westminster Faith Exchange, for example, notes as one of its aims: "To encourage dialogue and provide an opportunity for faith based organisations to network with each other and the City Council" and Glasgow Forum of Faiths has as its main purpose "to bring together civic authorities and leaders of various faith communities to work for the good of Glasgow". These local inter faith initiatives with a close link to or working relationship with local government often have a particular interest in faith based social initiatives. For example, among Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council's aims is "to improve the quality of life for local people by working together on agreed projects demonstrating partnership between different faiths".

The majority of groups meet monthly or quarterly, holding their meetings in a variety of locations. An increasing number choose to hold their meetings at different places of worship on a rotating basis and a couple commented on the importance of this for the success of their inter faith group or council.

c) Members

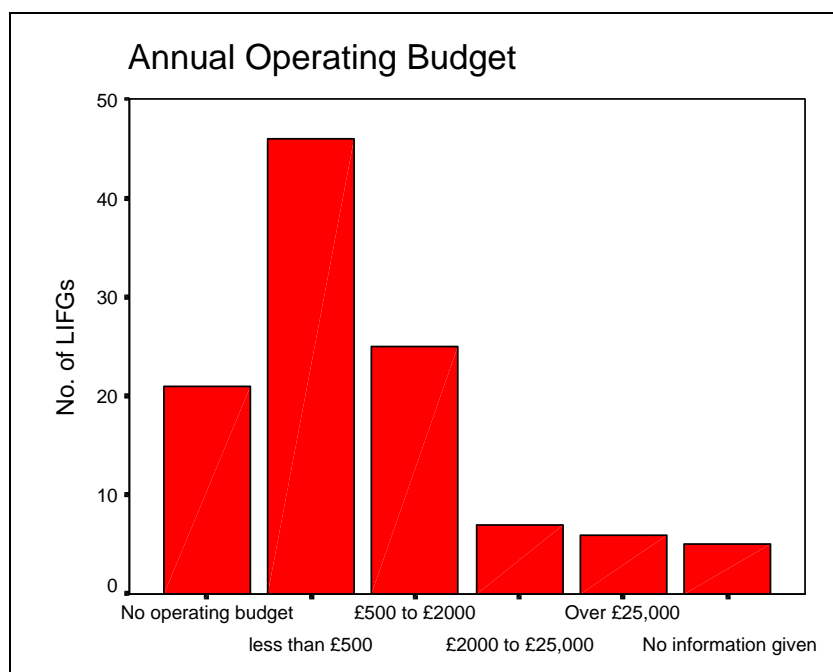
About half of the groups have just individual members and half have both individual and organisational membership. One or two, such as Southampton, have chosen explicitly to have no members. The pie chart on this slide shows the breakdown of groups by size of their individual membership. As you will see, most groups involve on a regular basis either between 10 and 24 members or between 25 and 49 members.



Nearly half of inter faith bodies have no group members and the remainder have relatively few. One important implication of this is that in most areas local places of worship and religious organisations are not plugged directly into the work of their local inter faith bodies.

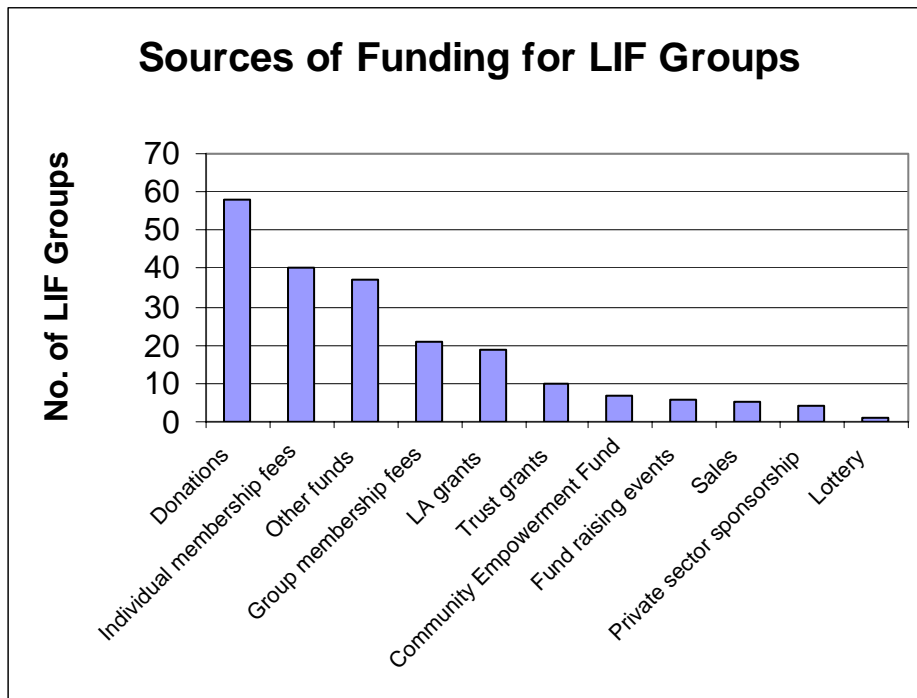
About a quarter of local inter faith initiatives have offices – mainly groups with a budget of £500 or more per year. Only 20 of the 110 responding groups have any paid staff. Most run on the energy and commitment of volunteers.

d) Money



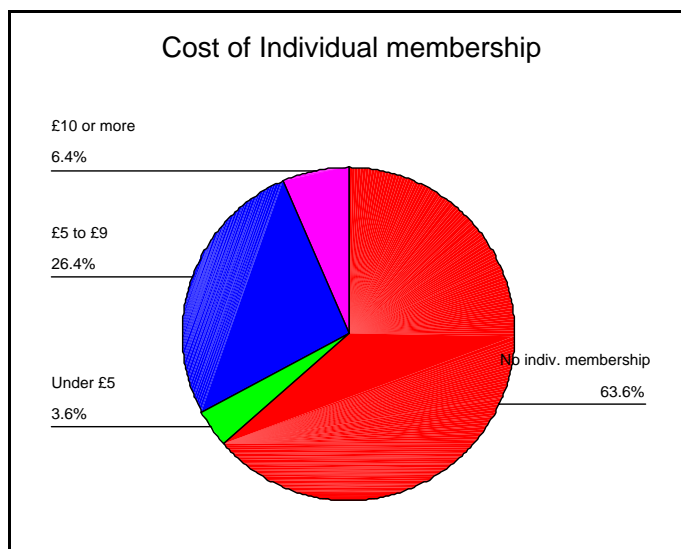
Annual operating budgets ranged between a nominal zero ("we pay occasional small expenses out of our own pockets") through to, in a tiny number of cases, £20,000 or above. However, it is very hard to compare the income of different groups since in some cases grants have been received directly by the group for core funding, whereas in other cases they are running or jointly running projects where, as in the case of the Positive Images project linked with Gateshead Faith Forum, significant funding has been received (in that case through a Home Office Grant). The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund has proven very significant in helping set up some of the new multi faith initiatives. Community Empowerment Fund monies have also been important to a number of these.

Sources of funding vary.



A number of local inter faith groups and councils such as Leicester Council of Faiths, Suffolk Inter Faith Resource and Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group presently receive significant grants from their local authorities. The number remains, however, relatively small. Some inter faith bodies, particularly those very closely linked with their local authorities, receive in kind support in the form of staffing, meeting rooms and mailing costs.

For most local inter faith groups, individual membership fees and personal donations remain the main source of funding.



This pie chart shows you what groups charge for individual membership. As you will see, the majority charge nothing. Of those which do charge, the usual rate is between £5 and £9 a year.

A common reflection from respondents is that with relatively little additional money they could do so much more. There is the usual chicken and egg problem faced by small voluntary groups: everyone is volunteering their time, few people have experience in fund raising, and there is a puzzlement about how to interface with funding agencies. But there is also another aspect to the situation. Not all inter faith groups or councils want to be large, well funded bodies with wide ranging programmes. They consciously opt to be small informal networks and friendship groups with an emphasis on mutual religious exploration and spiritual engagement.

I should note, though, that within a number of groups there seems to be ongoing debate about how best to mesh the older mutual understanding, spiritual exploration and friendship agenda with the more recent faith consultation and social action agenda partly driven by local government. In some areas groups are evolving to take on board the new agenda, in others new structures are emerging alongside existing inter faith bodies to serve the differing needs. For example, in Leeds, Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum and Leeds Concord play complementary roles, with differing emphases.

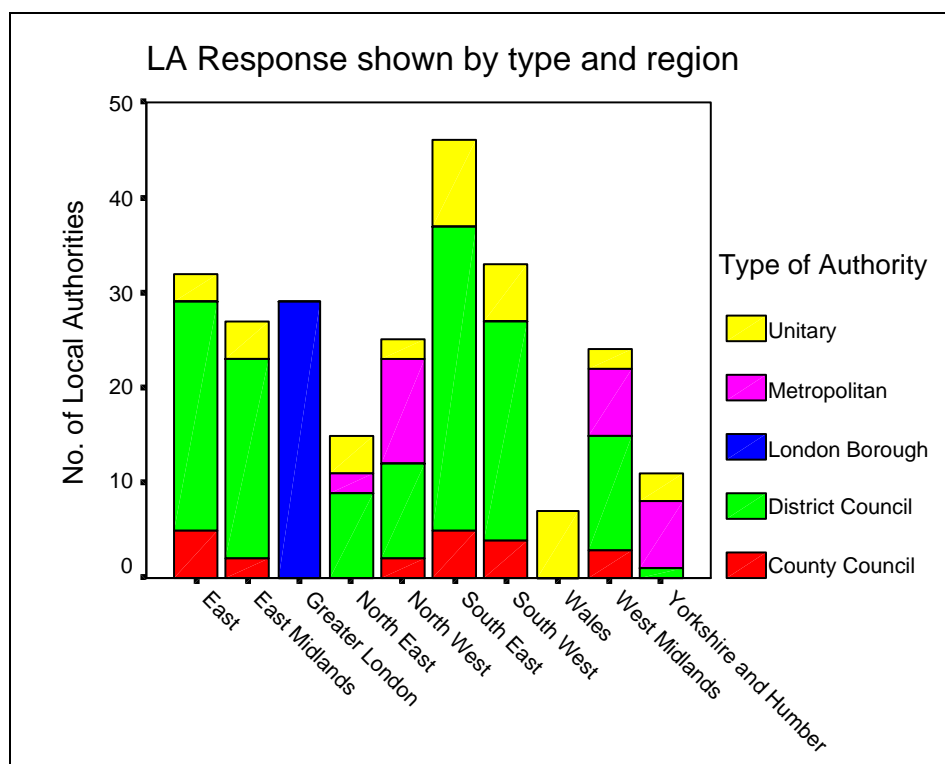
Local authorities

This is perhaps a good point to turn to local authorities and how they are engaging with faith and inter faith issues. The 61% response rate that we have had is an indicator not just of the fairly active chasing that was done to get returns in but also, I think, of genuine engagement with the issues. Typical is a comment from Cardiff Council: "The issue of faith communities is increasingly important as local authorities turn their attention to community cohesion. In an era of global tension, the links between different faiths are an important determinant of good community relations. "

A number of respondents wrote at length about their authorities work relating to faith communities. 44% of responding authorities now have an officer or officers with specific responsibility for faith and inter faith issues.

a) Response rates and types of respondent

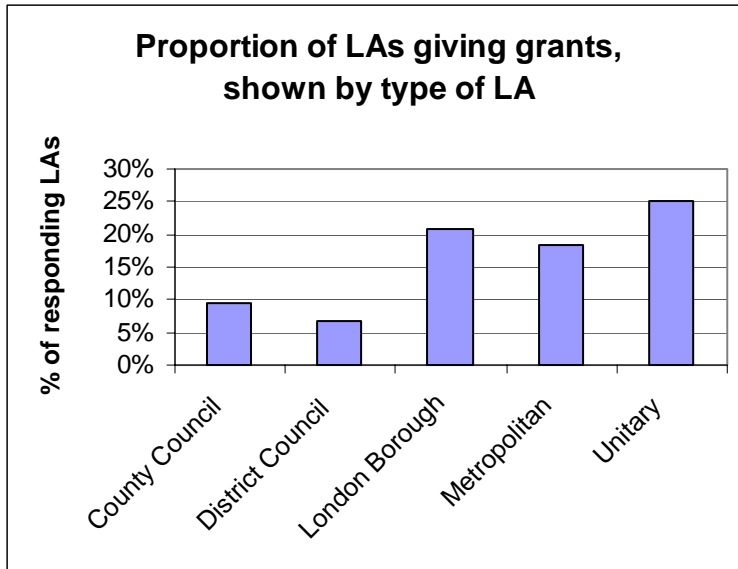
How many authorities responded and of what kinds?



This slide shows the return rates from the different regions of England and from Wales where questionnaires went, with the assistance of the LGA, to all local authorities (in Scotland we wrote, on the advice of the Scottish Inter Faith Council to 5 authorities and their responses are not all yet in).

b) Money

In the last financial year, grants were given by local authorities in a number of parts of the country to local inter faith initiatives.



As this slide shows, the number of grants was higher for Unitary authorities and London Boroughs and Metropolitan Authorities, probably reflecting the multi faith nature of their populations.

Some of the most significant examples of grant aid from local authorities (between £5,000 and £20,000 per annum) were found in multi faith towns and cities. However local authorities in some less religiously diverse areas such as Suffolk also supported inter faith work. Smaller grants for events or projects were peppered about the country, for example in Warrington helping fund the launch of the new council of faiths or for one off projects by Medway Council. Quite a number of authorities offer in kind support, assisting with mailings, free venues and publicity and occasionally staff time.

Anecdotal evidence, drawn from conversations with some of the local authorities, suggests that the overall relative paucity of grants has to do with a number of factors. Factor 1 - quite a few local authorities are blissfully unaware of their local inter faith councils and groups! Notably a major local authority in the South East expressed completed lack of knowledge about their highly successful, longstanding local inter faith group. There is a job of work to be done in raising awareness. Factor 2 – not all authorities have an officer responsible for faith and inter faith issues and there is sometimes puzzlement over which parts of an authority ought to be dealing with faith and inter faith matters and could help local inter faith groups. Factor 3 – local inter faith groups and councils do not always understand how best to approach their local authority for funding or are put off by the requirements to monitor what they are delivering for their grants. Factor 4 – a significant number of authorities felt their local inter faith bodies were not at all representative or only fairly representative and had slight reservations about funding them in this context. Factor 5 – Just as some local inter faith groups have reservations about the local government agenda, some local authorities still have reservations about funding work with a religious dimension.

The 2001 census figures for each local authority are now available and there is an interesting pattern emerging of many local authorities growing their own multi faith consultation structures as a way of trying to ensure that they get on board the key faiths in their areas in a way that reflects the faith balance of their populations. Barnsley, for example, where the Barnsley MBC/Faith Communities Forum grew, in 2002, out of the old Churches Forum and

which has as its aim: to enable the Council and local faith groups to discuss matters of mutual concern/interest.

Although we did not ask explicitly in our questionnaire to local authorities about Local Strategic Partnerships, it is clear that the arrival of LSPs has accelerated local authorities' interest in faith community patterns in their areas because of the need to ensure appropriate sources for nomination of people to fill "faith seats" on those LSPs which have these. So, for example, new consultative patterns are being explored in areas such as Blackpool, Bournemouth, Bury, Derby and Reading. In other areas, such as Leeds and Northampton, an existing inter faith structure is nominating one or more faith reps.

There are many other observations that could be offered about local authority support and funding for inter faith structures, but time is limited and I would like to return to the wider picture and in particular to steps ahead.

Conclusion

In terms of the project, the information that has come in has been so voluminous and so very interesting that it is clear that the project will be developing into one with a number of stages. The first stage will be the completion of the good practice leaflet which the Network plans to publish in association with the LGA, the ICRC and [the Home Office. A short report is also being produced, which will offer an overview of the information which has come in and highlight a range of examples of good practice by local inter faith groups, other local initiatives, and local authorities. We are also working on a much longer, detailed survey report, drawing in detail on many of the returns which have been sent in.

All the outcomes of the project are linked to a subsequent programme of work which, depending on funding, we would like to see take place across the coming three years. This would be a programme of work to support and strengthen existing patterns of inter faith activity and to enable local inter faith groups to play an even more important role in helping develop good inter faith relations in their areas. As is clear from many of the returns, the time is right for this. We in the UK, of all faiths, have much to be proud of on the inter faith front but there is still much work ahead of us to build a society where all can live harmoniously, with respect for each other's faith, and a commitment to creating a society rooted in the values we share, working together for the common good.

In this coming period, I think, several different strands of inter faith work will be of equal importance – multi faith cooperation on social projects, inter faith education at every level, faith engagement in civic life and, of course, dialogue. Some of the comments from more social action focused inter faith bodies have indicated some impatience with talking. But in those contexts where there are deep divisions, ignorance and where people are anxious and pessimistic, such as the REC respondent quoted earlier, talking matters. I've never particularly liked the word "dialogue". It sounds a bit abstract. But talking, meeting, engaging and dealing with our shared past histories and our present disagreements as well as our areas of agreement – we need to do all these things and we need to do them urgently. It is truly time, if ever there was, to come to the table of dialogue. I look forward to hearing from the rest of today's presenters some of the ways that this is happening.

The report on the Local Inter Faith Mapping Project, *Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey*, was published in October and can be ordered from the Inter Faith Network office for £8.95 including postage and packing.

The good practice leaflet, *Partnership for the Common Good: Inter Faith Structures and Local Government*, was also published in October in association with the Local Government Association, the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and is available from the Network office. Please send an A4 stamped addressed envelope.

IN DEPTH ENCOUNTER: THE SPECIAL ROLE OF DIALOGUES BETWEEN PARTICULAR FAITHS

Revd Jonathan Gorsky, Council of Christians and Jews

It is a great privilege to be invited to address you this morning. There are a number of areas that I have been asked to share with you. The first is the background of the Council of Christian and Jews, when it was formed and why. CCJ was formed 60 years ago. The background was the Second World War, a tragic and dreadful period for all of us, which in the Jewish memory would focus particularly on the Holocaust, the greatest tragedy in our community's history. As we looked at these horrors from Britain distinguished Christian and Jewish leaders decided that after the war they would try to build a better world, not only for Christians and Jews, but for everyone. The key point was to do something about prejudice and about the fearfulness that so often affects relations between different communities. The Chief Rabbi and distinguished Christian leaders founded CCJ, which was very innovative in its time because it was determined to involve "ordinary people". It was not to be a gathering of academics or eminent persons, but the whole idea was to get to grassroots levels. In a sense that is what it has been doing ever since. We have branches all over the country, in all the major towns and cities of the United Kingdom. We have about 4000 members and the branches are enormously important to us because without them, no matter what good work is done at the centre, it really is not touching everyone. You have to be able to reach out. You have to be able to touch everyone in all the different levels of society. This is the background to the CCJ and what the organisation is fundamentally about.

Historically, of course, there are other elements of background. Christian-Jewish relations have been very difficult for millennia and bringing these two communities together in all of their diversity has been no simple task. Initially, the key word was fragility. It was very difficult to discuss anything that was truly significant because people felt that to do so would wreck the enterprise, even before it had properly got underway. That stage took decades to overcome. It was so difficult for people to come together at a time before any notion of a multi faith society had really come into being. In the 1940s the only numerically substantial non-Christian community was the Jewish community. There were people of many different faiths, but usually in relatively small numbers.

So that is the background to the beginning of CCJ. But what do we do today? The situation is completely transformed. Not only do we have our branches, we have a professional staff. We have wide ranging educational activities. The best way to give you a picture of our work would be through several examples. On an annual basis we take people to Israel and Palestine. We do not take them as pilgrims, tourists or holiday makers, but we take them to hear whoever we can reach in the space of 9 or 10 days. They listen to all strands of Israeli Jewish opinion and meet Palestinians, Muslims and Christians. They meet people of every conceivable political persuasion and sit and listen. Much that they hear they might not accept or agree with, but what we are trying to do is to enable people to develop an understanding of the present conflict in its depth, passion and diversity; to help them hear where those involved are coming from, to hear what is happening to them and what the impact of their circumstances are. We believe that this process is absolutely vital, not only in addressing international conflict, but in all of the conflicts we encounter at home. The key word is dialogue and the key word in dialogue is not talking, but listening. This is one flagship activity of CCJ.

A second example is our educational work in Northern Ireland where members of staff assist the Christian Education Movement in bringing together schools across communal boundaries. So far, in terms of our involvement the project has touched more than 2000 young people across the length and breadth of Northern Ireland. We are drawing on the experience of Christian-Jewish relations to be of service and assistance in a very different pattern of conflict, but in a way that is immensely rewarding.

Neither of these activities would have been remotely conceived by those who founded CCJ. They did not anticipate religious dialogue of any sort because they thought it would be a threatening activity. That shows just how far we have come over the past 60 years. Today, dialogue is taken for granted and inter religious engagement, exploring difficult issues is what we are all about. This is the revolution which has taken place over the past 60 years. So these are some of the centrepieces of our work: education, but education of a particular sort, touching the grassroots and not being confined to the more elevated areas of our society.

CCJ has a journal called *Common Ground* which is quite unusual in being read across all Christian and Jewish boundaries. It is also read by people who are from other faith communities and from none. It is a crucial publication for us, as it enables us to hear each other. It is not simply a digest of information, but it offers people a chance to talk about how they feel and how different issues affect them. It is about personal communication, which is crucial for us. This journal is part of CCJ's very wide range of educational activities.

Having looked at our background and how we operate I want to look at the question of bilateral dialogue. CCJ is a bilateral organisation which means that it exists for two "constellations" of faith communities, because each of them is so diverse. Why are bilateral organisations important, alongside, of course, all other types of dialogue which are equally precious? There are several points to make. If two communities have a common agenda and interests and common concerns that are troubling them, then it is absolutely vital that they get together and talk about them. As in any case of conflict there is a wide range of issues which continue to trouble and separate Jews and Christians. So it is important for Jews and Christians to talk together about that shared agenda, which is not necessarily of the same interest to other faith communities. A common agenda requires people to get together to discuss it.

A second point is that if we are trying to gain a deeper understanding of any of our faith communities we find very quickly that every community is not only a world in itself, but a civilisation in itself. If we are to have any sort of understanding of a different community then we owe that community the courtesy of focusing on them. Even if we do that and do it for decades, very often we only begin to scratch the surface. This is so even in our own faith communities. I know that I have been studying the Jewish tradition since I was a child, but I would certainly not claim any great expertise in it. When one studies another faith community in addition to one's own, in all of its diversity, history and depth, that is a life's work. This is why bilateral dialogue is enormously important. If you wish to achieve depth you must realise you are talking not only to a community, but to a civilisation.

Thirdly, in our work we very quickly become aware of just how diverse each community is. For the Jewish observer the diversity of the Christian world is truly extraordinary and of course the diversity of the Jewish community is also very considerable. If you forget about even the broad headings and talk about a single church, a single synagogue, a single mosque,

a single local community, you can devote your life to that community and you will not be exhausted in what you will find. Everyone is an individual, everyone is precious. One of the ways to banish prejudice and stereotypes is simply to get to know one local community that is not your community but is someone else's. When you become aware of the sheer extent of variety and diversity, the idea of talking about 'Muslims' as if they are all the same, or 'Jews' or 'Christians', is simply not on the agenda. These are some of the advantages of bilateral dialogue.

Of course, this is not the only sort of dialogue and there are many occasions when we must all come together and be supportive of each other. There are matters such as the conflict in the Middle East which involves more than two faith communities and to exclude any of them would be quite invidious. So there are many different circumstances and many different forms of dialogue, but the bilateral element is crucial for all us. That is what we have discovered in our experience.

Christian-Jewish relations are deeply affected by the Middle East conflict. I do not have time to describe all that we have done to address this but I will give you just three examples. Firstly, we are trying to help all of our members, who have very different and often passionately held opinions. We are trying to help them hear each other. It is not a matter of Christians versus Jews; there are very different opinions within each community. Secondly, we try together to support those in Israel and Palestine who are pursuing peace and reconciliation. They are often very much alone and need all of us. Thirdly, and finally, we are trying to understand what happens to our communities in times of conflict. This has been one of my particular tasks in the CCJ over the past three years of the intifada. To try to understand how we respond to the Israel-Palestine situation and why we respond as we do and to share that with each other. Conflict can be very demanding in our dialogue, and tends to overshadow all of our other concerns.

Finally, I am asked to talk about what we call our Further Dialogue Group, which involves people from many faith communities who take part in different inter faith dialogues. Very often we find that those involved in dialogue can be isolated and misunderstood in their own communities still. There is a need to share experience and offer mutual support; to hear each other and to learn from each other is enormously important. The Group recently held a day seminar which was particularly fascinating because we discovered that just as there is a great diversity in faith communities, so there is a great diversity in dialogue. We divided into four workshops. Groups discussed young people in dialogue, women's experiences in dialogue, dialogue that takes place on a profound spiritual level and matters of dialogue in conflict. The content of each workshop was very different. Dialogue, in short, is as diverse as the people who participate in it. There is not just one method of dialogue. At its greatest, it is the most profound form of speaking to each other that we have, but the finest gift that it offers is that it develops in all of us the capacity to listen and to hear each other. In a world of conflict this is very precious indeed.

IN DEPTH ENCOUNTER: THE SPECIAL ROLE OF DIALOGUES BETWEEN PARTICULAR FAITHS

Kuldip Singh, Co-Chair Hitchin Sikh-Christian Forum

I came to this country in 1968, some 35 years ago, and have been living in Hitchin since then. In those early days you could count on your fingers the number of Sikhs there, no more than ten practising Sikh families. Our focal point used to be the local library because we were almost forced by our parents to go there to learn. We had a very wise and thoughtful librarian called Mrs Petrie, who is still a member of our Forum, and she used to take a really keen interest in people from different faiths. Over a period of time an informal group developed. She would ask questions about our faith, what our needs were and we would reply by saying that we needed books in Punjabi, as well as books in English. It was in December 1999 when the group was formalised and the Hitchin Sikh-Christian Forum came into being.

The Group is constituted primarily for dialogue between Sikhs and Christians, although that is not to say that we have not looked at other faiths. Hitchin is a fairly small town and there is no sizeable Hindu or Muslim community. There is a small mosque there, but no Hindu temple. Despite some attempts to do so we have not had sufficient support to make the group into a multi faith one, but its bilateral basis has worked really well. We meet three or four times a year. There are three gurdwaras in Hitchin. We meet alternately in one of them and in one of the local churches. There are many churches which I walked past for many years without ever having been inside them. Only since 1999 have I actually been inside these churches and have met people and asked questions which I would not have been able to do had it not been for our Forum.

We try to invite outside speakers, rather than having just myself talking on behalf of the Sikh point of view, but I do often find myself answering questions and asked to speak on particular topics. I find it fascinating that there are so many basic core values in our two faiths that are exactly the same. When I am talking from the platform it is so reassuring to see in people's eyes the agreement, the nodding of heads, to see them so engaged and to know that Sikhs are not now seen as some kind of alien community. We have so much in common and I find this the most reassuring aspect of the Forum. In addition to this, we have learned a great deal about each other, often in response to simple questions. For example, is there any significance in the colour of your turban? It has also made me personally look into my own faith from a different perspective because I need to study and prepare myself before I present this to the other members and as I study I am myself able to learn more about my own faith

Revd Pamela Wise, Co-Chairs Hitchin Sikh-Christian Forum

As Kuldip has mentioned, we do meet by rotation in the local gurdwaras and churches. We involve all age groups and have three open meetings a year. They are meetings which we try to design to have as wide an appeal as possible. We have learned by our mistakes in how we present them. We now ask speakers to keep their talks fairly short because people value the question and discussion time more than any other time in the meeting. The questions that are asked are fascinating. Matters that are vital to me as a Christian are of great interest to a Sikh and vice versa.

When choosing topics we have tried to touch on aspects of our shared humanity and how our faiths deal with these. We have looked at death, marriage, birth, baptism and initiation rites. We have also looked at areas of shared common humanity in what we enjoy. We had a very popular session on food and we have looked at symbols, festivals, and music, which was probably the most popular as we had young people involved. We had young Sikh drummers, a young Christian music group and a choir and the programme was very well received. We try to have quite simple presentations as we do recognise that there are limitations in language and limited knowledge of each other's faith. We have also tried to involve people in practical ways. For example, we held a 'place of worship' session where we walked around a church and talked about the significance of different parts of it and then we crossed the road to the gurdwara and did the same. We also looked at ritual clothing and people dressed up for this and the significance of each item of clothing was explained. This kind of event has been very successful and has maintained people's interest.

We have tried to get speakers from outside Hitchin, but quite often have speakers from within the Forum. As I mentioned, what people enjoy most is the time after the presentation, and also the time for social gathering, which from the point of view of inter faith dialogue is probably the most important time, because people eat and mix together and make new friends from the other faith. So we have always allowed plenty of time at meetings for this social mixing and for the question and answer period.

We have discovered that good publicity is crucial. We make sure that posters are put up in good time and regularly try to put articles in parish magazines and gurdwara bulletins on what events are coming up and also reports on what has happened. We take photographs of every meeting and publish those. When numbers are down at a meeting, we know that we have not been successful in our publicity for it. It is not uncommon to have over 100 attending a meeting, with the average being 50 to 60, with good representation from both faith communities. We have also been fortunate to have had chances to talk about the Forum on the local radio, BBC Three Counties. That has been a useful medium for publicising our activities.

In the three or four years that the Forum has been meeting, it has become incredibly successful and very much part of the Hitchin landscape. A crucial factor in this has been the support for the Forum by local Christian and Sikh leaders. We have been surprised by the extent of its success, but also absolutely delighted.

There followed a time for questions and responses

Mr Deepak Naik, International Interfaith Centre

On the one hand I feel positive that any type of inter faith activity is happening and that it should be encouraged. At the same time, as a Hindu, I have at times felt excluded when there are bilateral agreements between particular faiths. I have wondered what the purpose of that was. I have heard two reasons today. Firstly, within the context of the Second World War and the experiences of that time, there was a momentum behind Christian-Jewish dialogue. But I wonder whether the original organisers of this would say today that we only need that dialogue. Secondly, it is good to learn of the Christian-Sikh dialogue launched in 1999. But again, to my mind, even if there are only small numbers of Hindus and Muslims in an area, then it is important to include them. So while I am grateful that these inter faith activities are going on, at the same time I have a feeling that we need to consider more deeply what is needed now.

Bishop Kevin McDonald, Committee for Other Faiths of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

I want to slightly disagree with you, or at least make the point that two different faiths may have quite specific reasons for talking to one another and although the Holocaust may be the background to the setting up of the CCJ, there is a quite specific theological and historical rationale for Christian-Jewish dialogue. Without knowing the details I would imagine, for example, that there would be a quite specific historical and cultural rationale for Hindu-Muslim dialogue. I am not in any way against dialogues that do not have that kind of rationale, but simply want to make the point that there are quite specific reasons why two particular faiths not only should, but must, talk to one another.

Mr Sewa Singh Mandla, Birmingham Council of Faiths

My question is about the Hitchin Sikh-Christian Forum. Would it not be better to have a wider involvement, not only of Sikhs and Christians, but also of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, and all other faiths, so that within one framework you are able to establish relations with all different faiths and have better understanding of them? So far you have been operating on a rather local scale. Do you have any plans to spread your activities beyond Hitchin and take it to a national level?

Dr Ajit Kumar, Merseyside Inter-Faith Group

Firstly, I agree with the concern expressed in the first question that somehow Hindus are being excluded from dialogues. The Palestine or Middle East issue is a political one and there is a need to involve all those with a concern about this. Dialogue, as has been said, is two way. You can go on speaking but if the other person is not listening then there is no real communication. Secondly, in Dr Harriet Crabtree's survey she did not mention Liverpool, where the Merseyside Council of Faiths has been very active. Liverpool is to be the European Capital of Culture and we are proud to be a part of that city. One of next year's themes is inter faith so we should share dialogue and all the faiths should be involved in discussion on events happening around the globe today. Unfortunately, many conflicts that are happening are being fought in the name of religion. So it is up to the religious leaders to come together and have a dialogue and then act together which will have a greater impact.

Revd Pamela Wise

I would like to answer the question about whether bilateral dialogue should be opened up. This is not something we in Hitchin took lightly or ignored. When we first met we discussed

very carefully whether we should in fact be a multi faith council. We decided that as this was a first step, and as we had a previous history and a friendship on which to base this, we should go with a Sikh-Christian Forum, but keep this under review. We have continued to look at the possibility of opening it up into a multi faith council and I am personally in favour of doing so but I think we are waiting for the timing to be right for this. We have discussed the option of maintaining the Sikh-Christian Forum alongside a more multi faith council, because of the history of friendship between these two groups which are the two major faith communities in Hitchin and they have worked together for a number of years, so it is not a closed door. The other faith communities are very small, but, as was said, there is really no bar to inviting them to join a wider council.

Kuldip Singh

I would like to reinforce that. We do keenly desire to involve all the other faiths, but it is very difficult to encourage other people to get involved. Having said that, after 11 September 2001 we did get together a wider group, including the Muslims and Hindus, to release a joint statement to the local press. We thought that might be the beginning of a wider Council, but unfortunately we do still find people who are able to express and articulate their views and their faiths reluctant to come forward. That does not mean to say that we should not continue to try. I do not think that the Sikh-Christian Forum aspires to be a national organisation. It is a local organisation. We have gained a lot with the Forum and the two communities have worked together very well. It has been relatively easy to administer. We have both gained from it. Sometimes, when we have more faiths involved it is easy to lose the focus of the agenda and the issues involved.

Revd Jonathan Gorsky

Each way of operating has its own pitfalls and its own temptations. I would not deny that. The pitfall of bilateral dialogue is precisely that it will turn out to be exclusive. The pitfall of a multi-lateral dialogue including all of our faiths is that there will be a lack of depth and we will not really hear each other at all. What we have to do is to approach whatever we do with a certain humility. I am certainly not saying that our way is the only way, or that only the CCJ or similar bilateral groups are valid. We would like to see everyone included in a variety of organisations. If anyone wishes to talk to a particular faith community simply invite them around, especially if you have a centre where you can hold the conversation. But it is crucially important that multi-lateral dialogue should not lead to superficiality and to stereotyping each other because we never get to talk in depth to a particular community. Somehow the bilateral and the multi-lateral have to be kept in balance. There can be added difficulties when conflicts beyond our national boundaries very profoundly affect our communities. If many communities come together their different conflicts can be very difficult to handle. That is not a reason for not doing it, but the skills involved become quite demanding. Please do not feel excluded by anything that I have said. I have offered one model, which is not the only model. There are many others and if you want to be included, then do be included.

Mrs Rosalind Preston OBE

May I thank all our speakers. I would like to echo the remarks that have just been made in the responses. Like I am sure many in the room today, I have been involved over time in bilateral, tri-lateral and multi-lateral discussions. In my view they each have their distinctive value and can reinforce each other. There is an important place for each of them.

FAITH COMMUNITIES: DEEPENING DIALOGUE I

Dr Ataullah Siddiqui, Head of the Inter Faith Unit of the Islamic Foundation

I would like to address three broad questions. The first is how do I, as a Muslim, feel about dialogue. The second is what is the current situation regarding dialogue. The third is what are the fears of dialogue.

As a Muslim at the table of dialogue I face two challenges. My identity, my belonging, my affiliation is already defined by others. International political crises and issues of ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘terrorism’ have defined my place in the world. Unconsciously, and unspoken, I have been judged. My task therefore is to say who I am not before I say who I am. Eight out of ten times I have to define and clarify my position. The second challenge comes from my own community. As soon as I am involved in inter faith dialogue I am judged by those in my community who think I am involved in a compromise and that I am prepared to surrender my faith in the give and take of dialogue. So the challenge comes: have you ever been able to convert somebody in inter faith? What is the use of inter faith, just talking and doing nothing? Perhaps you need to check your iman - your faith. These are the kind of challenges I face. Dialogue is a lonely business. I try to explain to my Muslim friends that I participate in inter faith dialogue because of my concern for human dignity and justice, to explore and explain my own faith, not to seek conversion, or for some other motive.

There is a common theme between us, between all human beings. The Quran says to us that God has honoured the children of Adam (17:70). That honour has to be maintained irrespective of our faith. Differences of faith in this world are the plan of God and are not an accident. The most important element in inter faith dialogue is faith: there is no inter faith without faith. I can enter dialogue in a meaningful way with my values, with my contribution, with those precious parts of my faith that I want to bring to the table. I believe that those that are involved in inter faith dialogue are inspired by these Islamic traditions and values. Our whole purpose in dialogue is how to find a way to negotiate the differences and to negotiate what is involved in the whole idea of pluralism. How are you going to define it and act it? That is a responsibility derived from our common humanity.

I do not have time to go into great detail how at national and international level Muslims are involved in dialogue. I will just give you an overview. One of the very famous translators of the Quran, Abdul Yusuf Ali, was one of the founder members of the World Congress of Faiths in the early 1920s. The growth of inter faith started in the 1970s and a Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims developed. We now have a Three Faiths Forum in which where Dr Zaki Badawi plays a crucial role. We have a Jewish, Christian and Muslim Dialogue Group in which Rumman Ahmed, Roger Boase and Imam Sajid are involved. Over the last thirty years the establishment of the Inter Faith Network, of the Maimonides Foundation, and at an international level of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, have been very important developments. But there are areas of dialogue that are still lagging behind.

The first and most important need I find is for some kind of national bilateral forum for dialogue between Hindus and Muslims. We have a lot of problems from the historical baggage which we carry. In order to strengthen inter faith dialogue between us we need to

have a national framework for bilateral dialogue to address some of the problems between the two groups. We also need to have a Sikh-Muslim forum. We each have our own histories and this historical baggage has to be dealt with in each of our bilateral relations. We already have forums for dialogue between Christians and Muslims and between Jews and Muslims, but we have yet to establish one between Sikh and Muslims or between Hindus and Muslims. We have to take up this challenge.

There are a number of local inter faith organisations in which Muslims play an active part. For example, in Peterborough, where Zia Hassan is involved, and also in Bradford where Muslims are participating in various inter faith organisations. Let me describe the situation in Leicester, where there is a Christian-Muslim dialogue group and also a Christian-Muslim dialogue group exclusively run by women. The Christian-Muslim dialogue group, in which Andrew Wingate is actively involved from the Christian side, is very effective. Sometimes we handle very difficult issues, for example of conversion, involving converts themselves. People who have become Christians or become Muslims have come and expressed their views. We have raised funds from Ramadan to Lent for people in need. In the last two years we have been able to raise £12,000 for a children's charity, for a Christian hospital in Gaza and for a Muslim orphanage in Kosova. This is an important joint venture. More recently, we have been able to establish a local Hindu-Muslim dialogue group. As you know, there have been incidents in Gujarat and the Muslims and Hindus in Leicester have been affected by these. The best way to resolve these problems is by discussing them between these two groups of people. More recently, we have established a Muslim chaplaincy group and an Advisory Board to discuss chaplaincy matters and to give chaplaincy training has been formed by Christians and Muslims. We hope that in the future other faiths, such as Hindus, Sikhs and others, will also join this, so that we can have a joint venture. We also have a forum of the Abrahamic faiths. The Leicester Council of Faiths has a very significant multi faith role, but we also need to have ways to tackle bilateral relations to clarify our problems before we together go to the Council which could benefit as a result of our doing so. Most important is the positive role played in Leicester by the local media, BBC Leicester and the local newspaper. They also contribute to local inter faith activity, particularly in reporting the work of the Leicester Council of Faiths. Their role is crucial in disseminating positive information more widely.

Let me offer a few final thoughts. Dialogue is not simply about talking with members of other faiths, but also having a firm conviction that our spiritual values have something to offer to the whole of society, not just to ourselves. We enter into dialogue, taking our spiritual values with us so that we can together contribute to the benefit of the whole community. Let us go for a dialogue which does not turn into just another meeting. The purpose of spirituality should be to bring people together. In dialogue we are increasingly facing a common task together, but without facing questions of our relations with each other. My fear is that we will just become another committee or focus group. Dialogue must be meaningful and each community needs to have an "intra-faith" dialogue about its dialogue with others. We never talk amongst ourselves in our own community about how we should deal with the issues of dialogue. As a result, when we turn up for a dialogue, we sometimes do not know what the purpose of dialogue is and simply preach at one another. Many great monologues have been presented under the name of dialogue!

We have seen a growth in inter faith activity across the country as the chart Harriet Crabtree presented to us showed. It is impressive. We have to realise that the context for it has now changed as the Government itself is involved and interested. But the purpose of inter faith

and its spiritual values and the contribution of faiths to it should not be directed by the hope of funding. It should come from our hearts together, even if we do not have funding for it. If the Government comes and gives us help with the process that is wonderful. Be sure that there will be many challenges in the future and to face these we need not only “multi faith” “inter faith” groups but also within them more specifically focused “inter faith” exchanges.

FAITH COMMUNITIES: DEEPENING DIALOGUE I

Teacher and Students from Blue Coat School, Coventry

Ms Gyll Brown, Teacher

We have four sixth form conferences each year at the Coventry Blue Coat School, which is a Church of England foundation but has students from all religions. I apologise that our Muslim young man is not here today as part of our team, but unexpectedly he had the opportunity to attend an open day at a university. He spoke very well at our school's inter faith conference and it would have been good to listen to him. Our outgoing Head Girl, Ashmi Gangami, is going to tell you about the conference that we had a few months ago and then each pupil will speak about their own religious experience in Coventry.

Ashmi Gangani

Last April we held an inter faith conference at Blue Coat School for post-16s at which students talked about different religions and different aspects which could be misunderstood in that particular religion. We also had the opportunity to talk in groups and to put questions to different members of different religions. Views and opinions were shared. We were also fortunate enough to be joined by students from Belfast Lagan College, which is one of the few Catholic and Protestant integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The students talked about the problems between Catholics and Protestants, but they also provided a fine example of Catholic and Protestants working side by side to tackle their problems. I found the conference extremely rewarding and learnt a lot about Belfast which I did not know. Although I knew there were problems between Catholics and Protestants I did not realise how bad they really were. I did not realise there were literally walls between the communities and I did not realise that to have an integrated school was a big deal. It was only when I began talking to the Irish students that they told me that I was the first Hindu that they had ever met. It was then that I realised that as much as we all love to hate Coventry, there are many good things about it we take for granted.

Kiran Banga

I am going to talk about what it is like being a Sikh in Coventry. When my grandparents came here we were a small minority, but there are now third generation Sikhs. We have built a strong community of Sikhs in Coventry, and growing up I have been fortunate to have had a lot of guidance about everyday life and a lot of my religious morals have been passed on to me by my grandparents. Everywhere you look you see people maintaining their Sikh identity, for example people in my family wearing turbans. We have become less of a minority than we used to be. It is also nice to meet people who are of similar origin to myself and who share similar beliefs. There is a good mixture of other faiths and we have become a more multi-cultural society, where there is more respect for each other's religions. For my grandparents there were a number of racial issues between people who were of Indian origin and those who were British.

A number of Sikhs come together for annual events. There are certain charities that are set up by Sikhs in Coventry and that is how I have come to socialise with people in my own faith, as well as with other faiths as well. There is also a charity known as the Sikh Union, which originated from a Sikh hockey team, and we come together every year to raise money for charity. We also celebrate what is known as the Vaisakhi Mela which is a massive festival in celebration of the first five baptised Sikhs. This event takes place in Memorial Park and you

have Sikhs and non-Sikhs coming together for it. They celebrate through playing military war games and there are fair rides and so on.

Although we live in a multi-cultural society in Coventry I still notice that there are clear divisions between Sikhs and Muslims, and between Hindus and Muslims. I do not know whether this has always been the case, but nowadays there is a lot of violence and conflict which I did not notice before. This is rather worrying because we are the future generation. I have grown up with moral teachings from our religion which condemn racism. Among boys there is a competition in who is tougher. Recently I have noticed that Foleshill Road has been experiencing a lot of conflict and this has resulted in shootings and people being stabbed. I think religion is being used as a source of conflict and not as a means of worship and every day guidance as it was when I was younger. This is becoming more of a problem when it never used to be. You hear about the problems in Oldham and Bradford but it has never really been an issue here. I think somehow we need to find the means whereby Sikhs and Muslims, and Hindus and Muslims, can integrate more and get a better understanding of each other, not seeing a person and just labelling them as a Sikh or Muslim, but seeing the person as they really are. I do not know how to go about this, whether people of authority in the mandirs, mosques and gurdwaras could come together somehow. Perhaps the older generation could encourage people of my age to integrate a bit more and have a better understanding of each other in future for the benefit of our generation.

Sophia Ayres

I was asked to talk about Christianity but most people actually think I am Jewish. When I tell people that I am “Orthodox” people automatically think, that I am Orthodox Jewish but I have actually spent the last 18 years growing up as a Serbian Orthodox Christian. I bet you are thinking what is a Serbian Orthodox Christian? As you can imagine, I have grown up in a minority and it did not help at all that I was born in Norfolk! Obviously, living in Norfolk we were away from the Serbian community and this made our religious practice suffer. When we moved into our house it was not blessed, as it traditionally should be. I would not say that we lived with a society that was unaccepting of us, but rather that they were unaware of different cultures as everyone over there was an English farmer. There was an Orthodox church in Norfolk but during the time that we lived there we only went to it a couple of times as it was so far away. Also, with not many Serbians around, we would have travelled a long way and not known anybody there.

I suppose it would sound over the top to say that moving to Coventry really did save my religion, but I think it did because there is a larger Orthodox community here and it does make me feel more at home. For me, Coventry has definitely been more accepting of my differences. Of course, having all my family together helps as well. We have a decent sized community even though it is decreasing in size. I still cannot say, however, that Coventry is completely understanding towards us, as it is probably not for many religions and people. People still ask me if I am Jewish, why we kiss icons and why we need to cover ourselves on entering any of our religious places, as if such actions should be unacceptable. Regardless of this, however, I will always be a proud member of my Church. Nothing will stop me being proud of it, just as everyone should be, regardless of how much of a minority they are. I think Coventry has shown me in particular not to shut away my beliefs.

Ashmi Gangani

In Hinduism the concept of God is often misunderstood. I always like to describe God as being like the sun. Like the sun, people see God at different times, in different shapes and

forms, and sometimes do not see him at all, but that does not mean He is not there and that He is not playing a large part in their lives. God is there in everybody's life, playing a significant part. I think this image helps me in being a Hindu in Coventry. It makes me realise I am not really in a minority at all. I believe that the same God is being worshipped by different people, but in different ways and forms. Being a Hindu in Coventry I think it can be difficult to live the cultural side of Hinduism. For example, when we have certain cultural celebrations, such as Holi, it is not always possible to dance on the streets and throw colours at each other, but I think that the moral code of Hinduism is the same here as anywhere else. To me, being a Hindu means following the law of karma, which means what goes around comes around. So, for example, if somebody offers me a lift I return the favour with a box of chocolates. I also carry out prayer every morning. Most importantly, being a Hindu means that one should love and respect one's fellow humans.

The reason that I think it is important to understand and respect the beliefs of other religions is because religion is dying out and becoming unfashionable. There are several religious conflicts going on in the world, as has already been mentioned today. I believe this is because religions are dwelling too much on their differences and failing to acknowledge their similarities. All religions have the same basic moral code and I believe that until different religions take a step back to understand each, religious conflicts will go on. This is why it is becoming increasingly important for members of different religions to get on together and to understand the differences between them in beliefs and practices, and, more importantly, to acknowledge the similarities and work side by side to achieve their shared goals.

Mrs Rosalind Preston OBE

Thank you very much for your splendid presentations. It was a valuable lesson for us all to listen carefully to the voice of the next generation and to take very seriously the messages that you have highlighted for us. Can I thank Ms Brown for organising this. We are delighted that you were all able to join us and I hope on behalf of us all that each and every one of you will continue to worship in your own way and be friends to each other and that your communities will get to know each other better and live in harmony in this wonderful city.

FAITH COMMUNITIES DEEPENING DIALOGUE II

Bimal Krishna das, Secretary to the National Council of Hindu Temples

The concept of interfaith dialogue is not new to the Hindu community. In fact, the Hindus have been participating not just in interfaith but also in intra-faith dialogue for thousands of years.

Hindus have always recognised the importance of dialogue - that is why long before the commencement of interfaith, Hindus engaged in intra-faith discussions, which continue even today with the same fervour. Due to the diverse nature of modern Hinduism, sometimes intra-faith discussions have been on the same level of freshness as the interfaith.

Historically speaking, about 2,500 years ago was the period when Hindus began to experience interfaith activity. Around this period saw the advent of Buddhism and also Jainism in India. Christianity came to India in the 2nd Century and the Jewish community had been settled in India even before the Christians. Then a few hundreds years later came Islam. In the 10th century Zoroastrians migrated to India and in the 15th Century Sikhism was founded, making a valuable addition to the variety of religions in India.

India has been, and probably still is, one of the very few countries in the world where by and large all the major religious tradition have co-existed peacefully for centuries. Of course there have been periods of tension between one or two communities, especially in recent times, but that is probably due not to religion itself but to the 'politics of religion'.

Though having a long history of dialogue, Hindus have sometimes shown a reluctance to participate. One reason is that traditionally some Hindus have not seen the need for dialogue since Hindu theology gives credence to other bona fide religious systems. Therefore, Hinduism itself practises and propagates religious inclusiveness.

In this context, A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON, comments: "You have got your principles of religions...the effect is that you can live very peacefully...It doesn't matter to which religion you belong to, but if you follow the rules and regulation, then your life will be peaceful and there will be no material want."

Another reason for non-participation is that some Hindus would prefer to engage in a dialogue where there is level footing. In other words, for a dialogue to be significant the beliefs and practices of participants should not reflect religious exclusiveness.

Traditionally, the purpose of dialogue in Hinduism, both interfaith and intra-faith, primarily consisted of dispassionate and non-judgemental discussions on each other's theology. The aspiration being not just to understand each other's beliefs on the science of self realisation but also to adopt examples of good practice so as to make the path of going back home to the Godhead easier.

In comparison, some modern dialogues try to offer frameworks for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern, not all of them are of a theological nature. This unfocused discussion on religion sometimes also eventually causes some Hindus to stay away from interfaith dialogues.

Furthermore, one normally find that the goodwill, after it has been achieved with some endeavour, between different faith communities more or less remains within the meetings and does not necessarily permeate to the grassroots. Sometimes, this goodwill is jeopardised by pejorative unsubstantiated accusations by one community against another. What is more disheartening is that sometimes some of the stakeholders seem to contribute towards this.

In Britain, though Hindus began participating, individually or collectively, in the interfaith dialogue from the time they arrived here, meaningful participation, especially on the national level, probably did not start until the formation of the Inter Faith Network for the UK in 1987.

There are numerous interfaith initiatives at local, regional and national level in which Hindus continue to participate. A great deal of these initiatives are coordinated through the temples, which number about 140, and through Hindu national organisations.

Inevitably, the majority of these initiatives start with the Christian community. I will now highlight some of the work that is being carried out in this field.

ISKCON is probably one of the few Hindu organisations that has been very active in this area. Recognising the significance of interfaith dialogue, ISKCON set up its Interfaith Commission in 1995. Many conferences have been organised to understand one another's theology and worldview. There is an ISKCON Communications Journal (ICJ) that has cultural and academic exchanges with all faiths and there are numerous other publications specifically highlighting interfaith relations. Many residential meetings have taken place (both in the UK and abroad) where topics like the 'nature of the self', 'forms of worship and spirituality', 'common concern for this world' (the lost soul of humanity) and mutual theological challenges have been discussed.

One very important development with the Christian community is through the current Hindu-Christian Dialogue where a 'joint agreed statement of goodwill' by the working group has been prepared. I believe this joint statement is the only one of its kind. Future meetings will see presentations on theology and also a possible joint pilgrimage to India will be discussed. Recently, in Leicester, the Hindu-Christian group organised a series of lectures, held at each other's places of worship, that had specific theological themes.

The dialogue with the Jewish community usually takes place through the Indian-Jewish Association, which has branches in London and in Manchester. The programme consists of visits to each other's places of worship, group discussions on theology and cultural exchanges. Similar initiatives are being planned in Manchester with both the Christian and the Muslim communities. The Hindu temple in Bristol is engaged in active dialogue with the local Christian and the Jewish communities.

There has been no concrete dialogue with the Muslim community except for the couple of meetings that took place after the disturbances in Gujarat last year. However, there is a Hindu-Jain-Muslim Forum, which began a couple of years ago and is still in the preliminary stage.

Though there are no formal bilateral dialogues with the Sikh, Buddhist, and the Bahai communities, ample interactions take place at numerous multi faith forums throughout

Britain where members of the Hindu community are actively involved. For example, in Scotland, through the Scottish InterFaith Council and the Edinburgh Interfaith Association Hindus have been engaged in various projects. The most recent one was with the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, who bid for a Parliament of World Religions in Scotland in the year 2005.

The Leicester Council of Faiths, is very active, probably one of the most dynamic local multi faith forums in Britain. In Derby, the Hindu community been quite active. One of the founder members of the multi faith group, which has been in existence for over 20 years, is a Hindu. Also Hindus are involved with the University of Derby's Multi-faith Centre where the foundation stone for its new building will be laid in September of this year.

There are many other national and international multi faith forums where Hindus keenly participate, for example, the World Congress of Faiths, the International Interfaith Centre, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the United Religions Initiative.

I would like to finish by quoting a passage from Kenneth Cracknell's paper in the recent ISKCON Communications Journal where he is referring to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, none of the great Christian thinkers about interfaith relationships:

“In a seminal paper about the study of comparative religion written as long ago as 1959, Smith described the traditional form of Western scholarship as being 'an impersonal presentation of an "it"'. But then came a great innovation, what he called the 'personalization of the faiths, so that we find a discussion of a "they"'. 'Presently', he continues, 'the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a "we" talking about a "they"'. ”

The next step is a dialogue when "we" talk to "you". If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that "we talk" with "you". At that point, dialogue partners are saying to each other, 'this what we have seen of the truth, this is what God has done for us; tell us what you have seen, what God has done for you.' It appears that 'we Hindus' and the 'we' of one or two of the other faith communities' have probably attained this stage.

But there is one further stage to move towards. In Smith's terms, it is when 'we all' are talking with each other about 'us', and when we are able to formulate the beginning of a theology which talks about the same Lord's dealings with all his servants throughout world history.”

FAITH COMMUNITIES: DEEPENING DIALOGUE II

Revd Canon Dr Michael Ipgrave, Secretary to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's Commission on Inter Faith Relations and to the Inter Faith Consultative Group of the Church of England

I have been asked to talk about how inter faith dialogue for Christian Churches in Britain and Ireland has been evolving and responding to the changing situation and as I do that I want to speak as far as I can ecumenically. I work for an ecumenical organisation, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The area of inter faith relations has been one where the Christian Churches try as much as we can to work together ecumenically from our different Christian backgrounds.

There has been a quite major change over the last 15 years in the way that the Christian Churches in these countries understand the place of inter faith dialogue in our life. What grew as a pragmatic response to a changing situation, with the growth of religious plurality in Britain, has over the last 15 years developed into an approach that we see as rooted and grounded in what I would call the heartlands of Christian faith. We have come to see that there are very sound Christian reasons for engaging in inter faith dialogue and indeed that we have to do so and that it is no longer an optional extra for being a Christian. I want briefly to trace four of the strands of why the Churches are involved in dialogue and how they are involved, and then I will close with a few personal remarks.

The first and very simple reason that we have to come to see that we need to be involved in inter faith dialogue is that one of the great commands that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to his disciples was to love your neighbour. If my neighbour is somebody of a different faith to me, then loving that neighbour means respecting and taking seriously his or her religious beliefs and practices. I cannot love my neighbour while disparaging what it is they believe and the way that they live their lives in spiritual terms. Being good neighbours, to which we aspire as Christians although not always successfully, involves us in what is sometimes called the dialogue of life: people meeting and sharing their faith in the school playground, over the house wall, in the hospital ward, wherever it maybe. The Churches have played a quite significant role at local level in enabling that kind of sharing to take place and within it, for people to talk about the place that faith plays in their lives. I think, for example, of a very successful event which has been organised for several years now in Glasgow by CAIRS, the Churches' Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland, called 'Meet your Neighbour'. It involves people coming and talking about the place of faith in their life, the dialogue of life is what you could call it.

Secondly, building on that basic pattern of sharing together, all of us in our religious faiths have values and insights that we think are not just for us but for society as a whole. The wish to share those values and to make them a resource for society as a whole is a crucial theme in Christianity. We talk about Jesus preaching about the Kingdom of God as an inclusive symbol of the way the world could be if it lived in obedience to God and followed his will. Those of us that again aspire, however unsuccessfully, to work for that kingdom of justice and peace will surely recognise that there are values in Christian faith which we share, or which are very close to similar values in other faith communities.

The idea that dialogue enables us to share in service to the community is a key theme, again rooted in what it means to be a Christian, in the way that we engage in dialogue today. I think particularly today of the Inter Faith Network itself, and the development within our midst of a Forum of Faiths as a way of bringing those values to wider society. I think that is particularly important for us at present, since this is a time when religion is so often seen as something that needs to be taken seriously indeed by Government and by society, but taken seriously because it is a headache and a problem and causes all sorts of bad behaviour. I think that we need actively to co-operate in putting the other side of the case, so that we show the way in which we can be a blessing for society. As we learn to work together and as we come to trust one another then I think Christians perhaps in particular, but all of us too, recognise that we have a concern for ultimate truth.

This is my third point. As religious people we all care about truth. There is a text in the Gospel of John where Jesus tells his disciples that they will know the truth and the truth will set them free. The idea of commending the truth that we have seen is a very important motivation for Christian involvement in dialogue. We have come to see that to share the truth we need to do it in a spirit of mutuality. We need to listen to the truths others have grasped and that have grasped them too. We need to listen as well as to speak. Above all, we need to be ready to explore difference and sometimes to face up to the reality of disagreement. In terms of the discussion we were having earlier, I am one who would see a very definite place for bilateral dialogues as a particularly helpful context in which disagreements and differences can be honestly faced and talked through. There have been lots of bilateral organisations mentioned during the course of the day.

I want to mention one other event in which I was involved last spring, not in this country but in Qatar. You may have read about a Christian-Muslim seminar there involving the Archbishop of Canterbury, where we read one another's scriptures, the Bible and the Quran. We engaged in quite a deep dialogue, facing up to some of those points of disagreement in a common quest for truth.

Loving our neighbours, wanting to share insights for society, having a concern for truth, and fourthly, the New Testament is full of ways in which the Spirit, that is God as Spirit, meets people in surprising and challenging new ways through putting them in new situations and meeting new people. Perhaps the heart of dialogue is this spiritual engagement with the recognition that we can see God in a new way, and yet it is the same God whom we already know, when we meet somebody and engage in an in-depth dialogue with them. It is for many Christians an experience, you could almost say of renewal of their faith, to find that in an encounter with people of deeply held beliefs and faiths, in some way through them the Spirit is speaking to my heart and renewing my understanding of who God is and how I am meant to serve and worship Him. This sense of spiritual renewal is perhaps one of the most surprising dimensions of inter faith dialogue, but I think an increasingly important one for us as Christians.

Just a few personal observations with which to finish. Firstly, our neighbours and our colleagues of different faiths need to recognise, and I am sure you do, that the Churches in this country very often feel that they are under tremendous pressure too. Churches, in inner city areas in particular, often feel beleaguered and all our churches are facing considerable financial stringency. They may often feel that inter faith dialogue, while it seems a good idea in principle, is not very high up their list of priorities. Now that is not meant to sound gloomy, but I think it is to emphasise the importance for us as Christians and Churches, of

people of different faiths encouraging us to take the first step when we may well feel reluctant or that it is not top of our list of things to do so. So please do help us with that.

Secondly, to recognise the huge diversity amongst Christians. We are not just diverse theologically, we are also diverse in this country culturally and ethnically. What that means in terms of dialogue is that alongside the inter faith dialogue, in our engagement with Christians of different faith we need as was said this morning an intra-Christian dialogue where we talk amongst ourselves about dialogue. That can sometimes be more difficult than the inter faith dialogue!

Thirdly, the increasing importance of the international dimension and the way in which difficult inter religious situations in other countries can put tremendous strain on inter faith relations here. This happens to us as Christians too. We quite often, and in some ways understandably, get a degree of criticism from Churches in other parts of the world, where the situation may be much more difficult for engaging in inter faith dialogue than it is here. I think our response to that has to be to say that here in Britain we do have the opportunity, the conditions and the goodwill to build positive inter faith relations and to pursue this path of dialogue, and that this is probably the best example and encouragement that we can give to people in other countries where the situation is much more difficult.

The following question and answer exchange followed these two speakers

Harun Rashid, Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group

It was the Churches who were in the forefront of initiating inter faith dialogue. How far have recent events, 11 September 2001, and in particular the war in Iraq, set us back? No speaker so far has addressed this directly. I wonder what the last two speakers would say?

Revd Canon Michael Ippgrave

This has been an enormous challenge for those of us engaged in inter faith work and has perhaps called into question some of the things that we rather took for granted and disturbed some of the complacency that there has been in some places about the degree of progress we have made in inter faith relations. That is not to say that we have not made considerable progress, but we always need to recognise the fragility of it. The disturbances in northern towns in the summer of 2001, the events of 11 September 2001 and all that flowed from that, highlighted some of the problems that already existed in some of our towns and cities, and in particular the issues of separated communities, and the need pro-actively to build bridges of understanding and foster encounter between people who sometimes live geographically and culturally separated lives. Concerns about that separation need to be held in balance with respecting the integrity of different communities and their desire to organise their own lives, but we do need points of meeting. The Churches and other faith communities have been working quite hard at that.

Bimal Krishma das

Some members of the Hindu community have also been victims of 9/11 because of mistaken identity. Many people in the UK were attacked physically. The community itself has also been a victim. In terms of inter faith relations in order to lessen the tension many have been involved in multi faith forums. In Leicester and other places, for example, work has been done to lessen the tension and to make sure that progress continues as it did before 9/11.

WORKSHOP 1: PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGUE

Facilitator: Professor Paul Weller, University of Derby

Ten years ago the member bodies of the Inter Faith Network helped produce some short guidelines for inter faith encounter: *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*. How useful are these today? Are there other principles that could be added? What other guidelines are available?

Professor Paul Weller pointed out that the Network's "code of conduct" on *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs* was first published in 1993, a decade ago. It had been abstracted from a longer document on *Mission, Dialogue and Inter Religious Encounter* published by the Network at the same time. It has been translated into various minority community languages; has been widely distributed; and has been adopted as working principles by a number of other organisations, including, for example, in the equal opportunities policy guidelines of the University of Derby. Over the last decade inter-faith relations have faced a number of challenges, including the impact of the first Gulf War; the events in India at Ayodyha, the killings this year in Gujarat and their impact in the UK; the controversy over *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie; the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001; and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Against this background, Professor Weller suggested the following questions for discussion in the workshop:

- How far is the Network's "code of conduct" still serviceable today?
- If it remains basically serviceable, rather than needing to be completely replaced, does it need amendment/additional material?
- What other "codes of conduct", guidelines or principles for dialogue, whether from within an individual faith community or tradition, or prepared on an inter-faith basis should be taken into account?
- Is there a need for the development of a new document, perhaps in parallel to the Network's existing "code" rather than as a replacement?

Professor Weller draw attention to different kinds of other examples of "codes" and "guidelines" including:

- A '*Personalist Code of Practice*' of the kind produced by the Network as *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*. Documents of this kind focus primarily on individual believers and their relationships with one another, rather than on the corporate dimensions of inter-religious relations.

- *'Personalist Principles' of the kind developed by the former British Council of Churches (BCC) in its so-called 'Four Principles of Dialogue'.*
 The Network's "code of conduct", although abstracted from a fuller document is still, in itself, quite lengthy. By contrast, the so-called "Four Principles of Dialogue" are much pithier principles that can easily be digested and remembered. These also originally formed part of a longer BCC document, *Relations with People of Other Faiths: Guidelines on Dialogue in Britain* published in 1981, as a British response to the earlier *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* produced by the World Council of Churches in 1979. Although developed from within the perspective of a single faith tradition, a variety of people and bodies from other faith traditions have confirmed that they can also affirm the BCC's "four principles of dialogue" as their own, while others have felt them to be too terse.
- *'Community Relations Statements' of the kind produced by the Inter Faith Network in its Statement on Inter-Religious Relations of 1991.*
 This document preceded the Network's "code of conduct" and was, like the "code" itself endorsed by Network member organisations. Each section commenced with summary statements that were also collected together and available as an overall summary statement. The document was more a "statement" than either a "code" or a set of "principles" or even "guidelines". This was because, essentially, it attempted to reflect the shared understanding which had been reached by Network member organisations at the particular point in time at which it was produced, and dealt with the questions and issues with which the Network had been concerned. In contrast to the more "personalist" emphasis of the "code", the "Statement" was much more focussed upon the corporate and community dimensions of inter-religious relations.
- *'Societal Theses or Propositions' of the kind that Professor Weller himself produced as 'Seven Theses on Religion(s), State(s) and Society(ies)', based on his own experience of engagement in, and reflection upon, the relationship between religions, the state and society in religiously plural environments.*
 These theses were first developed in the mid-1990s in the context of a conference of the Academic Response to Antisemitism and Racism in Europe and also a Council of Europe seminar on Religion and the Integration of Migrants. In their final form they can be found in Professor Weller's Inaugural Professorial lecture of 1991 on *Insiders or Outsiders? Religion(s), State(s) and Societies: Propositions for Europe*.² As theses, they are not intended to 'reflect' a present position, but rather to stimulate and, perhaps 'provoke' debate, by taking up specific positions rather than trying to present a 'balanced' position.
- *'Questions for Dialogue' of the kind produced by Professor Weller based on reflection upon his own experience of inter-faith dialogue over the past quarter of a century.*
 This approach is set in the form of questions that, methodologically in a more open-ended way than 'theses' or 'propositions', seek to elicit a response, inviting others to participate in the questions and to make them their own. Professor Weller's own set of questions were originally developed for a Sharpham House [Dorset] colloquium on "How Others See Us".

² Published in the *Baptist Quarterly* and in Race, A and Shafer, I (eds), *Religions in Dialogue: From Democracy to Theocracy* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002)

Among points made in the following discussion were:

- The Network's "code" on *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs* focuses primarily on individuals and their personal interactions with one another and therefore perhaps pays insufficient attention to the corporate dimensions of inter-religious relations.
- The present "code" does not deal with the sharing of prayer and worship which has been a sensitive issue.
- The "code" does not discuss the complexities of how religions in dialogue deal with the overlapping dimensions of being simultaneously local, national and global in their spheres of operation and influence.
- There could be room, whether by addition to the current "code" or as a parallel development, for a more extended consideration of how to handle the impact on relations here in the UK of conflicts in other parts of the world.
- Statements by religions of regret for the negative actions with which their followers have been associated in the past have considerable inter faith impact.
- In general, the view of workshop participants was that the present "code" remains serviceable in relation to the principles which it sets out, which are both important for personal behaviour and compatible with the fundamental teachings of the various religious groups. In general terms, the fundamental principles of the "code" are sound and not in need of any fundamental change.
- However there might be a case either for some selective "supplements" to the existing "code" in specific areas or some newly developed code in parallel with it. Regardless of whether the "code" should be "supplemented" in some way, or needed a new parallel development – there is at least a need to reflect on the present "code" given that the general population has become more secular; people in faith communities have become more faithful; when talking with people in faith communities we are talking to fewer people but perhaps to more effect; and the Government is now interested in the conversations between faith communities.
- The spread of a "code" of this kind as widely as possible among the ordinary members of various faith communities and through local places of worship was seen as a critical task.
- Various comments were offered on format. For example, it was pointed out that the present version (A4 folded into A5 card) did not fit comfortably into a top or inside pocket, or into a book. Perhaps consideration could be given to a more "carrier friendly" format?
- People can lose interest in too long a text. It might therefore be worth examining whether it is possible to distil the "code" still further whilst avoiding the danger of too brief a statement being more 'sententious' in style and impact. The 'tone' of any "code" or guidelines is in many ways as important as the content, audience, context and format.

- Accentuation of the positives was important, with an emphasis on responsibilities; commitments; and undertakings.
- On the basis of this discussion, the Network Executive Committee might wish to consider:
 - (a) whether there is a case for a separate parallel development of a new “code” or “codes” to deal with issues either absent from the existing “code” or not dealt with in a way which matches the changed context for inter faith encounter.
 - (b) whether, either the existing “code”, and “supplemented” version of it and/or a new parallel “code” or “codes” could be made available in physically more user-friendly formats.

WORKSHOP 2: DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO FAITHS OR THREE FAITHS

Facilitator: Mr Alan Schwartz MBE, Cardiff Inter Faith Association and Inter Faith Council for Wales

Bilateral and trilateral dialogue is an opportunity to go in depth into aspects, both positive and negative, of shared histories and different theologies and philosophies. What are some of the successful ways such dialogues have been carried out? How is the interface between faith and politics handled by bilateral and trilateral initiatives?

In the discussion a number of points were made about inter faith dialogue in general:

- Being able to speak openly about faith issues requires courage. Participants had identified with Dr Siddiqui's comments in the morning session about feeling under pressure, in order to deal with negative prior assumptions, to state first what he "wasn't" rather than what he "was".
- Some participants expressed surprise at the level of ignorance of their faiths which they had encountered in inter faith circles. The "demonisation" of "the other" is a common problem. But it was also noted that there are now many places in the UK where the interaction of cultures is actively encouraged and where diversity is celebrated.
- It is essential for dialogue to take place in an environment which participants experience as being safe and open. In working to establish this, the development of friendships between individuals is a vital first step. There was mention of a series of meetings organised by the United Religions Initiative where people from different faiths met and talked initially in pairs for 30 minutes to get to know one another before joining in a group discussion.
- Two inter faith initiatives in Leicester illustrated the importance of personal relationships. One began by meeting separately in small groups to talk together and was now flourishing, with up to sixty people participating in it. Now that the bonds of friendship have been established, the group is ready to start tackling more difficult issues. Conversely, the other initiative, which began by discussing highly sensitive topics, has taken over two years to get to the stage where they are able to agree on a statement of goodwill.
- It is helpful for dialogue to take place at a local/regional level. Being able to identify and share local community concerns facilitates the development of personal relationships.
- It is necessary when engaging in dialogue not to focus disproportionately on conflicts occurring overseas. At the same time arguably these issues have to be tackled at some stage because all faiths have their roots in countries across the world. It is important to be able to listen carefully to one another and participants will have different emphases in addressing the need to seek both justice and reconciliation.

- Among the sensitive topics that can make inter faith dialogue a tense process, the issues surrounding mission and conversion are arguably the most problematic. Inter faith meetings, including bi-lateral and tri-lateral initiatives, can sometimes be viewed with suspicion as a cover for proselytism, even where this is not the case.
- It is important for dialogue partners to be able to trust one another. Building a relationship with people of other faiths needs to be viewed in a similar way to building a relationship with family members or friends, on whom we would not wish to force our ideas. But at the same time we would wish them to understand our views sufficiently well to respect them.

Among the points made relating specifically to bi-lateral and tri- lateral dialogue were:

- Bi-lateral and tri-lateral dialogue has an essential part to play in developing good inter faith relations. In many ways these dialogues can prove more valuable than multi faith dialogue because discussions can go deeper in them. They also provide an opportunity for any misunderstandings between two or three faith communities to be discussed between them without being played out in the wider inter faith arena. Some of the other faiths may have little direct interest in, or knowledge of, the issues of past history affecting the relationship between particular communities.
- Initiatives taking place between two or three faith groups may be perceived as being exclusionist. It was noted that some people are worried that bi and tri lateral initiatives could be used to create alliances against other communities.
- Separate inter faith initiatives need to be set up to serve different purposes. For example, the Leicester Council of Faiths as a multi faith representative body works with the local authority on issues affecting life together in the city and there is also a Faith Leaders Meeting which supplements this. However, experience suggests that particular difficulties between faiths can best be resolved through bi-lateral or tri-lateral dialogue groups rather than in the Council of Faiths or the Faith Leaders Meeting.
- Scholars from different faiths should sit down together and discuss particular issues that cause friction and hostility between particular faiths and prepare joint statements on these which could be of help to people within their respective faith communities. Perhaps the Inter Faith Network should help in promoting work of this kind and take on the role of facilitating the development of more bi-lateral and tri-lateral dialogues more generally by providing models of existing initiatives. These could describe ways of working in different contexts and give advice on how to begin new initiatives of this kind.

WORKSHOP 3: DIALOGUE IN A MULTI FAITH CONTEXT

Facilitator: Mr Bhupinder Singh, Information Officer, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Are there particular issues faced by those seeking to involve several different faiths in dialogue? What are some of the successful strategies that have been used for this?

In the course of discussion the following points were made:

- In all dialogues there is a need to decide whether it is possible to extend their boundaries and to dig deeper into particular issues, perhaps risking the giving of offence, or whether it is preferable, for the time being at least, to stay within safe, if possibly bland, limits.
- By openly recognising differences and not just looking for common ground a deeper discussion is possible. The consensus of participants was that it was better to take risks in order to deepen relationships: “You can’t be real friends if you can’t be frank with one another”.
- Bi-lateral dialogue offers the chance for members of two faiths to discuss particular issues in greater depth, which can be more difficult in a multi faith setting.
- Two examples were given of possible ways of avoiding both superficiality and conflict. In the case of one inter faith group, at each meeting speakers from two faith traditions present a topic in depth, and then others contribute to the subsequent discussion. In another group each meeting is held at a different place of worship, so that the roles of “host” and “guest” change around.
- Some practical difficulties were noted. Some inter faith groups find that the same people attend each meeting, while others attract new people each time. In the first of these situations there is a need to involve more people, while in the second it can be difficult to deepen dialogue, because it is not possible to build on previous discussions.
- Initiatives in some areas to appoint a full time development worker to stimulate wider interest in the work of the local inter faith group clearly represented a significant step forward.
- It is important to be explicit that conversion/proselytising is not appropriate in the context of inter faith meetings. It was noted that all organisations in membership of the Inter Faith Network have signed up to the principles set out in *Building Good Relations between People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*. This “code” makes a number of points about appropriate ways and contexts for sharing one’s beliefs with others. However, it was questioned whether the “code” is sufficiently explicit that proselytisation is unacceptable in inter faith contexts.
- The effectiveness of dialogue at different levels in the community was discussed. Religious leaders are often seen together at important events, but it is important for them

to give emphasis within their own communities to the importance of inter faith dialogue. Dialogue at the grassroots level is equally important. Top/down and bottom/up approaches need to be taken forward together in inter faith work.

- The importance of RE in schools was discussed. Since 1988 it has been compulsory for state schools to teach multi faith RE. Will children who have benefited from this need inter faith groups in future? In practice, the impact of RE varies greatly from school to school and from teacher to teacher.
- There was discussion about the way in which a teacher should handle, in an RE context, their own faith position, whether as a committed member of a particular faith, an agnostic or an atheist. Suffolk Inter Faith Resource, with the help of an LEA grant, sends paid tutors of different faiths into schools to give presentations on different faiths.
- It was noted that inter faith issues also need to be highlighted in RE alongside teaching about individual faiths.

WORKSHOP 4: INTER FAITH ENCOUNTER: THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

Facilitator: Mr Nitin Palan, Swaminarayan Hindu Mission

Individuals find themselves involved in inter faith encounter for many different reasons. Each person's experiences differ. This workshop provides an opportunity for people to share their reflections on their own experience in dialogue.

This workshop was different in kind from the other four. It provided an opportunity for participants to share their own experiences of involvement in inter faith encounter and their reflections on this. The contributions of participants were therefore of a more personal character. However, common features of their experience emerged:

- Inter faith dialogue can challenge one's own faith perspective, but it frequently strengthens one's own faith commitment. It requires participants to learn more deeply about their own faith tradition.
- Inter faith encounter enriches one's personal life.
- It is much more real to encounter, at a personal level, individual members of a faith community, than to study a faith tradition in terms of abstract concepts.
- Involvement in inter faith work can be misunderstood by others within one's own faith community and it can at times feel a lonely endeavour.
- Individuals can feel excluded or marginalised when their own community is not recognised and included in the circle of dialogue between the major faith groups.
- Inter faith marriage involves a daily encounter with the faith of one's partner and this can be particularly challenged, but also particularly enriching.

WORKSHOP 5: SOCIAL CO-OPERATION: THE BEST STARTING PLACE FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING?

Facilitator: Hon Barnabas Leith, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK

People from different faiths often meet each other for the first time to discuss the scope for working together for social goals or on local projects. How far can these encounters be the basis for deepening mutual understanding, trust and co-operation?

Hon Barnabas Leith said that his experience of multi-faith co-operation on projects had been positive. He gave as an example of this the preparation of the recent Department of Health guidelines on 'NHS Chaplaincy'¹ These were the result of five years of work by a multi-faith joint consultation working group, which had been set up following a multi-faith conference. This exercise had illustrated the need to ensure that work at national and local level complemented each other and did not involve duplication.

The following points and recent projects were noted in the course of the workshop discussion:

- There is a need for a clearer understanding of the theological basis in different faith traditions for involvement in working together to improve society. There is also a need to deepen mutual understanding of one another's faith traditions as well as to work together for peace and justice.
- Faith communities are now being asked quite frequently to contribute to work on regeneration and community cohesion and it is important to make an effective response to these requests.
- An intercultural arts project in Sheffield, called Simunye, which draws together people from various ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds, has created a café, world music store, gallery and performance space. The value of the project has grown from £40,000 to nearly £500,000 within six years. A recent initiative has been the establishment of monthly cultural fora, whose subjects for discussion include faith traditions.
- A partnership project between Tibetans exiled in India and the Progressive Jewish community in the UK has involved a number of young Jewish people going on trips to India to live in Tibetan communities and young Tibetans travelling to the UK to attend Jewish youth camps, so that they can share with, and learn from, each other.
- The Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum was formed about 10 years ago. It originally started working on relatively small projects but, as it has grown in experience and maturity, it has taken on larger projects. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 in Northern Ireland stipulated that all religions had to be treated equally. As a result of this,

¹ **Note** – the document can be downloaded from the Department of Health's website and comments offered on it can be recorded there.

the Northern Ireland Government gave the Forum a grant to help train the staff in public sector organisations in faith issues. The Forum decided that they would continue to function as an inter faith body and that they would run the training courses through a separate organisation, with the relevant skills and experience. This enables The Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum to keep its core focus and to build its outreach activities in a complementary and mutually supportive way.”

- Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource not only provides tutors from the faith communities to schools, but also runs diversity training courses for the local authorities and for police recruits. A major conference took place during the spring to bring together representatives of statutory bodies with members of different faith communities. Sheffield Interfaith has also been invited to provide training courses.
- The introduction of legislation to give effect to the Directive on discrimination in the employment field on a variety of grounds, including religion and belief, will open up opportunities for local inter faith groups to become involved in training work. As well as being a good source of income, this would be a positive way of building inter faith links.
- The importance of a local inter faith initiative seeking financial and other help from its local authority was emphasised. Working at the grassroots level, focusing on issues such as drugs is important.
- The Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has a very positive relationship with its local authority. After the events of 11 September the Group was able to work with it and other organisations to ensure that positive relations between local communities were successfully sustained. Positive relationships between faith leaders and the annual multi faith festival for Wolverhampton school children were also mentioned. But despite positive developments, discrimination and racism remain problems which still need to be addressed in Wolverhampton, as elsewhere.
- The statutory requirement for every local education authority to have a SACRE with membership reflecting the faith communities in its area provides an important impetus towards developing inter faith relations there.
- It was noted that in Harrow children from a number of schools took part in a multi faith concert, with contributions supporting different aspects of their communities` cultures.
- Universities are places where extremist groups can flourish and some young people are attracted to them.
- In Bolton the main barrier to integration of migrant faith communities used to be language, but this is no longer a major issue now. Younger people need to be encouraged by the older generation in faith communities to develop positive attitudes to those of other faiths. Local inter faith organisations often do not succeed in involving young people in their work. Young people may be more attracted by a social action approach and develop a greater theological understanding later.
- “Religious illiteracy” is a real problem. This allows stereotyping and misconceptions to develop and it is not easy to encourage a greater degree of ‘theological’ understanding. Some may find it difficult at first to enter into dialogue but having a strong faith of one’s

own is a firm foundation for this and people need to be encouraged to learn more about other faiths, as well as their own.

- It takes time to build trust, and until trust is built, discussion of more difficult issues cannot take place. Different approaches - social, educational, and theological – are needed to engage different people. Co-operation in social action can bring together those with a faith commitment and those who do not see themselves as religious.
- Local inter faith groups need to review carefully their objectives and how best to give effect to them in their programmes. While it is right to acknowledge the good inter faith work which is being done there are no grounds for complacency since there is still too much polarisation within in the UK and barriers that need to be broken down.

Hon Barnabas Leith said that a range of important issues had been raised in the discussion. He did not personally feel that there is a sharp divide between “social” activity and “theological” activity. Socially based activity is often a useful starting point for inter faith involvement but it is not the only way. Encouraging “intra”, as well as “inter”, faith encounters is important too.

REFLECTIONS FROM PANEL

Jehangir Sarosh, Moderator of World Conference on Religion and Peace (Europe) and member of the Zoroastrian community;

There are three types of dialogue about which we have heard today. One of them is bilateral dialogue. Generally, bilateral dialogue is more about theology and understanding each other's faith. A tri-lateral dialogue is very useful because it enables two people to talk through a third person and there are many examples of this. As I am here from the World Conference on Religion and Peace I will mention that only last week there was a meeting of religious leaders in post-war Iraq. The catalyst there is the Christian community because it is a minority community. Similarly the Jewish community acted as a go-between enabling a dialogue in Bosnia Herzegovina. That is very important.

Multi faith dialogue offers another dimension in its opportunity for intra-faith dialogue. I believe that some of the newer faith community organisations have come about because people from different denominations and groups within a community have met at multi faith conferences, have got to know each other and have then been able to have an intra-faith dialogue. One aspect that was mentioned is the difficulty we can encounter in our own community. This is a very important issue, especially in the case of the smaller communities who really do not believe that there is a necessity for inter faith dialogue. They believe that they have no problems and do not need it. I think that there needs to be a confession by every community that we have internal problems with racism and various other issues. It is so important to work within your own community.

There is a saying that it is good to love your neighbour but it is easier to build a fence! I think this is what religions were doing previously: they were building fences and keeping to themselves. Let me share a brief story with you. A couple of years ago I used to hold group meetings in my house, one of which was an inter faith meeting. One year I planted some lettuce in my front garden and when the group members came they said "Why are you planting lettuce in the front garden?" I said "To have with my salad." They asked again, "But why in the front garden?" I did not understand them. Then I thought more about it and realised they expected me to grow the lettuce in my back garden not the front! I believe that it is very important that we do grow our lettuce and vegetables, which give us nourishment, in our back garden - within our family. I mean the family of our own community which binds us together, which is one of the meanings of "religion": to bind together. Then you move from your back garden to the front garden, which is beautiful and displays all the best there is of your family. But it is very important then to cross the road and go into the park and meet people of other faiths who are there and speak in their language and share the nourishment which they have. That is reconnection, the other meaning of "religion": to reconnect. I think this is very important.

Finally, I would like to refer to what is sometimes described as the top down and bottom up of inter faith dialogue. Both are absolutely essential. The top down approach enables communication to make use of a community's infrastructure. As was said at a Network meeting last year "If only we would speak for five minutes about other religions when we meet together in our own community and other communities did the same". That is one element. There are the newsletters of churches and others that filter down what the Archbishop or Bishop or faith leader has agreed at their level about inter faith. When

religious leaders meet together, and this is known, in a way it gives “permission” to their flocks to meet at the grassroots level. It is at this grassroots level that most of us work and that is where I believe the mindset most needs to be changed. Let us all work on this together.

Maureen Sier, member of the Baha’i community and Scottish Inter Faith Council;

In trying to reflect on today’s events I felt that each of the different speakers offered something unique and interesting to us. It has been a fantastic day. When I wrote down some of the points that were made, I started to see some apparent contradictions. With Harriet Crabtree’s wonderful presentation, I felt that a sense of hope in the work of inter faith came through very strongly, but also a sense of anxiety. In the questionnaires that have been completed for the local inter faith mapping project there is clearly a lot going on, and lots of hope, but still a sense of anxiety – anxiety perhaps as to the long term future and vision of inter faith.

It was very interesting when Jonathan Gorsky was talking about bilateral and tri-lateral inter faith relationships, and the questions that were asked of him were actually just as interesting. The questions focussed on how with bilateral dialogue there may be a sense of exclusivity because only two faith communities are involved and yet it was also clear that there was the possibility of tremendous depth for that very same reason. Sometimes when you have members of faith communities from many different backgrounds together you only get a little beneath the surface, but never quite get to the roots or the depths. This tension between exclusivity and depth I found really challenging.

Ataullah Siddiqui said something that really hit home to me. He said there would be no “inter faith without faith”. I think there is something wonderful that does motivate us and bring us here to this type of forum, and to our local inter faith groups and to all the inter faith work that is going on within our different religious communities - and it is our sense of faith which links to what Harriet Crabtree was saying this morning about hope. Faith really does give us hope that there is a point to what we are doing, that it is really vital work and that we are going to make a difference to society and to the world that we live in. I think it is very important that we remind ourselves that it is God’s work, that it is based right at the heart of who we are - faith is critical.

I also found the young students’ presentations very stimulating. One of the girls said that she felt there was a great need to focus on similarities, because sometimes focusing on differences leads to violence and young people fear this. The media also portrays all the negative aspects of difference rather than the celebration of difference. In inter faith work we have an opportunity to celebrate our differences, not to focus on them as being negative and I think that is very exciting. From the students therefore I heard this need to focus on our similarities, but also to celebrate our differences rather than to fear them.

Bimal Krishna das said that faith and practice are important. In the Baha’i scriptures, Baha’u’llah says that one without the other is pointless, that the very essence of your creation is your faith and then how you live that and practice it. So the point Bimal Krishna das made really resonated with me: the idea that we can have faith, but we also need to practice what we preach.

I thought the essence of what Michael Ipgrave was saying was that we should be motivated by love and our sense of shared values and that we should be seeking the truth in all things; that God's engagement with us, or the Spirit's engagement with us, is very important; and that whatever faith tradition we come from, there is this engagement with its spiritual truth and the sharing of this with each other - his insights were profound.

I have just recently come back from working for five years in the South Pacific. A friend said to me "You are so lucky to have travelled and to have had that wonderful experience." And, of course, it was a wonderful experience and I was very lucky. She asked me what were the three most important things I had learned from that journey. The three things I felt were most important to me were, my faith, my family and my friends. I think that comes out too in inter faith work: that we are with people of faith, that we have become almost like an extended family and that we really are or can be friends. When I reflected after my outer journey abroad on who I was when I set off and who I was when I came back, I realised that I was the same person and that the biggest journeys that I have ever taken, and I imagine that all of us ever take, are inner journeys - inner journeys where we really explore our relationship with God, our relationship with people, our relationship with our faith, and our relationship with the wider society that we inhabit.

I would like to thank the organisers of today for helping us with that outer journey as well as the all important inner journey.

Paul Seto, Director of the Buddhist Society and Inter Faith Coordinator for Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)

Harriet Crabtree spoke this morning about how talking matters. Of course, dialogue is important. To use that old phrase of George Orwell 'jaw-jaw is better than war-war'. I think that is very true. But I also think that from our perspective being silent together is not practised enough. Yesterday I was with a group of five people, all from different places, and we sat down for half an hour in silent reflection and then left. As people were leaving they said "It is so strong doing this in a group." We need to reconnect with the richness of silence.

There are nine symbols on the PowerPoint screen to reflect the different faith communities. I can remember when we had a discussion about eight years or so ago about what symbols to choose for each faith. There was a long discussion about this and whether they really reflected the traditions appropriately. For example, we initially wanted to use a Buddha image, but it was felt that having representations of a human body would cause difficulties. We did eventually agree on the combination and since then they have become accepted and used very widely, by the Government, at inter faith events and even internationally. They are being used as a reflection of faiths together, each equally respected, a constellation of faith. When one of my Christian friends and I walked in the door today he looked around the room and said; "Do you know, most of the people I know here I met at 10 Downing Street or at Buckingham Palace!" What an amazing observation and this is only true because of the work that the Inter Faith Network has done.

In the intra faith journey that I have been on, and in my inter faith journey over the last few years, I have been astounded at the lack of knowledge not only of our own faith but also of others. I think that the key to any understanding is to try to secure an awareness of the basic roots of each faith and be able to understand them. If we do not know the real history of our

own faith, then we will be entering dialogue from a position of untruth and this will lead to arguments. Michael Ipgrave encapsulated it all when he said that we are all followers of faith because we are seekers and lovers of truth and that the key phrase is “the truth will set you free”. Everybody nodded when he said this because it is true. If we actually pursue the real final ultimate truths of all the traditions that we are following we will be set free. I cannot imagine that sitting on a cloud somewhere God, Allah, Yahweh, Krishna, Zarathustra, Buddha, Waheguru, Ahura Mazda and Baha’u’llah are having a religious war! If our Gods, our founders and our spiritual masters are not in conflict with one another then I do not think we have any right to start a religious war in their names.

Rt Revd Charles Henderson, formerly in charge of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy’s relationships with other faiths

I have had the pleasure and privilege of being associated with the Inter Faith Network ever since its foundation, but have handed over to Bishop Kevin McDonald who is now in charge of the inter faith work of the Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales.

It has been for me an area of tremendous personal growth, inspiration and encouragement. I am indebted to all the members of the Network for much that has brought great happiness and joy to me, in the fulfilment of my duty as a Bishop in the Catholic Church. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone, and especially to the members of the Network’s staff. They have been tremendous in their example, zeal, ambition, efficiency and competence. That has been illustrated, not only today, but throughout the years, and it has been a privilege too to work with the Network’s Executive Committee, among so many friends.

Most of the speakers ahead of me have been summarising various aspects of what has been said today. Perhaps I might just offer a few personal reflections. One thought that struck me is the difficulty of promoting inter faith relations. It was mentioned by one or two of the speakers. In our secular world there are so many people totally uninterested in anything to do with faith and indifferent to it. There is another danger that even within our own faiths there are many people who feel that we do not need inter faith relations: we are alright, we have everything that we need in our own faith, so why bother? That is an attitude we have to overcome, that self-smugness within one’s own religion. But if they understand their faith correctly it will drive them to build good relations within the wider human family. When we perceive every person as a member of the human family, we immediately see the wrongness of exclusiveness. We begin to recognise the inherent natural bond between every person as brother or sister. I think that is fundamental to the beginning of all good inter faith relations.

Within our own faith communities we spend a lot of time promoting our faith, encouraging people to enrich their faith and to live it out in practice. When we move outside our own faith we draw strength from our faith to promote good human relations. We are not trying to convert others or to proselytise, but recognise others as members of God’s family, as having human dignity and deserving respect and friendship. Human friendship is at the basis of all good relations. We need to see that each of our religions is valuable in promoting the ideal of good human relations. So, as Christians, we use the gift of our faith, the liveliness and enrichment of it, to be able to see in others the image of the Divine and those who are called to a unity of perfection in union with God. The task of all of us, indeed our duty, is to value

our religion and to use it to promote and uplift human life at all levels, to promote good fellowship, and to try and enable all peoples to live together in peace.

When we engage in inter faith relations we should start with a quiet meditative silence and put before our minds a vision of harmony and peace. We should begin to imagine the world without its present disruptions, without the hurts that come to so many people, and try to visualise how marvellous it would be to be able to walk anywhere at anytime feeling totally safe and amongst friends. If we have got a vision of this kind then we have something at which to aim, something to promote, something to work at, which enables us to appreciate all that we have, and particularly the friendship of our fellow beings. In order to do so I think we need great patience. As we mix with each other it is so easy to misunderstand each other. It was stressed by several speakers today that one of the necessary qualities of anyone engaged in inter faith is the capacity to listen. That requires a lot of patience, particularly when people are promoting ideas which are contradictory to our own convictions. To be able to listen, to be able to hear, to be able to see the base from which people come and their ideas arise, to be able to understand what they are striving to do needs much patience and listening. Deep down, they too seek harmony and peace, but they are coming from a different point of view, a different perspective, and a different background. Sometimes the words that we speak, or they speak, do not convey to one another what we really mean and understand by these words. You know how misunderstanding can occur through misreading the words that have been used. Recently somebody mentioned to me a Japanese who was going back to Japan after doing business in London where someone had said to him “Don’t worry: out of sight, out of mind”, a common phrase we use. When the Japanese went home they asked him if he was going to keep in touch with his London contacts. He replied “No. They said to me as I was leaving that they were invisible and insane.” So we have to hear what is being said but also to know how to understand it! So often we misunderstand what the other person intends to convey.

In order to know the other person it is essential to chat. The word “dialogue” can be off-putting. We do not go home and say that we are going to engage in dialogue this evening. We chat. Through chatting we come to know each other, and come to understand and respect each other. In inter faith we must begin by a friendly chat over that cup of tea or coffee, or whatever drink is usual within that particular faith. It is in that chatting that we will come to realise the values that people have, their customs and mannerisms, their style of argument and presentation and their diplomacy. These all arise from their backgrounds and their origins in the places where they were brought up. We have all got to come to terms with that so that we understand what is meant when someone says “Out of sight out of mind”, and we do not totally misunderstand it. We need to recognise that what another person is saying is sincere, that we can trust them and can say quite honestly “Sorry, I do not think I understand what you mean. Can you please explain?” We should not be frightened to ask questions because we are seeking to become brothers and sisters, soul mates who understand each other. When we are friends then indeed there is little to stop us from promoting true harmony and true peace, which arises from our deep faith.

A final warning. There is a great danger of suffocation if you try to involve yourself in too many dialogues at any given time. You can suffocate your mind by trying to take on board too much! So stick to seeking basic human friendship. You are all wonderful people. God bless you and thank you.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

John Battle, MP, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Faith Community Matters

When I was invited to this meeting I had the impression that it might be a very formal AGM, a business meeting. Unfortunately, I got caught in a traffic jam this morning so I missed Dr Harriet Crabtree's presentation, but I asked someone about it and heard that it included dramatic graphs. If it was a business corporation it would have shown the lines all going up for group activity, numbers, commitment and energy. The only one that is probably not going up enough is for money and resources! Nevertheless every area of activity is doing incredibly well. I want to say that the Inter Faith Network itself has achieved a great deal and contributed a great deal to our society as a whole in the years of its existence and is continuing to do so.

I have jotted down a few of the key comments made today but I want to start with the introduction in the programme for it, which touches on two themes: The first is 'growing cooperation on the faith and public life agenda'. But let us take the second one - 'deepening understanding between and about faiths equally important' - which is the one on which today is focusing. Jonathan Gorsky spoke about the need to develop a common agenda, which requires us to get together to address it. The other comment he made was about 'developing the capacity to listen and to hear each other'. Dr Ataullah Siddiqui, gave a very powerful and inspirational presentation, as did others. The word "bilateral" echoed throughout the whole of this meeting, emphasising in many ways the need to intensify our bilateral conversations as well as multi faith ones. We cannot really have "multi faith-inter faith" without having the bilateral dimension as well. They go together. It is not a case of one or the other, or of waiting until we have sorted out all the bilaterals before we have multi faith conversations or of calling off the multi faith ones until we have sorted out the bilaterals! No: there is a need together to deepen and work at the whole agenda.

Dr Siddiqui came out with the brilliant comment that many great monologues have been disguised as dialogue! I found that remark very striking. There are monologues even within households, and even between husbands and wives! I was reminded of a cartoon that a close friend gave to my wife and I some twenty years ago when our children were young and which is still pinned on the back door in our kitchen. I was a politician on the local city council at the time and the cartoon is of a woman with a vacuum cleaner in one hand, and an infant on the other arm, with a child pulling at her skirts asking "Mummy, Mummy, where is Daddy?" and Mummy replies "I don't know, he is probably out somewhere fighting on behalf of oppressed peoples"!

Again, Dr Siddiqui said that he took part in inter faith dialogue because of human dignity and justice. I thought Michael Ipgrave also put it well by saying that we may wish to share our insights and values as a resource for society as a whole. In other words, faith is not just about private prayer but goes much beyond that to be part of changing society. I just wondered if we are in a society where we are told to keep faith to ourselves and to pray in private, and if you do, then do it in a quiet room, and not let it get out or affect your neighbours or your relationships with them! Keep it to yourself whatever you do? Do not talk about your faith with anybody? No. We need to move faith out from the private sphere to the whole of community and public life, to the areas listed on the meeting programme discussing multi

faith activity in the public sphere that is now the norm: community cohesion, community renewal, health policy. That is a move to faith as good works. At a Hindu temple that I visited recently they were serving meals to all those in need in the neighbourhood and there are many examples of service that I have seen all over Britain that come instantly to mind.

There is another movement too: the engagement of faith with institutions. The shift to seeing faith communities in Britain as part of the solution to the challenges we all face. I was invited by the Prime Minister to take up my present role after the last General Election. During a visit to Britain President Wahid of Indonesia, who was the leader at that time of the world's largest group of Muslims, 280 million, with great tensions in the country between Christians and Muslims, came to 10 Downing Street. He and Tony Blair had a conversation about faith-state relations at which I was present. We went to the door to say goodbye and Tony Blair turned to me and said "Perhaps we ought to take faith-state relations much more seriously here in Britain". That is why I was appointed. I do not have a formal brief but am exploring dimensions of that theme and what it means in practice. I think it does mean that we move from seeing faith as a private matter. We move on from faith as good works to seeing how our work can actually contribute to a more just and peaceful world. How will inter faith dialogue based on our common humanity, on human dignity and justice be part of shaping the public realm? In order to be engaged in the public realm, I think we have gone beyond just an invitation to a few known people to No. 10 or Buckingham Palace to getting into closer contact with faith communities and a broader range of them too. We have gone beyond one or two faith leaders having privileged access. We have moved well beyond that.

So what is the agenda now? Last week within Government a steering group met which brought together representatives from within the faith communities with Ministers and civil servants. Why is that important? Because we have gone beyond a visit to No. 10 for a cup of tea or a drink of orange juice. It is now about the structures of Government and the work of all its departments. Ministers in all departments are having to learn that faith communities have something to offer, to help shape the whole policy agenda, not just by helping people in their local areas.

I was rung early this morning by the local radio because Ian Duncan-Smith is visiting Leeds. They asked "Ian Duncan-Smith has come to Leeds, can you do an interview?" The questions went like this. "Don't you feel embarrassed that Ian Duncan-Smith is in Leeds?" He had come to Leeds to launch an initiative and to take an interest in the question of drugs. I said to the interviewer "I am delighted. He is welcome here. Any ideas that he has on tackling the challenges of drugs in our society are very welcome, because we haven't yet got the answers to that terrible challenge." The interviewer went on "Well, does that mean that you agree with him?" "No" I said. "But he is not my enemy. He is a person with whom we can have a dialogue". That is what we must be about. We have not got the solutions to some of today's challenging policy issues. We need more voices at the table to help shape our policies, to face together some of the deep and intractable problems in our society and to find answers to them. Faith communities should be welcome as part of that process, not just to carry out social programmes, but to help shape the politics, the economics and the social fabric of this society as well.

I think that at last the doors are starting to open so that there can be a new relationship between faith and state. By faith and state, I mean at every level: the local council, regional government structures and internationally as well, so that we start to take seriously the contributions of the faith traditions. It is not the job of Government to organise inter faith

relations. We are not skilled at this and could not do it and it is happening anyway. But if the faith communities together develop a common voice and bring to the table their common principles and values about developing a society of justice and peace, in our neighbourhoods, in our country and internationally, then surely that voice has to be counted.

I close with a comment. In the workshop I joined today I think we could have gone on for about three days just sharing the views of the people in the room. We had a wonderful session reflecting on the basic principles of the Inter Faith Network. How do we move on from these? Are they still relevant? This afternoon's workshop should be seen as just being on "hold". It needs to continue. Rosalind Preston made an important comment in that discussion. She said that "Our society has become more secular, but those in faith communities are becoming more faithful" I thought that was a very perceptive insight into an important paradox. I think there is also another paradox. Another person in our group said "If faith communities are part of the problem of conflict" - and I thought the young people that spoke today were honest and outspoken about the need for bilateral dialogue because of the challenges we still face of tensions and conflict - "then if we are to be more honest about the extent we are part of the problem and be more humble about this, can we also be quietly more confident about the positive contribution we can make to shaping the future, because we ought to be". So as well as the context being a more secular one, but a more faithful context, we might need to be more humble within our faith communities, but at the same time be more critically engaged in the future. I hope that perhaps the tide is starting to turn and that at last in Britain faith communities will be positively welcomed as they make a critical contribution to our society. To be engaged, not just to be thanked for coming along and helping, but invited to contribute from within their traditions, and from within their dialogue together to actually shaping the public agenda and solving the challenges that we face, so that in the future we can have a more just, and perhaps a more peaceful, world.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

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

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

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

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

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Member organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2003-04

Faith Community Representative Bodies

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

Inter Faith Organisations

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

Calamus Foundation
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Council of Christians and Jews
International Association for Religious
Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Foundation
The Interfaith Foundation
Three Faiths Forum
United Religions Initiative (Britain and
Ireland)
Westminster Interfaith
World Conference on Religion & Peace (UK
Chapter)
World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Inter Faith
Brighton & Hove Inter Faith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Interfaith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Harrow Inter Faith Council
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)
Huddersfield Interfaith Council
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum
Leicester Council of Faiths
Loughborough Council of Faiths
Luton Council of Faiths
Manchester Interfaith Forum
Merseyside Council of Faiths
Merseyside Inter-Faith Group
Nelson and Brierfield Building Bridges
Newham Association of Faiths
Nottingham Inter-Faith Council
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Richmond Interfaith Group
Rochdale Interfaith Action
Sheffield Interfaith
South London Inter Faith Group
Southampton Council of Faiths
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council Inter
Faith Panel
Watford Inter Faith Association
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

Educational and Academic Bodies

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

*links faith community, inter faith and educational bodies in
Scotland

