

**CONNECTING FOR THE FUTURE:  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND  
INTER FAITH RELATIONS  
IN BRITAIN**

**Report on the  
2005 National Meeting of  
the Inter Faith Network  
for the UK**



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**2005 National Meeting  
of  
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 27 June 2005  
at the TechnoCentre, Coventry University**

Published 2005 by the Inter Faith Network for the UK  
(registered charity no1068934 and company limited by  
guarantee no 3443823 registered in England)

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ISBN 1 902906 21 7

# CONNECTING FOR THE FUTURE: YOUNG PEOPLE AND INTER FAITH RELATIONS IN BRITAIN

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## PROCEEDINGS

**Bishop Tom Butler**, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting and welcomed participants to it. He reflected that as the UK becomes increasingly religiously diverse, it is ever more important for young people to become involved in inter faith projects and initiatives and to build bridges of friendship and understanding. In the last few years, an increasing number of inter faith youth projects have been taking place in many parts of the UK. The meeting gave a chance to reflect on the challenges of this vital area of work and to hear from, and talk with, some of the UK's younger contributors to building good inter faith relations.

The first speaker was **Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK**, who gave a brief "taster" of just some of the youth inter faith activities now going on around the UK. This was followed by some reflections from **Gaurav Prinja, Hindu participant in the Golden Jubilee Youth Forum and advisory board member for the Connect guide**, on the vital importance of young people who are active and involved members of the distinct faith communities engaging in work to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation.

There was then a presentation by **Dr Maureen Sier of the Scottish Inter Faith Council** and **Jagtar Singh of the Scottish Inter Faith Council Youth Steering Committee** who described the development of inter faith work with young people in Scotland, including a recent conference which was held in Glasgow and attended by over 150 people from all over Scotland. **Rebecca Niknam, Programme Co-ordinator for the Maimonides Foundation**, then talked about the Maimonides Foundation inter faith programmes specially designed for young people from the Jewish and Muslim communities. Her presentation was followed by contributions about the Intercultural Leadership School, an international project which first started its work in the UK in Bradford and has since held seminars in other places such as Leicester. The speakers were **Sofia Maskin, a Museum Officer from Bradford** and **Rachel Gilbert, a youth worker with the Hearts Youth Project in Leicester**.

The final speaker before lunch was **Sue Houlton, Head of Development Services at the National Youth Agency** who gave an overview of the work of the Agency and also looked at how bodies such as local inter faith groups might develop inter faith work with young people; the importance of making activity young-people-friendly; and relevant legal issues to bear in mind when working with young people.

After lunch, **Jaggiwan Singh**, Network Co-Chair, introduced the afternoon session. This began with seven workshops on:

- (1) Good to talk: youth inter faith forums and conferences
- (2) Inter faith dialogue across the generations
- (3) Youth organisations and inter faith activity
- (4) Developing inter faith understanding and cooperation on campus
- (5) Diversity and dialogue project
- (6) Educating for inter faith awareness
- (7) Europe, the Commonwealth, the World!

After the tea break there was a presentation by **Graham Langtree, RE Adviser at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority**, who spoke about the contribution which RE can make to promoting understanding and respect for different faiths and beliefs and gave a brief introduction to the new national non-statutory framework for Religious Education.

The meeting ended with final reflections from four of the day's participants: **Preet Majithia, President of Cambridge University Hindu Cultural Society, Leicester Youth Inter Faith Group; Rowena Loverance, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Commission for Inter Faith Relations and member of the Society of Friends; Rauf Bashir, Building Bridges Project and Nelson Muslim community; and Rosalind Preston OBE, Vice-Chair Inter Faith Network for the UK.**

At the end of the meeting a presentation was made to Rosalind Preston who stood down at the AGM held later in the day from the Network's Executive Committee on which she had served since 1993, serving once as a Co-Chair and twice as a Vice-Chair during that period.



## A TASTER OF WHAT'S HAPPENING

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

I have been asked to give you a brief taster of some of the sorts of inter faith activity involving young people which are happening around the UK.

First, though, what do we mean by 'young people'? Well, I guess you are young when you are a toddler, you are young when you are 12 or 20, you are probably still young when you are 30. By 40 most people wouldn't describe you as young and at 50 or above, while you may be young at heart, the general populace would not describe you as young! Our focus today ranges widely, from inter faith activity at primary school age through to post higher education so we are talking about the age range 5-30.

Ten - even five - years ago, relatively little was happening in an organised way to engage young people with the vital project of building good relations between people of different faiths and beliefs. But just as involvement of older people in inter faith work is growing, so is youth inter faith work. Bishop Tom Butler and Gaurav Prinja have already mentioned the *Connect* guide. When we were researching case studies for this, we found out about a number of exciting initiatives. Across the last year we have learned about more, partly through a short survey we carried out, with project support from the Home Office, to find out about ways local inter faith groups are involving young people in their work. We discovered various kinds of activity going on. I am going to speak briefly about each of them:

- Inter faith forums and discussion groups in universities, colleges of further education and sixth forms
- Inter faith issues in RE and Citizenship Education
- Faith school exchanges and partnerships
- Youth councils and inter faith projects of youth organisations
- Special projects
- Local inter faith projects and events

### **1) Inter faith forums and discussion groups in universities, colleges of further education and sixth forms**

We read from time to time about problems between students of different backgrounds on university campuses. What we rarely read about is the fact that on a number of campuses, active steps are being taken to develop better inter faith relations through

student forums and discussion groups. For example, there is Warwick Inter Religious Roundtable for Dialogue (WIRD) which arranges events and discussions to promote understanding between people of different faiths at Warwick University. There will be a presentation on this in one of the workshops later today. Then there are smaller dialogue groups such as MoJow. MoJow was set up by two young Muslim and Jewish women students at Cambridge University - one of whom, Miriam Feldmann, worked as an intern at the Inter Faith Network last summer [and has now gone on to be the Interfaith Officer for the Board of Deputies of British Jews]. If you are interested you can read more in the *Connect* guide. *Connect* also features the University of London Union Buddhist Association which has been arranging inter faith discussion panels as part of their programme. Some inter faith work on campuses is given direct assistance by bodies such as the Council of Christians and Jews and the Maimonides Foundation and their work is featured in today's programme.

Last autumn, copies of *Connect* were circulated by the National Union of Students to all student unions in the UK and this is increasing the level of interest. Copies also went to higher and further education chaplains, many of whom, of course, were already very much aware of the importance of inter faith issues and play an active role on this front.

Colleges of further education are also giving increasing attention to inter faith relations among their staff and students. Hackney Community College, for example, recently established a student faith forum to discuss matters of concern to the students and to advise on issues such as equitable sharing of prayer room space.

In schools too, there is evidence of a growing interest among sixth formers, in particular, in inter faith issues. Early this year, for example, I had an extended correspondence with a sixth former in Watford who was busy trying to set up an association of faiths and cultures at his school and to arrange dialogue events.

## **2) Inter faith projects and teaching in schools**

I would like to move now to another important type of inter faith activity involving young people: activity within or linked to the curriculum in schools.

As we are due to hear from Graham Langtree later today, the recently published new non-statutory National Framework for RE encourages the inclusion in local syllabuses in England and Wales of inter faith issues. Traditionally RE has taught young people about the different faiths and enabled them to look at these individually as well as particular themes across different faiths. Of course a number of local agreed syllabuses have included for some while units which pick up inter faith themes. But now there is real encouragement to enable students to discover the importance of how people of different religions relate to each other.

This theme of inter faith relations also surfaces in Citizenship Education where some pupils have been learning about local inter faith relations as part of what it means to learn about citizenship. For example the Building Bridges Pendle in Lancashire has, over the past three years, produced two social cohesion education programmes which are delivered to year 6 pupils in primary schools and year 7 pupils in secondary schools. Both programmes are based on PSHE/Citizenship guidelines and use the

foundation of inter faith values to discuss a wide range of issues in relation to diversity and cohesion. Rauf Bashir will be talking about this later in the day.

Inter faith encounter for older pupils has been aided by special conferences and forums. For example, in Bournemouth local sixth forms invite panel members from different faith groups to address them. In some areas, such as Bromley, there have recently also been 'youth faith forums' or youth 'inter faith forums' similar to that mentioned by Gaurav. Following the Golden Jubilee young people's faith forum, The National Association of SACREs has been encouraging local SACREs in England to work with schools to put on faith forums for pupils to have inter faith discussions. Two such forums, in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be reported on later today. Others are on the near horizon.<sup>1</sup>

What might be seen as a forerunner in some respects of these SACRE linked youth forums is the Bradford Shadow SACRE. In Bradford, during the revision of the Local Agreed Syllabus some years ago, the adult SACRE ran a "Student Agreed Syllabus Conference" for a day to discuss what should be taught in RE and how it should be taught, as well as what principles should underpin its philosophy and practice in schools. It was so successful that they decided to establish a permanent "Student SACRE" as a way of promoting understanding and respect for diversity. Each adult SACRE member nominated a "shadow" sixth form student from one of Bradford's schools. Young people involved reflect both different schools and different backgrounds (representatives include students from Baha'i, Christian, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds as well as no religious affiliation). The Student SACRE helps advise on RE but there are also discussion sessions.

Of course, in a way, every RE or citizenship lesson and indeed many other lessons in schools in multi faith areas can turn into inter faith discussion. If you are at a school where there are practising members of several religions, this is likely to happen as a matter of course.

If, however, you are in a relatively undiverse area or in a school which is predominantly of one faith, more effort has to be put into ensuring inter faith encounter. Some creative schemes have been developed to help, enabling inter faith discussion between even relatively young pupils. For example, Julia Ipgrave and colleagues developed a scheme to enable email dialogue between year 5 and 6 pupils at Uplands Junior School, Highfields, an inner city school with a predominantly Muslim population, and their mainly Catholic counterparts at St Thomas More

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<sup>1</sup> 'SACREs' are Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. Every Local Education Authority (LEA) in England and Wales is required by law to have a SACRE. The responsibilities of SACRE are: to provide advice to the LEA on all aspects of its provision for RE in its schools (this does not include Voluntary Aided Schools); to decide whether the LEA's Agreed Syllabus for RE needs to be reviewed and to require the LEA does so; to provide advice to the LEA on Collective Worship in its schools (this does not include Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled Schools); to consider any requests from Headteachers to hold Collective Worship that is not of a broadly Christian character; to advise on matters relating to training for teachers in RE and Collective Worship.

Catholic Primary. The model has been adopted in other areas – sometimes at long distance enabling even students in not very diverse areas to be part of inter faith conversations. For example, around 200 pupils in eight East Sussex primary schools had the opportunity to hold email conversations with pupils in inner city schools in Leicester on topics related to pupils' work in RE.

### **3) Faith school exchanges and partnerships**

Faith schools, which in many cases have pupils drawn chiefly from one particular religious background (although, of course, quite a number are more varied, notably many Church of England schools), have caused concern to some who see them as closed worlds where pupils are cut off from encounter with the wider world and, in particular, from encounter with people of other faiths.

In fact, increasingly, faith schools – encouraged by the Department for Education and Skills - are making energetic efforts to ensure there is a positive encounter between their pupils and pupils of other faiths. For example the head of the Muslim Avenue School in Brent mentioned to me recently that she has organised inter school sports activities with other schools such as a local Roman Catholic school and has participated in Jewish-Muslim Sport activity organised by The Maimonides Foundation. We will be hearing from Rebecca Niknam more about this scheme later. Similarly, St Anne Roman Catholic Primary School in Tower Hamlets and a neighbouring community school where pupils are all Muslim share assemblies and playtime once a week as well as coffee facilities for parents. Clore Shalom School, a Jewish primary school in Hertfordshire, works with four other local primary schools to run an inter faith project.

In South London, Sarah Thorley, who is with us today, initiated a school interchange between the C of E school at which she teaches part time and Al Risaala, now Gatton primary school (Muslim), along with their headteacher Firdos Qazi. Their year 5 staff and pupils have had regular exchanges for 3 years, spending a morning in each others' schools most terms. They had a 'Learning about Islam' week earlier this term and next term, Gatton are planning a similar event about Christianity. They hope to have a joint visit to Southwark Cathedral in July.

The partnership work of these faith primary schools is a reminder of the importance of inter faith engagement even for young children alongside secure grounding in their own individual religious traditions. Another important project which will be picked up today in one of the workshops is the Ladywood Inter Faith Education project which enables children from local primary schools (8 at present) in the Ladywood area of Birmingham to explore and appreciate the faiths of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, through visits to the relevant places of worship.

### **4) Youth councils and inter faith projects of youth organisations**

I would like to move on now to inter faith youth councils and projects outside the education system. These are usually run by inter faith bodies, local authorities, youth organisations or other voluntary sector bodies.

We are shortly going to be hearing from Maureen Sier and Jagtar Singh about a very major inter faith young programme involving both conferences and an inter faith youth retreat in Scotland. Other than the Golden Jubilee Youth Forum there have been no other multi faith youth inter faith conferences on this scale in the UK. There are, however, regular youth inter faith events and projects run by bodies like the CCJ and Maimonides Foundation.

In some cities, such as Liverpool, youth councils are being formed which have an inter faith dimension. Liverpool Community Spirit has been bringing together young people of different faiths and cultural groups to visit, together, different places of worship and work on schemes like helping primary school children to read. A Youth Council is part of this project.

The Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby has recently received a grant from the Local Network Fund to run a 6 month pilot project to bring together the youth forums within Derby to meet up for a one day conference which will address different faith issues and will give the youth of Derby the opportunity to give their views on various faith related topics, including how to improve relations between those of different faiths. The plan is that the conference will be facilitated by young people from different faiths with the support of adults should they need it.

Discussions and projects are also increasingly happening in youth organisations and Sue Houlton and Maxine Green will be saying more about this during the day and about the important new resource the National Youth Agency has just published to assist the activity.

In youth organisation projects sometimes the inter faith dimension is explicit – for example, at national (and indeed global) level the Scouts have for some while been incorporating an inter faith dimension both to badge work and to their general activities. Daljit Singh and Mark Wagthorne will be talking about this in one of the workshop. At a local level, youth organisations are also beginning to do this. For example, young people at Jellicoe Youth Club in LB Camden created a mosaic of the symbols of the principal world faiths to encourage understanding between the different religions. But sometimes, though, inter faith issues are downplayed because they are felt to be too sensitive. A young Muslim local authority employee working with young people from the Bangladeshi community and other communities in Darlington suggested in conversation with me a while ago that inter faith issues were perhaps best not tackled directly, given the sensitive aspects of religious identity, particularly in the context of the current situation in the Middle East. Friendship building exercises were, he felt, a better starting place to open minds to others' different faiths and cultures. As we shall hear shortly from Rebecca Niknam, it is often in playing together and participating in joint projects that understanding grows. Football and art are fine ways into friendship and understanding. Sometimes talking directly or extensively about religious issues is not the best place to begin.

Youth organisations rooted within a particular faith community, however, often do tackle inter faith issues up front. One example is a Methodist church in Birmingham involving members of a Christian youth programme and of the Bangladeshi Youth Forum, both of which meet at the church. It brings together African Caribbean and

Bangladeshi youth from different faith backgrounds in shared activities (for example, at the end of Ramadan bringing the two groups together for Eid to break the fast.).

## **5) Special projects**

United Religions Initiative (UK) Elders and Emerging Visionaries (SEEV) programme brings older members and young people of faith traditions together to talk. Malcolm Stonestreet will be talking about this later today in one of the workshops, alongside participants from Nottingham Inter Faith Council who recently ran an SEEV event.

BBC Radio Leicester, under the leadership of Sandra Herbert (now working freelance) pioneered inter faith media working with young people. This is featured in the *Connect* guide. Sandra trained a group of young people to make radio programmes. In July 2004 some of them went with Minorities of Europe to Barcelona where they participated in the World Parliament of Religions. Preet Majithia will be reporting on this in one of the workshops later this afternoon. A Leicester inter faith youth group has emerged from the post-Barcelona follow up and we are delighted to have several of its members here today.

I have just mentioned Minorities of Europe. This Coventry based body is working to bring European youth intercultural projects to Coventry and the West Midlands and to work locally with young people and minority communities. It has a special inter faith programme. Young people, perhaps even more than their elders, have a keen interest in European and wider global issues. These global issues are very much at the heart of two other projects picked up in the programme today: the Diversity and Dialogue Project and the Royal Commonwealth Society's youth CHOGMs (youth meetings modelled on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings).

## **6) Local inter faith activity**

Last, but far from least, the local inter faith dimension of youth activity. The Inter Faith Network recently contacted local inter faith groups around the UK to learn about their involvement of young people. Many heartening responses were received.

In March of this year Birmingham Council of Faiths held an evening youth event "Living Between Cultures", in partnership with Birmingham Youth Service. It brought together young people of various faiths (recruited by both BCF and BYS) in Birmingham City Council House. Three 'buzz groups' were encouraged to listen to young people talking about the pressures they felt living between a secular culture and a religious tradition. It is hoped to try and set up a Youth Interfaith Group run by BYS with an annual contact with BCF.

In Newcastle, the Faith Leaders' Group have recently encouraged a youth project called 'Across Communities' to bring young people together to learn about each others' faiths and cultures. It involved 67 young people from all the faith groups in Newcastle was set up by Lesley Carson, the Anglican Diocesan Interfaith Advisor. As part of the project, they held 'Celebrations of Light' to mark each of the faith's holy days and festivals that occurred around the time of the project. Over 300 people attended the event with cultural activities such as dancing, henna art, artefacts from

each of the faiths and presentations given by the young people about each of the holy days/ festival that had taken place.

A number of groups commented on the important role young people have played in events and services they have organised. Bedford Council of Faiths noted, for example, that in April this year their young people helped with and presented sections of a multi faith civic service - the first such civic service in Bedford.

Some groups have forged connections with local schools – both sending speakers to these and also involving students in activities. For example, in Altrincham, pupils from the local grammar school were very active in helping with the Interfaith Group's charity dinner and interviewed the inter faith group's secretary for an article in their school magazine.

A number of groups help arrange school visits to places of worship. For example, large numbers of students and pupils and their teachers have participated in the visits to places of worship organised by the Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group in partnership with local faith communities. In order to make their experience meaningful, the Group has produced *Faith Lives*, resource material for schools and other agencies. This education pack tries to encapsulate the essential beliefs and practices of different faiths in the local context. Groups also help with special exhibitions and educational resources for school pupils. North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council has involved young people in creating two faith displays which were shown in Dewsbury town hall last year, with the support of Kirklees Metropolitan Council. They are now a partner in the establishment of the RE Faith Centres in Kirklees which are for all ages and especially junior and secondary schools (as well as for interested adults).

Quite a few of the local inter faith groups which responded to the recent survey highlighted particular challenges they were experiencing when it came to involving young people in inter faith work. Calderdale Interfaith Council noted, for example, that Young Muslims attending Quran school, or young people studying for GCSE/ A Levels have little extra time to take part in inter faith activities. Another West Yorkshire local inter faith body noted that they had decided not to work directly with children partly because they did not want the responsibility of working out a child protection policy. Some groups felt that they just could not take on work with young people because they were already over extended in their pattern of activities.

One group in the North East commented that they had initial difficulties when setting up a project with parents who were suspicious of its motives for the project. They did, however, overcome this. There was a general feeling, though, that despite the challenges the work was very worthwhile and careful planning of such events and involving young people themselves in the planning process would ensure success.

Local inter faith bodies were asked in the Network's 2005 survey whether they had suggestions for increasing work with young people. The following suggestions were made:

- a roadshow about inter faith issues

- inviting as speakers role models who have successfully achieved in engaging youth in inter faith activities
- helping find and develop the skills of good young speakers who can share their faith values and commitment to good inter faith relations with other young people in their community and beyond
- having a committed group of young people with enthusiastic and experienced older guides
- publicising events in local secondary schools, colleges and youth groups
- local inter faith groups could have have an education sub group to help them provide some form of inter faith activity at least every 6 months aimed at schools and pupils between the ages 3-16
- a database of groups who can be contacted to share good practice
- appointment of inter faith youth worker/co-ordinator or a 'community faith youth worker' or a project officer (who must be a young person) to liaise with different places of worship/faith communities and to suggest, organise, assist with the proposed activities on behalf of and with full support from the local inter faith group
- producing a paper to guide schools on inter faith issues
- funding/more funding!

## **Conclusion**

That is just the wish list of local groups. Other types of organisation and – indeed – young people themselves may have many other suggestions for extending and deepening inter faith activity by and for young people. I hope that out of today's discussions will come many suggestions that we can all draw on because this area of work is so vital: whether it is in universities, colleges of further education or schools or whether it is through faith communities, youth organisations, national inter faith bodies or local faith groups. It is such an important area of work because alongside the contribution that each young person makes to their own faith community, they have a key contribution also to make to building good relationships with people of other faiths. Young people are crucial contributors to inter faith activity – it is not a kind of junior or less significant role. We are all, regardless of our ages, part of the process of people of different faiths in the UK finding ways to coexist and contribute to a shared society in ways which respect the integrity of each of our distinct historical faith traditions.



## **INTER FAITH BRIDGE BUILDING: THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS**

**Gaurav Prinja, Hindu participant in the Golden Jubilee Youth Forum and advisory board member for the *Connect* guide**

I am sure that everyone here understands the importance of understanding and respecting one another. We have seen in recent weeks how, for instance, the European Union, has had to postpone the adoption of its constitution. What is the reason for this? The consensus seems to be that the people of Europe want to maintain their own national identities. I do not think all of the different members of the countries have a problem with working together, but they do not want to be labelled as a single homogenous group. It is a fine line to tread, and it becomes a thinner tightrope when you apply it to faith. However it is through inter faith activities that we gain valuable experience in tightrope walking!

Without wishing to disrespect those of the elder generation, in about 30 years' time, all these fantastic inter faith initiatives will need new people to run them. Whilst there is no doubt that in 30 years time some of my peers will probably, all of a sudden, decide that inter faith work is pretty cool, they will have to start from scratch with a bit of juggling, then some acrobatics, and finally be able to walk that tightrope. After all, it is a bit difficult to get your head around getting all these people, who passionately believe in their faith, to work together and understand, (not necessarily accept, just simply understand) the views of someone else who has a similarly deeply held faith which is different to their own. But one thing I realised whilst at university is how impressionable 'young minds' are, not that I count myself as old yet!

I shall tell you the story of the Golden Jubilee Young Peoples Faith Forum. It was organised jointly by the Golden Jubilee Office and the Inter Faith Network and brought together about 80 young people from different faiths from around the UK. Personally, I was very glad to be part of this as I had just finished my first year mathematics exams and it occupied my mind whilst waiting for my results! The theme of the Forum was 'Faith and Service to the Community'. We as participants talked about our faith and how it inspired us, or drove us, to serve the community. There were participants from eight different Christian denominations and from eight other faiths. We were treated to a fantastic couple of days in London, taking part in discussion sessions and workshops in St James's Palace, culminating with a reception at Buckingham Palace for representatives of different faiths. There were 64 'younger young' people (aged 16-18), and 16 'older young' people, among whom I was the Hindu representative.

Us ‘older young people’ were invited to come slightly early to be briefed about what was expected from us. Naturally all of us being keen and young, many of us were there nice and early. The problem was there were now about ten 18-24 year olds in London on a sunny Sunday afternoon. So it was no surprise that at the earliest opportunity, we escaped from the watchful eyes of the organisers and went out gallivanting! It was on the first floor of a Starbucks somewhere in the middle of London that I realised something fantastic. Each of us had presumably been selected to attend by our communities because we had a certain level of knowledge and a certain level of faith in our particular beliefs. This led me to expect that there may have been a level of tension in the atmosphere. However, I was pleasantly surprised. We started off just chatting amongst ourselves, we even started playing some games to get to know one another better. In fact to anyone who was sat around, we would have appeared to be a group of very good friends starting off their evening activities by meeting up for a rather rowdy drink in Starbucks. I quickly came to realise the power of personal contact with people. Immediately, by making personal contact with these people from different faiths, my thoughts on those faiths changed. It was by leaps and bounds more effective than sitting in a stuffy classroom in an RE lesson where the teacher had told us that not all Hindus are pacifists, not all Muslims are terrorists and not all Jains are vegetarian!

In particular, I remember there were a few rather loud ‘good Christian girls’ and an extremely witty and worldly wise ‘Buddhist ascetic’. There was one faith I was encountering for the first time: there was an extremely pleasant young girl from the Baha’i faith. It was a perfect first experience of a faith. Whereas I had expected to end up in a group of slightly fanatical middle aged people trapped in young people’s bodies, I found we were all cracking jokes, teasing one another and getting along quite well simply as friends. If any of them had thought that I would turn up bare chested with a sacred thread, a huge big mark on my forehead and speaking Sanskrit then hopefully they too were pleasantly surprised. This little two hour gathering caused a huge turn around in my thoughts. Perhaps that makes me a quick learner, or perhaps it just means I’m rather fickle in my views. But I basically realised that whatever preconceptions one may have about a faith, there are always people from the faith to prove them wrong, and all of this was before the Forum had even officially begun!

Realising this fickleness, or open mindedness, there seems to be with young minds, I was delighted that the Inter Faith Network decided to keep in touch with all of us! I was overjoyed to be invited to help develop an inter faith action guide for young people. In cooperation with *TimeBank*, the Prince’s Trust Initiative *respect* and the *National Youth Agency* the Inter Faith Network produced a booklet entitled *Connect: Different Faiths, Shared Values*. Thanks to a special grant from the Home Office there are about 500 copies of this booklet available free at the conference today. I was particularly keen on this project because the target audience was youngsters. Not that this should stop any of today’s older attendees from taking one!

Young people who have an interest in their own faith usually contribute a lot to their own faith community, and are usually thought of as rather ‘good apples’ by most. However, one observation I have made is that when youngsters go to university and are away from the security of their home, there are many who do open up but there

are also a significant number who become engulfed with members of their own faith and faith groups, sometimes to such an extent that it becomes rather fanatical. The time at university is a vital part of any young person's life. It is when they really start making their own major life decisions, and I believe that the stronger the inter faith influence is at this time in their life, promoting respect between faiths, the better. The issue, of course, is much like the argument put forward about Britain becoming a 'melting pot of cultures'. If we all become too engrossed in 'interfaithism' then what becomes of everyone's own personal beliefs?

I will end with a little story from the Faith Forum. I was asked, "How do you reconcile the precision of mathematics, where there is always a water tight proof for the exact right or wrong answer, with the wishy-washy-ness of faith?" I have to admit that at that time my knowledge of mathematics was limited to the exact and precise, whereas as a Hindu I grew up being taught that there are multiple paths to one supreme truth. I think I said something about these being two distinct parts of my life.

I have graduated now, with a BA after my name, so I am perhaps a little bit wiser! There are two points that I would like to share with you about mathematics. Firstly, any proof that is used in mathematics is always based on certain assumptions and theorems. However, the theorems that you use have to be proven too. If you follow this down you end up with 'axioms'. These are very simple mathematical statements that are essentially unprovable. These 'axioms' are considered so blindingly obvious that no proof of them is required! Essentially, all mathematicians 'believe' that they are true. Upon them is built this impregnable fortress of precision which is mathematics. The second point is that there is always more than one way to arrive at an answer. There are numerical methods, whole hosts of different theorems and, of course, the good old fashioned method of spilling Greek letters all over reams of paper. In fact, my theory at university was that whenever an examiner considered a question too easy, he would add another line saying, 'Now arrive at this answer using a different method'.

The best mathematicians are those who have their own preferred method of deriving an answer that works for them. However, they will always know what other ways are available and why these do or do not suit them and why they suit other people. In the same way, I think that young people need to learn that whilst they have their own faith, to learn about and respect the faiths of other people will do them and their own faith absolutely no harm at all.

## **ALL TOGETHER: INTER FAITH VOICES FROM SCOTLAND**

**Dr Maureen Sier of the Scottish Inter Faith Council and  
Jagtar Singh of the Scottish Inter Faith Council Youth Steering Committee**

*Dr Maureen Sier:*

It is a great pleasure to be here and to see so many young faces. Gaurav mentioned earlier that he thought he was going to find a lot of middle-aged people in young bodies. I feel a bit of a fraud because I feel like I am a young person in a middle-aged body!

The Scottish Inter Faith Council, asked me if, as its Development Officer, I would find a way of engaging young people in inter faith work. We began with a completely blank slate and so what I want to talk about, before I hand you over to Jagtar, is how important process is in inter faith development work and in inter faith altogether. Although there are very often wonderful outcomes to the processes that we undertake, the process itself is very, very important. When I was given the remit of engaging young people in inter faith work, in theory I could have planned a conference, found a venue, got in touch with young people and gone ahead with it. But then it would have been a conference that was organised by, (I hate to say it!), a middle-aged person. It would not have had the impact of actually getting young people engaged in the process of planning the conference itself. I think it is very critical when working with young people, for young people themselves to be empowered to take the work forward themselves. That is very important and that dimension of the process is vital.

So my very first step was to form a committee of young people from the diverse faiths of Scotland. That in itself was an important part of the process, because I had to approach the faith communities asking them if they had a representative that they could send who they thought would be interested in inter faith work, and then bring these young people together, ensuring that they were comfortable with each other. This happened almost immediately: friendships were formed and developed straight away. Then we had to find a way of working on the planning of the very first inter faith conference for young people in Scotland, which took place in December 2003.

You should have no fear in handing over inter faith work to young people - they understand it immediately. They don't have the prejudices or the pre-conceived ideas that sometimes older people have. It has been an absolute privilege to work with the young people in the faith communities of Scotland.

At our first conference there were elements I might never have thought of myself: drumming workshops, meditating workshops, panel presentations and lots of dialogue. We had Shareen Nanjani, a presenter from “Scotland Today” on national television. It was very exciting to have her there. She told us that she had a Christian mother and a Muslim father so right from the beginning of her life she had been very aware of the importance of good relationships between the faith communities.

Then there was the process after the conference as well. We had had a successful inter faith conference. Were we to just leave it at that? We immediately organised an evaluation dinner so that the young people themselves could answer questions such as How do you think the conference went? Would you like to continue working in inter faith? Can you get more of the young people in your faith communities involved? And to all those questions there was a resounding “Yes! We can do this. We have loved the process and we have had a successful conference.”

I think what was very important was the fact that they were engaged with the planning of the conference. Dialogue is central to inter faith work. We all know that. But actually planning something that was successful and then building on that and being able to take the work forward with a goal at the end of the process was important. So the committee that was formed comprised myself and young members of each faith community. Perhaps the next step was the most important: we held an inter faith planning retreat. At this stage I want to hand over to Jagtar, because it was then that he came on board and he is going to take you through the next stages of the work that we have been doing with young people in Scotland.

### ***Jagtar Singh:***

To begin I would like to tell you a wee story about how I got involved in inter faith work. I am from Glasgow and with all the activity going on there you would think I would probably have found out about it there but I didn't. I am glad to see that you have got an exhibition at the back of the hall about last year's Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona. I was lucky enough to attend this. While I was there I was at one of the youth workshops and somebody came up to me, actually a member from the committee that organised the first Scottish youth conference. She said “We're thinking of planning another conference in Glasgow.” And I said, “Funny that, I'm from there too!” And we got chatting and she said, “You know, you should come on this retreat.” I am not sure how far it is from Glasgow to Barcelona, but it took me that long and that big a trip to get involved in something that was down the road from me! That's how these things go sometimes.

I am going to tell you how we planned our conference, a bit about what was involved in our second conference and some of the post conference activities we have been involved in through various people that we met there. Two most important words here are “Development Officer”. We really should thank Maureen Sier because it wouldn't have happened without her. The point has already been made that much inter faith work cannot go on without an infrastructure behind it and Maureen keeps this committee going. Young people are very dynamic. A university course is three, or possibly five or six years long. Over that time people may be going abroad studying. To keep a group going you need to have some key people who will make

sure the project stays on track and that it will keep going as new members come in. So the role of a Development Officer is critical. And, of course, so are the contributions of members from each faith. An inter faith planning retreat was one of the most important parts of the process.

Let me show you some pictures from our planning retreat. About half of our committee knew each other and the other half didn't. Sometimes that can be very difficult as you are not too sure if people will form their own cliques and new people will be left to wander on their own. But luckily Maureen created a good programme that involved some work, which was quite good because it had all been funded, and a lot of play which was also really good! I can appreciate the gallivanting of Gaurav and his friends in Starbucks but our retreat was on Holy Island so there wasn't a Starbucks on site! Nevertheless, we went for a few walks and had a variety of activities as you can see from the pictures of our sessions, one of a work session and four of play. That was the right kind of mix for the weekend! All our brainstorming sessions took place on Holy Island and it was very important that we were all in the one place. I think it was a lot more productive than simply having an ordinary meeting which usually lasts for two hours as a maximum. Here, our dialogue started spilling over into the times when we were having food together and walking up and down mountains. Discussions were taking place all the time in very informal settings and I think that was very important. The theme for the conference was discussed and we even had someone who was a design student on our committee who came up with a poster for it on the spot.

Then there was time to forge friendships, which is probably what inter faith is all about. "Networking" is an OK word but I think it sounds rather business like. Making friends is more what it is about. That is probably what has kept our committee going more than anything else. Just phoning people up and saying, "Do you want to go to the cinema tonight?" Obviously we had meetings after the retreat to work out the arrangements in more detail. We held meetings every week for 6 or 8 weeks. People have allocated tasks and everything is minuted. Very importantly, a Committee member isn't there as a formal "representative" of their faith community. They represent the interests of that community but give their personal views.

So moving on to ensuring attendance. This is important. From where do you get the people to come to this conference? It is all fine and well planning it, but if nobody comes to it then there is not much point! Talking to schools and universities is important. You have to go out there and be seen. Youth groups within faiths are obviously also an important area. Posters for the conference have to be quite catchy to stimulate young people. That is why Maureen was saying it is important to get young people involved in inter faith work, because at least they can have similar kinds of ideas. Our first two conferences have been in Glasgow but our next conference is moving over to Dundee, in the hope that young people from Aberdeen and further up north can come down to it.

So, to our conference programme itself. It was very important to have an ice-breaker at the beginning of the day because people often come with other people to a conference, and like today you are maybe sitting with people that you already know. We started the conference with "human bingo". I don't know if you have played this before but you have to go round and get different people to sign your sheet, someone

who has got an “r” in their name or something like that, so it is a good way to meet a lot of people. You have to keep asking what people’s names are and the whole room gets quite buzzing. Something like that is very important because it gets people to mix with one another. We had plenary sessions but there has to be a good mix of these and workshops, because as you might know, young people, (and older people too!), don’t really like sitting down for too long. So getting them up and around in workshops often gave that opportunity to have dialogue with other people and we found, especially from our second conference, that people wanted more of that. They wanted more time for informal discussion and time to chat with the friends that they had made during that day. And we broke it up with some music. We had an inter faith band there which also finished off the conference. We had Indian dancing and actually had a rapper who had made up a faith rap! So it was a varied programme.

We had discussion panels made up of the religious leaders of Scotland. The young people really liked this because they could ask all the awkward questions that nobody else could really answer. It was quite interesting to see when the religious leaders couldn’t answer them either! I think it was good to see that, because sometimes you think that everyone has got the answer and it is very interesting when they have to huddle up close over the microphone to discuss a question and figure out how to answer it! Having our exhibitions on display was also quite important. You have to be careful to make sure you include the faces of different people from different faiths. We had open spaces, places to do meditation, places for prayers, just a chill out zone. If you didn’t really want to go to a workshop you could go and sit somewhere else. Food played quite an important part because everyone chats over food. It’s when socialising happens. People go up and say, “Can I get you another bit of something?”. I quite enjoyed that part of it. It is where chit-chat happens, but again you have to be careful because there are various different diets to be taken care of. There are also issues like fair trade about the products you choose.

We got involved in quite a lot of inter faith work after our conference. People started coming up to us and asking us to take part in events which was quite nice. It also meant that our committee kept things going. I think that holding the conference has made sure that the committee stays together. It is almost like a service project and people keep involved in it. Talks about people’s religions and discussions come from that, but the fact is that they all stay together to take forward this one goal of planning the conference. We visit each other’s places of worship and have met the religious leaders when we went and had a meal with them. We presented a statement on the Make Poverty History campaign. We have got workshops coming up at the World Youth Conference and we are actually holding a inter faith service there. And obviously lots of socialising, learning and growing, which is part of the gallivanting to which we keep coming back!

The theme of our last conference was “Service Above Self” which we all thought was important. The theme of our next one is going to be “Walking Together Beyond Tolerance”. We think it is really important to move from just tolerating others to understanding and respecting them.

## **DEVELOPING INTER FAITH PROGRAMMES WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: THE MAIMONIDES FOUNDATION EXPERIENCE**

**Rebecca Niknam, Programme Co-ordinator, Maimonides Foundation**

The Maimonides Foundation is a joint Jewish-Muslim inter faith organisation which was founded over ten years ago. It fosters understanding, dialogue and cooperation between Jews and Muslims through academic, cultural and educational programmes based on mutual respect and trust. The Foundation is committed to creating a forum where the two communities in this country can share their commonalities and discuss their differences. We believe that dialogue is the only positive means of living in harmony in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic society. One of the specific goals of the Maimonides Foundation is to provide opportunities for children and young people to have a positive experience of young people of other faith. We believe that if children of different faiths are allowed from the earliest age to meet each other, to play together, and to interact with one another, they will create meaningful relationships with each other and not grow up with prejudices. We feel that children should be taught from the earliest age, both at home and at school, religiously and socially, that children who have a different colour of skin, or faith, or even social status, are not inferior to them but just as valued and as loved. If they are taught that differences can be enriching and not diminishing, then children will grow up to relate to one another as equal human beings. This is why one of the greatest aspects of the educational programme of the Maimonides Foundation is to teach young people that it is their responsibility to carry forward the blueprint of a just and cohesive society. To actualise this ethos of the Foundation we have initiated a number of youth orientated programmes.

First, I want to talk about our football programme. This we initiated over five years ago and it involves Muslim and Jewish schoolchildren aged 9 to 12 spending three Sunday mornings playing football together. It starts in July and this coming July is the start of the programme for this year. Our partner is Arsenal Football Club who host the children and provide coaching for them at their football grounds in Highbury in London. It is a very popular scheme. In previous years we had Rami Shaban, who was a goalkeeper for Arsenal and is originally from North Africa, come on the final session to meet with the children. The children who participate in the scheme are recommended by Muslim, Jewish and secular schools, mosques, synagogues and faith-based community centres from both communities. The way the programme works is that the children are divided into mixed faith groups and encouraged to play



as a member of a team. They are encouraged to interact with their team mates of other faiths and to take back this positive experience to their other friends so that it is not just interacting on the day but taking it forward. Parents, too, get a chance to meet with each other, so on two levels we create interaction. The parents believe that now more than ever there is a need to educate children to relate to each other as a member of a team and not as isolated individuals. This programme has been very successful and in 2002 it was singled out as a best example of an inter faith scheme in the *Respect* programme which was launched by Prince Charles and supported by the Chief Rabbi, who came to the scheme in 2002.

We also organise projects with schools, specifically in schools. One of our projects is a “School visits programme” and I want to talk to you about one visit we organised and initiated when Jewish sixth form students from Immanuel College were invited to visit Muslim sixth form students at Brondesbury College. The teachers, governors and parents from both schools were invited to be present as observers and supervisors during this visit. This made the visit as open and inclusive as possible so that all participants felt secure and confident in the programmes. In this programme the students were first given a talk about the shared history and culture of the Jewish and Muslim people and the importance of harmonious coexistence and good citizenship in Britain through inter faith dialogue. Afterwards the students participated in an in-depth discussion on a wide range of topics including inter faith issues. This programme identified many commonalities between the students. For example, some students came from similar cultural backgrounds. We had both Jews and Muslims whose family originally came from Iraq.

We also have a “Schools inter faith awareness programme”. In this programme the Foundation is invited by both faith-based and secular schools to talk about Jewish-Muslim inter faith relations. We are invited into the schools both by teachers and headteachers but also by students. Sometimes students have student-run organisations or societies within schools and we are invited by them as well to come into the school to run this programme. Under this programme issues are addressed by the students in an interactive session, it is a discussion-led session rather than a talk, include anti-semitism and islamophobia, the practicalities and opportunities for Jewish-Muslim dialogue and the individual’s responsibility as a British citizen to create a cohesive and inclusive society. We have visited several Jewish, Muslim and secular secondary schools for this initiative.

Another recent programme that the Foundation initiated is called “Dialogue Through Art” and this is part of our cultural and educational programmes. In September last year we launched the programme with a series of visits to the exhibition *Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands* at the Hermitage Room in Somerset House. This was a very beautiful exhibition which some of you may have had an opportunity to visit. The exhibition showed the positive interactions of Islamic art with the people of the Book, people of the three Abrahamic faiths and it provided an awareness of the important contribution of Islamic art to the Western cultural tradition. So we invited Jewish and Muslim school pupils to visit the exhibition in mixed faith groups and learn about the positive cultural heritage of Islam. After visiting the exhibition together the pupils would participate in a supervised art or calligraphy session during which they produced their own artistic impression of the visit. Here we have some of those sixth form pupils who visited it and we invited for this session both a Muslim

calligrapher and a Jewish calligrapher to teach the children some calligraphy. They started off with “Shalom” on the left which is the word in Hebrew for “peace” and is also a greeting. And over here we have “Salaam” in Arabic which is the equivalent. It also means “peace” and is also a greeting. The aim of that programme was to provide an opportunity for Jewish and Muslim students to meet and work together on an art project and provide them with a positive experience of both Jewish and Islamic cultural heritage. So this will also work with exhibitions of Jewish art.

Finally, I want to talk to you about one of our programmes we hold on university campuses – our Student Forums. We have initiated a number of student groups on university campuses around Britain. These groups are independent of both Jewish and Islamic societies. In each group a number of Jewish and Muslim students meet with the aim of developing their understanding of the other’s religion and beliefs and to have a forum to discuss and explore inter faith issues relevant to both communities. This shows some founding members of our group in Manchester. The groups begin by exploring commonalities between the two religions and participants are often surprised to learn how much they share in common. Going back to the school programmes, when people have an opportunity to meet, even though they can be hesitant, it is a very positive start when they find they have something in common. They can then, when they have built on this commonality, begin to progress to explore more sensitive issues and discuss alternative points of views on current issues. They also have an opportunity to develop their own personal identity and opinions. The Foundation always ensures that the privacy and sensitivity of all participants are respected. This is a very important point. We want to encourage and allow participants from as wide a range as possible to participate in the forum and for them to do this they have to feel secure. For many students engaging in inter faith dialogue for the first time it is a very difficult and challenging experience. If they haven’t had an opportunity through their schools or educational backgrounds, many of them are very interested to engage in dialogue, but it is not as easy as they had imagined and the Foundation provides a very safe environment to do so constructively. Here we have some founding members from our Oxford group.

To finish, why is this work so important? As a young person I want to make a change. I want to change the world, to make it a better place. Not just for myself and for the current generation, but for children and for future generations and this is something I think young people feel very strongly about. They want to participate, they want to get involved, they want to make a difference and inter faith dialogue is an area that I feel is very important. I think a lot of young people feel very strongly about this issue and the need to improve relations between faiths. That is the reason why I find the ethos and the programmes of the Maimonides Foundation so important and so vital to achieve this positive change.

## **EMPOWERING FUTURE BRIDGE BUILDERS – THE INTER CULTURAL LEADERSHIP SCHOOL**

**Sofia Maskin and Rachael Gilbert  
ICLS participants**

### ***Sofia Maskin:***

My name is Sofia Maskin and I am from Bradford. Rachael and I are here to talk about the Inter Cultural Leadership School (ICLS), which started in Bradford a few years back. Because of the difficult and complex issues faced in Bradford, such as the tangible segregation between different communities, underachievement amongst young Pakistani Muslim boys and the 1995 and 2000 riots, the town has been in the spotlight recently. All these issues coming together have caused some tension between different groups who don't have much opportunity to meet together. This was the context for the ICLS initiative. It initially consisted of a few different groups working together, such as the churches, the mosques and the community sector. It entails bringing young leaders of the future together aged between 20 and 30 years old.

The first meeting point is going on a residential together at a place in Yorkshire called Kettlewell, where *Calendar Girls* was filmed. So if you have seen that film, you know where Kettlewell is! It is a nice secluded area where we all come together and meet for the first time and go through a programme about which Rachael is going to talk. A lot of issues arise from the fact that communities are not mixing together, not living in the same areas and as a result there is a lot of ignorance of each other. I think it is about the fear of "the other" and not knowing one another and, again, not having dialogue. If you don't mix, how are you going to know about the other community? So the whole point of the ICLS is to provide participants with the foundation for those dialogues to begin.

The primary objectives of the ICLS are:

- to provide environments where young adults from various communities can meet;
- to provide a framework where a deeper understanding of the other's culture and religion and values can be explored; and
- to provide skills to assist in developing cross-community relations and awareness of the other.

The most important part of it for me was the networking and meeting people from different cultures and religions. Usually we are quite comfortable in our own separate groups, not mixing with others, so it provided a good foundation to meet other people from other cultures. On our programme in Bradford we had both Christians and Muslims and people who didn't really believe in any particular faith, but believed in human values. We didn't have anyone from any other faith background. That wasn't intentional, but was just the result of who had applied. For me, as a young Muslim growing up in Bradford, even though I have never had problems mixing with people, being in that environment raised questions for me as well. I think I had never considered that some people might not believe in a God, for example. So for me that was quite hard to comprehend. It was interesting and challenging to discuss some of the views and opinions that people expressed. Now Rachael is going to talk about the actual programme.

***Rachael Gilbert:***

Thank you to Sofia. It really is very nice to meet a person that I have heard a lot about as she was from the original Inter Cultural Leadership School. As you are aware, my name is Rachael and I am a youth worker on a Catholic youth project. The project is based in an area of Leicester that is approximately 96% Muslim. So that is a challenge in itself: working with a Catholic community in a Muslim area. When I got this job I felt that it was very important that the project was not just working with the Catholic community but also reaching out and encouraging the communities to work together. So when I saw a very fancy eye-catching poster for the Inter Cultural Leadership School I found myself driving towards a place called Hothorpe Hall, about 26 miles away from Leicester. About halfway there I thought "I'm not going! I'm going back." I'll be honest and say that I was very apprehensive. I do have friends from other cultures and from different faiths, but I thought that to spend five days and four nights in their company would really be a challenge. I was actually going to be living with people who at that time I was not aware that I had anything in common with. That scared me and I am ready to admit that.

So, how was the ice broken? When we got there we were asked by the head of the Intercultural Leadership School, Geza Tessenyi, why we were there. None of us wanted to make eye contact until a young Hindu woman put her hand up and said she didn't really know. Thankfully, that just broke the ice and we all laughed and felt much more comfortable.

The first day was about looking at stereotypes. Was I as broad-minded as I thought I was? If you had asked me, I would have said I was a broad-minded person. By the end of that day I was not so sure! There were various leaders from different communities there and we could ask them questions. One rule of the ICLS is that you do not challenge another participant but you can challenge a visiting leader from their community. This is very important because this helps to avoid defensiveness on the part of the participants and difficult situations do not arise because you're not challenging each other. Discussion comes about in a much more friendly way.

The second day looked at the issue of (rather fancy words!) “emotional intelligence”. We had a guest speaker from Pakistan. She talked about the idea of being comfortable in your own faith, being comfortable in yourself as a person, before trying to go out and understand somebody else. Look at yourself first, look at your own weaknesses, look at your own issues and then, when you are comfortable, go out and talk to other people.

Then on the third day, and this is what I found very useful, we studied media management. To be able to go out and talk about it. I would not call myself the most confident of people, as you can probably tell, when it comes to speaking in a situation like this. They trained us to be able to write a speech and to present it to people and showed us how sometimes what you mean to say is not always what you say and how that can be misinterpreted. So, for example, a classic situation that they played to us was a clip from Radio Leicester where somebody was speaking about “we”. The point was who is “we”? “We”, the whole of the Muslims in the world? “We”, the whole Catholic community? Was I speaking on behalf of the Pope? Or was I speaking as an individual Catholic? It was important to be able to think that through. Once you know what you yourself think and have dealt with the issue of stereotyping, then you can communicate effectively.

Finally, on the last day we dealt with conflict resolution. Are you the kind of person who can deal with that? That was very interesting. A guy from the Bradford Institute of Peace Studies who had worked in Northern Ireland spoke to us. We dealt with questions such as, Can you deal with things when they go wrong? How do you do that?

The training of the Intercultural Leadership School was, as Sofia said, about training future leaders and it was very high quality training. What was the most important part of it? For me, it was not the training itself but what happened in the free time. It was the time I spent playing table tennis with a Muslim, it was the time I spent playing pool with a Hindu, it was the time I went for a walk in the grounds with a girl from the Baha'i faith. That is where the true friendships were built.

After going on the ICLS I was asked, together with others, to give a presentation to the Lord Mayor of Leicester about what we had done. My boss, who is a Catholic priest, asked me what I was going to talk about. I said “Pizza!” He thought I was joking. When I stood up in the Lord Mayor’s Chambers, I did begin to talk about pizza. I could see him shaking his head thinking, “She’s only been in the job a month - she doesn’t want to be in it much longer!” The point I made was that after the ICLS seminar several of us walked into Domino’s Pizza shop and after working out what type of pizza we could eat and where we could eat it, we managed to do it. Actually, I think that is a powerful statement. A Hindu, a Christian, a Muslim and a Baha'i walk into a pizza shop! It sounds like a really tasteless joke, but thanks to the ICLS in Leicester, it became a reality.

## **THE NATIONAL YOUTH AGENCY AND INTER FAITH WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Sue Houlton, Head of Development Services for the National Youth Agency**

I would like to talk to you about what youth work is, what it strives to achieve, who is involved in it and what the scale of it is. I also want to touch briefly on faith-based youth work and look at its history, its commitment and its contribution to youth work as a whole and to focus on what the commonalities might be to which everybody can subscribe whatever their faith or non-religious faith. I would also like to explore whether there are legal constraints in our work with young people. And finally I want to look at the role of the NYA in all of this and how it supports youth work.

When I agreed to speak at this conference I did not realise I was going to be the sixth presenter and would be speaking just before lunch. So I am going to involve you by starting off with a quiz to keep your mind off your lunch and to try to stay focused for the next 15 minutes!

Please work in twos or threes with the people sitting next to you, just for a few minutes, to come up with an answer for each of these five questions:

1. What is youth work about? Is it for:
  - Providing recreational opportunities
  - Personal and social development
  - Keeping young people off the streets
  - Offering an alternative curriculum to that provided by schools
2. What percentage of young people are involved in youth work?
  - 24%
  - 37%
  - 76%
3. Faith based youth work began in the Second World War? True or false
4. Anybody can start a youth group? True or false
5. The diverse range of youth provision offers more commonalities than differences? True or false

Thank you. So let's consider these questions.

### **Question 1: What is youth work about?**

How many people thought it was about providing recreational opportunities? About 20 or so. What about personal and social development? An overwhelming number of you. Keeping young people off the streets? Offering an alternative curriculum to that provided by schools? A few of you. Actually, if you were looking for one phrase to say what youth work is about you would be saying that it is about “the personal and social development of young people”, which is the definition used by the National Youth Agency. But clearly all of the aims mentioned, as well as others, would fit into that general goal. In terms of age range we are talking about young people between the ages of 11 and 25. The Government’s priority age range for youth work is 13 to 19 year olds.

There are four characteristics of good youth work:

- A wide range of quality activities that focus on personal and social development.
- Ensuring that young people have a voice and can influence the youth activities in which they are engaged, (as Maureen Sier said earlier). Young people have to be active participants or it won’t work.
- There is a distinctive methodology about good youth work which includes experiential learning, but there is a strong emphasis on the relationship between the youth worker and the young person.
- Respect for young people, instilling respect for others and instilling a respect for diversity.

### **Question 2: What percentage of young people are involved in youth work?**

How many people think 24%? About a third. 36%? About a third. So about a third must think the answer is 76%. The answer actually depends on what we are talking about. If we are talking about statutory youth services and the Government’s priority age range of 13 to 19 which I mentioned earlier, then the answer is 24%. There are just over 1 million 13 to 19 year olds, who are involved in the work of statutory youth services. If we are talking about the wider age range of 11 to 25 year olds then the numbers increase, but surprisingly the percentage goes down to about 14%. However, we are not just talking about statutory youth services. Although it is hard to get statistics from the voluntary sector, from the faith based sector and from independent groups, it is estimated that 60% of 11 to 25 year olds engage in youth work at some point in this period during this period of their lives, whether through statutory services or a faith based group or a voluntary group. So the percentage is actually quite high.

There are approximately 21,000 part time youth workers in the statutory sector who work “face to face”. Once you add to that the voluntary sector and the faith based sector, (although we do not have accurate figures for this), the numbers increase significantly. We are talking about some 500,000 volunteers and paid staff in the voluntary and faith based sector. So you can see the huge contribution that is made through the voluntary and faith based sector to the whole field of youth work.

### **Question 3: When did faith based youth work begin?**

Does anybody think that it was around the time of the Second World War? Certainly there was a big surge in faith based youth work at that time, but clearly it is much, much older than that. It is probably as old as the faiths themselves because faiths always have a concern for their young! The earliest history of the youth service is full of examples of initiatives of religious men and women who cared passionately about

what was happening to young people. Faith groups demonstrate their commitment to young people by the resources that they make available to them. We have just heard about the numbers of volunteers who work with them and we also know about their contribution, particularly to social issues of the time and we have heard a lot about that this morning. So we have a rich tapestry of youth work run by a range of people from different faith backgrounds in a number of different settings.

**Question 4: Can anybody start a youth group?**

Who thinks this is true? Evidently a number of you think that not just anyone can start a youth group. In theory, anybody could start a group with young people, but there is a legal framework for working with young people and people need to be aware of that and to work within it. All those people working with young people need to comply with certain laws. People who work with children and young people have to have a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check, as it is a legal requirement. This is there to protect both the children and young people and the people who work with them.

Anyone working with children also needs to have a child protection policy. This is not onerous, and is not about trying to constrain the work which is done, but is about protecting the young people and, again, the people who work with them. I have heard people say that it is difficult to deal with setting up formal policies and that they just want to get on with working with young people. But there is advice around on what to do. You can get advice from local councils for voluntary youth services, who have guidelines on this. It is quite straightforward really and you do need to have a child protection policy in place to protect the people you are working with and for.

There are also be a number of health and safety requirements to observe. Again, these are not there to trip people up, but rather to protect people. Particularly if you are taking young people out on a trip or an adventurous activity there are some strict rules about what you should do to make sure that it is a safe and happy experience.

Obviously, there are requirements with which you need to comply in terms of equality and discrimination legislation, for example, the Race Relations Amendment Act, the Discrimination Act and the Disability and Discrimination Act, (which are all laws you would want to observe anyway), and, of course, there is the new Racial and Religious Hatred Bill, which is before Parliament at present.

In addition, those of you working with young people might know about the Children Act 2004 and a subsequent Government document called *Every Child Matters*. This sets out five outcomes for children and young people. Statutory youth services are required to work towards achieving these outcomes, and I think voluntary faith based youth organisations will want to do so too. If you are going to be commissioned by a local authority, in other words if you are looking for funding to support your work, you would need to be able to demonstrate that you can contribute to these five outcomes.

They are about young people:

- being safe;
- being healthy;
- enjoying and achieving;



- making a positive contribution to the community (the citizenship debate); and
- having economic well-being.

I think these are very good outcomes for which we would all wish to strive.

**Question 5: The diverse range of youth provision offers more commonalities than differences?**

We heard a lot about commonalities this morning. Does the diverse range of youth provision offer more commonalities than differences? I hope so. Obviously there are going to be differences and you would expect that. But we have to concentrate on shared values and commonalities. We are talking about us all wanting to contribute in some way to the personal and social development of young people. We have heard a good deal this morning about respect, about respecting young people, instilling respect in them for others. It is what is called in *Connect* “the Golden Rule”. (The National Youth Agency, incidentally, is very proud to be associated with this publication.) “The Golden Rule” is about treating others as you would want to be treated yourself. It is about social justice, equality and fairness and about challenging discrimination. That is underpinned in youth work, as I have just explained, by a legislative framework. When I was training youth workers in a previous job I would remind them that they had a legal duty in terms of challenging discrimination and promoting diversity, a contractual duty (because it was in their contracts) but also a moral duty, a moral obligation to social justice, equality and fairness.

Finally then, I would like to tell you about how the National Youth Agency supports inter faith youth work. First of all, the NYA defines youth work and sets out purposes, methods and principles. There are two useful booklets on this: *The NYA Guide to Youth Work and Youth Services* and *Working for Young People: Helping them to fulfil their potential*. The NYA also provides policy updates. A useful publication that gives general information about youth work is *Young People Now*. This week’s edition mentions a new NYA publication called *A Sense of Respect* - this grew out of an NYA funded project into research about young people and inter faith issues. It provides practical ideas for working with young people on inter faith issues. It is very good and I recommend it to you. I would also recommend another publication on *Justice, Equality and Our World*, which is about active involvement in strengthening communities. You may also be aware of a consultation booklet *Spirituality and Spiritual Development in Youth Work*, which has recently been circulated.

The NYA has worked with a number of faith based projects. It is the managing agent for three large Government-funded programmes: one on neighbourhood support; one on health; and one linked to the Heritage Lottery Fund. We have examples of working with faith based youth projects to deliver some of those key messages about health, about heritage and about helping young people who are disaffected and disengaged. Faith was an integral part of a community leadership course we have run for young people.

The NYA is the validating body for degree courses which qualify people as youth workers and also validates those HE courses that are faith based from universities. I think there have been six of those in the last couple of years.

There is also information to be found on our website, including general information about youth work and also specific points about inter faith work as well.

As other people have said, young people are our future. We all recognise the difficulties that young people face during the transition as they move from childhood, through adolescence, into adulthood. Some of them face many more problems than others do. We want to support all young people so that they become well balanced young adults. All of us who work with young people would share that goal. Whatever our background, our faith or our approach, our commitment to this is not in doubt. At this inter faith conference, my final message would be “Have faith in young people”.

## **Workshop 1: Good to talk: youth inter faith forums and conferences**

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

***Presenters:***

- **Dr Sarah Smalley, General Adviser, RE and SACRE Cambridgeshire and Chair of the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, and youth contributors including Lisa Elliott, Raihanna Hirji, Rebecca Owen and Chio Si Lok**
- **Fariha and Haroon Ahmed and Jagtar Singh of the Scottish Inter Faith Youth Council**

Dr Sarah Smalley explained that she was there to share news of two SACRE youth forums which had taken place in a community centre in Cambridge and at the Deaf-Blind Centre in Peterborough. The initial idea for these came after she had read the Home Office report containing an inspiring account of the Golden Jubilee Young People's Faiths Forum held in 2002. She presented it to Cambridgeshire SACRE and they were keen to organise a similar event. There was already an RE festival week planned for Cambridgeshire schools in October 2003 so it was decided to make it part of that. Similar discussions were held with Peterborough SACRE and similar plans drawn up for a forum.

In both cases the day was organised by a small planning group, involving members of the SACREs and colleagues from the Race Equality and Diversity/Ethnic Minority Achievement teams. Both the morning and the afternoon sessions followed the same pattern (in line with the format at the Golden Jubilee Forum). They started with four or five young people from different faith traditions talking about the session's theme from their perspective and then people moved into small groups and discussed the issues together. The themes (again following the Golden Jubilee precedent) were "Growing up as a young person of faith in Britain today" for the morning session and "Faith, community and service" for the afternoon session.

It was hard to recruit through schools alone enough young participants to take part so the organisers turned to their personal contacts as well. Those who attended the Cambridge event were students from six different faiths. Peterborough managed to attract a number of Christian and Muslim representatives with some Sikhs showing interest.

Dr Smalley said that serious thought has to be applied to the format of such events to ensure that the programme provides ample time for participants to get to know each other. This can be achieved through ‘icebreakers,’ practical presentations from the young people about their faith and what it means to them personally, as well as how they see it bringing value and providing services to the community at large. It can be helpful to send an initial questionnaire to each participant so that they have a chance to think through in advance what it means to be a young person of faith growing up in the UK today. This enables the young people to be better equipped to participate on the day.

There are also many other issues to consider, such as ensuring that suitable food is provided for all participants whatever their faith; arranging for permission for parents and schools for the pupils to attend; transport to and from the venue; and getting substitute cover for the teachers who were accompanying the children.

The two events were deemed a success and were a marvellous experience for some of the adults who had helped as they had never been involved in inter faith activities before. It was also inspiring to meet young people with passionately held views and hear them talk about these in public. The event evaluations showed that for some of them it was the first time they had ever spoken, for example, to a Muslim or a Hindu. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for doing something more of this kind in the future. Dr Smalley noted that the attendance of older people at what is essentially a young people’s event needs to be carefully regulated. She also noted that most initiatives of this kind are volunteer based, with funding only provided to assist with venue and food.

Lisa Elliott, Raihana Hirji, Rebecca Owen and Chio Si Lok who were all young participants in the Cambridge and Peterborough events, talked about their feelings in taking part in these events. They had felt proud to speak openly about their faith and in such a comfortable atmosphere where small group discussions allowed them to discuss issues informally in a relaxed manner. It was much more stimulating than the classroom “textbook” RE experience and provided an opportunity to learn from one another’s real life experiences.

Fariha Ahmed and Haroon Ahmed of the Scottish Interfaith Youth Council (SIFYC) spoke frankly about their involvement in the organisation and about some of the events in which they have taken part since becoming members. Having had no involvement with people of other faiths the first experience for Fariha, a Muslim, was in her predominantly Christian girls secondary school where she found herself in a minority of just two Muslim girls. She then became involved in the work of the SIFYC through the Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre and attended an SIFYC retreat on Holy Island for the purpose of establishing a strong core of committed people to carry this work forward. Visiting the places of worship of other members of the group was highly recommended. Haroon Ahmed reported on the Interfaith Youth Conference. It had been very worthwhile. He particularly enjoyed the programme which included an “icebreaker” session, followed by presentations, workshops and panel discussions. He noted that the attention to little extras, such as sweets in the meeting room was an unexpected plus!

In the discussion following the two presentations a number of points were noted:

- The involvement of young people in inter faith work is often not encouraged enough by parents and faith communities but it is tremendously important.
- It is very desirable also to involve in such activities young people who do not have any formal religious faith.
- There should be some way of exchanging news between youth inter faith initiatives around the UK.
- “The ‘Inside out, Outside in’ approach could be applied, where participants engage in walking together beyond tolerance by taking their internal faith values out to the community while also taking the outside in and introducing them to our faith community”.
- Simple, humble, face to face contact is the best way forward – so onwards and upwards!

## **Workshop 2: Inter faith dialogue across the generations**

***Facilitator: Dr Natubhai Shah, Jain Samaj Europe and United Religions Initiative (UK)***

***Presenters:***

- **Malcolm Stonestreet, Chief Executive of United Religions Initiative (UK)**
  
- **Musarrat Tariq and Clare North, participants in a Spiritual Elders and Emerging Visionaries event run recently by Nottingham Inter Faith Council**

The presenters began by setting out some starting points:

- Multi faith cooperation leads to global cooperation
- Lack of inter faith dialogue between generations is everyone's loss
- There is a need to reflect on the role of religion in conflicts
- We need to see 'the other' from the other's viewpoint.

Malcolm Stonestreet gave a brief introduction to the work of the United Religions Initiative, much of which is aimed at the under 30s age group. It offers programmes on: the arts, though painting and spirituality workshops; education, leading to an NVQ course; and "Sacred Space". Many faith communities already value these. The URI has also evolved a programme called "Spiritual Elders and Emerging Visionaries" (SEEV) which is intended to heal the divide between generations and between faith groups.

Musarrat Tariq and Clare North spoke about their experience of an SEEV event run recently by Nottingham Inter Faith Council. This included raising necessary funds, inviting participation from faith communities, and pairing older and younger people who would be prepared to talk openly (for 20 minutes each) and to listen to each other.

Clare North, who had been chosen for the event as she was a Religious Studies student, said that she had found the evening an amazing experience from the point of view of someone who has been through the Catholic schooling system and not had very much contact at all with people of religions other than Christianity. The opportunity to talk to an older member of a different religion was extremely interesting, particularly since the woman with whom she spoke had converted as an adult from Christianity to the Baha'i faith. It was also wonderful to have the

opportunity to speak about her own religion as it allowed her to express the beliefs that she had built up on her own, as a Catholic. It was a very personal experience.

Musarrat Tariq said that she was paired up with a young lady from an African background who has been brought up in the UK as a Christian. Mrs Tariq was brought up as a Muslim in Pakistan. People taking part in the event had spoken about their personal thoughts, their own faith, and, in a number of cases, their struggles to adopt a new life style as settlers in this country. They had shared the good and sad moments of their lives and discovered how their faith had played a very positive role in each of their lives. Mrs Tariq said that before her conversation with the young girl she had felt that the faith experiences were unique and that the prayers and meditation which had been helping people through the very traumatic times, were very personal and private. She thought it might be difficult for some people to talk about their beliefs. But she came to realise after meeting with her partner that anyone who has a trust and true faith in God has a confidence to express their spirituality, and will get through troubled times in their lives. The young lady had told her about her serious illness when she thought that she was dying, but both her prayers and her mother's prayers were heard and she had recovered. No matter who we are, and where we come from, as long as we trust in God and our spiritual need is met it will be all right at the end. Mrs Tariq expressed her belief that faith and prayers are an important element in keeping our spirituality alive, just as we need good food to keep our bodies alive and healthy. We take so much care over our physical appearance, our hair and our skin; we buy expensive clothes and beauty products, jewellery and so on. But we know that one day we are going to die and our body will perish. The only part within our bodies which will live forever is our soul or spirit. It is to care for that spirit that we worship and perform our daily prayers.

In discussion it was noted that the listening process had various outcomes. One pair of participants discovered common experiences, such as settlement in the UK from abroad; asking God for help and support; encountering racism and ignorance; and the importance of the mother's role in the family. For another pair, the journey leading to conversion was re-traced. It is always good to ask the question "Where are you coming from?" and then to listen. It is not impertinent to ask religious questions about belief, practice, faith and doubts providing they are asked with sensitivity and respect, allowing the partner in the conversation to reply how they wish.

Points were also raised about the necessity to establish identity and individuality and some concern was expressed about involving people who do not already have a formal religious commitment.

Those present decided to end the workshop with the reading of the Act of Commitment made by the UK's faith communities at the Millennium event on 3 January 2000 in the House of Lords. A copy of this can be downloaded from the Inter Faith Network's website at [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk).

### **Workshop 3: Youth organisations and inter faith activity**

**Facilitator: Brian Pearce, Director, Inter Faith Network**

**Presenters:**

- **Maxine Green, consultant to the National Youth Agency and co-author with Carmel Heaney of the recently published NYA book, *A Sense of Respect: Inter Faith Activities for Groups of Young People***
  
- **Mark Waghorn, Scout Association Programme and Development Adviser, Faiths, Beliefs and BME communities and Daljit Singh, Sikh representative on the Scout Association Faiths and Beliefs Team and member of its Minority Support Team and Group Scout Leader, 13<sup>th</sup> Southall**

Maxine Green gave a brief introduction to *A Sense of Respect: Inter Faith Activities for Groups of Young People*, a new publication by the National Youth Agency which aims to encourage inter faith dialogue, and to increase respect and understanding among young people. The book suggests a series of activities for young people who are interested in understanding people of different faiths or beliefs. It aims to provide youth workers and others working with young people with a set of ideas, activities and resources to help young people to find out about, and understand more, others in their community. The publication came about as a result of a project involving a series of consultations during which the NYA discovered that young people wanted to know more about other faiths - not in a bookish, dry, factual way – but through personal encounter. The increased understanding to which this can lead has the potential to bring communities closer together and foster respect and cohesion, replacing mistrust and misunderstanding.

She suggested that it is always best to start at a level where people are. One of the exercises in the book is the Golden Rule Exercise where young people have to match each version of the Rule to the faith tradition from which it comes, using the list of these to be found in *Connect: Different Faiths, Shared Values*, published in 2004 by the Inter Faith Network in association with TimeBank and the National Youth Agency.

At Maxine Green's invitation, the workshop group carried out this exercise themselves and talked about the potential discussion and learning which might emerge from it if it were used with a group of young people. It was apparent to all members of the group that doing this exercise would help young people to recognise the common ground to be found in the ethical teachings of different faiths. It might help



to encourage young people to take as their starting point the existence of shared values rather than focusing on the differences.

There was then a presentation about the work of the Scout Association in the area of faith and inter faith activity. Mark Waghorn began by rebutting the myth that the Scout Association had only recently started welcoming members from faiths other than Christianity. The Association began nearly 100 years ago and has always been multi faith. Today, for example, one third of the world's scouts are Muslim. It was stated in 1907 that the Scout Association in the UK was not, nor would be, tied to any singular Church or faith body at a national level. While its founder was Christian, it was created with all faiths in mind. The wordings of the Scout Promise have reflected this diversity: doing one's duty "to Allah" and "to my Dharma" are not new concepts for scouting.

In the UK the Scout Association currently has approximately 400,000 youth members and 100,000 adult members. Worldwide there are over 28 million members. Robert Baden Powell's original aim when he developed the concept of scouting in 1907 was to bring young people together irrespective of their background and to provide them with a framework through which they could develop themselves to their full potential and by doing so, help others to achieve their own. There are three main elements to this: Duty to self, Duty to others, and Duty to God. These elements are summed up in the Scout Promise: "On my honour, I promise that I will do my best, to do my duty to God and to the Queen, to help other people and to keep the Scout Law." The Association's religious policy, which has been approved by the leaders of religious groups in the UK, states that:

"All members of the Movement are encouraged to: make every effort to progress in the understanding and observance of the Promise; to do their best to do their duty to God; and to belong to some religious body;"

Faith is both integral and explicit within Scouting. This policy applies to full adult members who take out 'warrants' and so take the Promise. Because of this adult leaders must be able to promise to do their "duty to God" and it is not therefore possible for adults who are atheists or who have no religion to become fully warranted leaders.

Finding out about individual faiths is an important part of Scouting but so is inter faith work because young people learning and interacting with all faiths helps them gain a greater knowledge of the world around them and of each other. It helps the young people develop, through learning that difference does not make us poorer, and that greater understanding makes us all better people. This is, of course, exactly why Baden Powell set up Scouting. This interaction and understanding is particularly relevant to those Scout Groups which have a membership of one predominant religion. In a mixed faith group, the interaction of young people of many faiths will occur naturally. In, a single faith group, for example, a mainly Muslim or Catholic group, the leader may have to provide more in the programme about other faiths as the young people cannot provide that mix themselves. This can take many forms, including visiting festivals and various places of worship. These experiences will be very important, given the absence of opportunities for inter faith encounter within the group.

It is not, however, the case that all young people involved in Scouting must have a faith. All young people are welcomed irrespective of faith, development of faith or absence of faith. The Scout programme is designed to accommodate this and contains provision for all young people. It also enables young people to explore religions and spirituality at their own personal rate. For example, if a young person has little knowledge about any of the faiths then through the 'World Faiths Badge' they will gain this. If they already have a personal faith then they will be able to further this through the 'My Faith Badge'.

Daljit Singh then spoke about how the theory and policy of Scouting and faith are put into action and what it means for him. Scouting is known for being about the outdoors and badge work but it is also about a progressive scheme. Most children progress from being Beavers through to being Network Scouts (6-25 years). The work with young people takes place at different levels: local groups; community/district level; national level; and international level. All the activities are based on the principle that a child's development should involve a balance between physical, intellectual, cultural and spiritual development.

At local level there is a lot of badge work done and more besides. One example of badge work is the 'World Faiths Badge'. This involves visits to places of worship; attending religious festivals from different faiths; looking at the sacred texts of another faith; looking at the impact that belief in a faith and its prayers, rituals and dietary laws have upon daily lives of people who follow that faith; and finding out about someone whose faith has had a significant impact on their lives.

Local Scout work is extended into the wider community. For example, the 13<sup>th</sup> Southall Scouts recently had a joint camp with a Scout Group from Battle, near Hastings. The 13<sup>th</sup> Southall Scouts visited Battle for one weekend and then invited the Battle Group for a weekend camp in return. During that weekend they attended a service at Westminster Abbey, and visited St Paul's Cathedral, a Hindu Mandir (in Neasden) and a Sikh gurdwara. The visits were a great way of learning but the process did not end there. The Scouts also ate together, played together and stayed together. It was the whole experience which counted and not just bits of the programme.

How is this extended even further? The 13<sup>th</sup> Southall Group also went to the Essex International Jamboree with about 7,000 other Scouts from approximately 23 different countries. This involved fantastic activities covering everything from abseiling to quad biking. What was special as far as the faith/belief element was concerned was the 'Focus Days'. These were days on which the organisers focused on a different faith: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism or Judaism. Each day thousands of young people came and learned about each faith and its place in society.

The next World Jamboree, in 2007, coincides with 100 years of Scouting and 40,000 Scouts from all over the world are expected to attend. In preparation for that, this year a European Jamboree has been organised where 12,000 Scouts are expected to attend from 58 countries. There will be activities throughout the Jamboree focusing on different faiths. The 'Faith and Beliefs' zone of activities is at the heart of the whole programme of these and interacts with all the rest. The results of this will be

greater understanding; tolerance; spiritual development; and a movement towards peace. In summary, Scouting is about the balanced development of young people in a safe environment.

During the general discussion after the presentation the following points were noted:

- Scouting is funded partly by the young people involved and partly through fundraising.
- The Girl Guides have a similar ethos to that of the Scouts and there are some faith-based Guide Groups. Sometimes Scout and Guide Groups hold joint events.
- Scouts meet only once a week during the school term but during holidays other activities take place so Scouts can take part in local celebrations.
- The relationship between a group leader and young people is of great importance.
- There can be hesitation on the part of young people about encountering others from outside their own groups and there is a need to build up a Group's confidence itself before taking members out on a camp with other groups.
- Like others, Scout and Guide groups have to take account of statutory requirements and Government guidelines.
- Activities need to be designed according to different age groups but can at all ages help young people to develop respect for one another.
- Young people should be encouraged to engage in more inter faith encounter.

## **Workshop 4: Developing inter faith understanding and cooperation on campus**

***Facilitator:* Rev Cassandra Howes, Senior Chaplain, University of West of England, Bristol**

***Presenters:***

- **Louise Mitchell, Council of Christians and Jews' Youth Officer**
  
- **Pritesh Karia, student member of Warwick Inter-Religious Roundtable for Dialogue**

The workshop began with a presentation by Louise Mitchell. She gave a brief history of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ), and in particular the way its remit has broadened over the years from its initial primary objective of combating anti-semitism. She said that when the CCJ was set up in the early 1940s neither Christians nor Jews wanted their dialogue to go beyond this one single focus. There were fears that too much intermingling might lead to intermarriage or attempts to convert Jews to Christianity. There were fears also that a broader dialogue might lead people to think that there was more than just one 'right' way to be. Yet, nevertheless, despite its narrow objectives CCJ did much in the early years to help promote good relationships between Jews and Christians, and was ahead of its time in trying to deal with the fear of the 'other'.

However, CCJ would never have had the impact that it still does today if it had not developed a broader role with a more equal relationship between Christians and Jews which did not simply focus on the problems which Jews suffer from anti-semitism. Today dialogue takes place, academically, religiously and socially, from mock seders with a community, to day long seminars about Jewish and Christian perspectives on the same texts and to just listening to different cultural styles of music. Friendships have been made, debates have been held, people have learned both about the other religion and indeed their own through simply explaining theirs to someone who doesn't see it from the same perspective.

Louise Mitchell went on to describe her work with young adults. This differs from work with other people for various reasons. Young people have reason to be grateful to previous generations for the surroundings in which most of us have grown up. A multicultural environment is part of everyday life in Britain, and the background conditions are ripe for dialogue. Real progress has been made in the way we think and talk about one another, and, in many ways, today's young people can approach dialogue with much less 'baggage' than our parents or grandparents. We approach new ideas and initiatives with the desire to see quick changes and visible movement.

Many young people are energetic and idealistic: we want to change the world. And we want to change it now. There is no greater political energy than that seen and felt on university campuses. We have our opinions and we are anxious for them to be listened to and acted upon by others who share the same goals.

At the same time there are also unique difficulties that young people interested in inter faith work have to face. The first is quite an obvious point. Young people are by their very nature inexperienced. While many of us are very dedicated and are willing to give much time to inter faith work we simply do not have the same years of experience that other older people who have dedicated much of their time to inter faith work have. We are also less experienced in defining who we are and what we do. While multiculturalism has led to an increased freedom to practise our own beliefs there are still only a few chances to explain these beliefs to others. Taking part in inter faith dialogue is not simply a chance to learn more about other faiths but indeed is also an opportunity to learn and define one's own identity. Young adulthood is a time of exploring who we are, and what our place is in the world. Though some young people are very secure in their identity and beliefs, others are less so, and may not be ready or willing to challenge personal boundaries. We cannot simply look to what has been done before to work out what we should do now. While the older generation can guide us in much of what we do, the new challenges we face are very different in inter faith work today.

Secondly, while we live in a multicultural society it is for the most part a 'secular multiculturalism'. Faith, and particularly organised religion, is often portrayed as the source of all trouble. There is talk of a 'clash of civilisations' between the radical Islam of Al Qaeda and George Bush's fundamentalist Christianity. In discussions on Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland and relations between India and Pakistan religion is often cited as the source of the difficulties there and elsewhere. In our society religious beliefs are often seen as either bigoted or outdated and people of faith are often stereotyped.

The third problem for inter faith dialogue is that, predominantly, it is nice people who are involved in it - nice people sitting around a table discussing nice things with other nice people! And this can give the impression that inter faith dialogue ducks difficult issues.

Louise Mitchell went on to say that CCJ works on campuses in England, at universities such as Birmingham and Manchester, through an initiative called Faithshare. This is a project meant to give a space to any student of any faith to share their faith with others through talks, social evenings and meals. It is keen to work with other organisations, such as chaplaincies, and to encourage face-to-face encounters. It also holds Jewish-Christian study sessions, acts as mediator to groups involved in conflict on campus and provides a resource generally for student groups interested in getting involved in inter faith work, both between people of different faiths and between people of faith and people who have no formal faith.

Pritesh Karia began by noting that there are now approximately eight Student Union religious societies at Warwick University. The Warwick Inter-Religious Roundtable for Dialogue (WIRD) is an umbrella organisation which seeks to unite these societies and create an understanding between people of different religions and none. Two

members from each society are invited to participate: one to join the events committee and the other to become a member of the executive committee. WIRD is primarily organised by students and although not affiliated, has links with the students union and chaplaincy. Its constitution can be found at [www.WIRD.org.uk](http://www.WIRD.org.uk).

WIRD is a fairly new organisation and in its existence has achieved a substantial amount. It has organised many events, including:

- ‘Know your Neighbour’, a series of short presentations by students representing their faiths and question sessions focussing on each one of the religions represented.
- ‘Love is’, talks from invited speakers on the meaning of Love for their respective religions with questions afterwards.
- "Word-Sharing" events where people from each religion read a few passages of scripture relating to a particular topic, which were "Seeking help and guidance" and "Suffering". The later word sharing event was held after the Asian tsunami.

WIRD also supported the Student Union’s *One World Week Forum*, which included the theme of ‘Religion and Faith’ and had members participating in the Coventry Peace Walk.

In the general discussion that followed the presentations the following topics were raised:

- The tensions that exist between and within religious groups are not unqualifiedly negative but rather issues to be ‘worked through’, e.g. discussion/debates which require members of different religious communities to discipline themselves to listen to each other. It was pointed out that tensions also exist within religious groups themselves implying that the inter faith challenge also needed to take account of the need for a greater measure of “intra faith” dialogue and of ‘internal ecumenism’.
- It was acknowledged that there are many parental concerns, both Jewish and Muslim, about ‘university culture’. Some have serious concerns about the prevailing ‘secular’ culture and the conversionary activities of Christian evangelical groups on campus. Muslim parents have expressed concerns about drug culture and extremist religious groups.
- There was widespread agreement about the importance of getting people talking to each other and questioning themselves as well in the process. A powerful story was told of a Palestinian Arab Muslim Israeli – pursuing graduate study at a UK University – who arrived in the country clearly prejudiced against Jewish people. However, following a conference in Germany, he was – on re-entry – detained at the airport by the immigration authorities. When his Jewish fellow participants protested at his treatment and waited for him until he was allowed through, he was so impressed by this act of solidarity that he dramatically changed his viewpoint

and on his return to the Middle East, he set up a Jewish-Muslim network in Palestine.

The workshop ended with a question: What is the best basis for moving inter faith work forward on campus? The following suggestions were offered:

- Discussion of issues from different perspectives
- Discussion of working papers, e.g. a Muslim-Christian discussion of the Catholic Church's document on *The Common Good*
- Promoting mutual respect
- A strong expression of initial commitment from participants
- Talking about family backgrounds
- Discussing a controversial topic under the supervision of an able chairperson
- Concentrating on common interests
- A common project anchored by somebody who is willing to 'hold things together' and to act as an enduring presence
- A shared meal
- Attentive listening to what is going on in the University
- Talking about matters of common concern, for example, how to respond to the Tsunami disaster or the implications of political developments such as the shaping of a European Constitution

## **Workshop 5: Diversity and Dialogue Project**

***Facilitator:* Rev Daniel Otieno-Ndale, CTE/CTBI Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs Reference Group**

***Presenters:***

- **Becky Hatch and Imogen Gregg, the Diversity and Dialogue Project**

The workshop presentations were given by Becky Hatch and Imogen Gregg, who are working on the Diversity and Dialogue Project – an inter faith project for young people. Firstly, they set out the background to this two year project which is based at Save the Children. Problems over the situation in the Middle East and over the war in Iraq have led British development organisations, whatever their faith background, to try to offer a more unified response. Christian, Jewish, Muslim and secular NGOs came together. During talks about this the organisations all noted ways in which these and other global conflicts have had an impact on community relations in the UK, with a rise, for example, in anti-semitic attacks and Islamophobia. This has sometimes led to an increased tendency for faith communities to isolate themselves, when there is a need for them to do exactly the opposite.

The group of faith-based relief organisations discussed the need to work on a youth inter faith education project and received funding for this from the Department for International Development.

That partners felt that global development issues could offer a unifying framework and the project emphasises the links between local and global issues and asks young people to share ideas about the kind of world in which they want to live. Discussions were originally based on the three Abrahamic faiths and then expanded once the project got underway. The project began with a mapping exercise and establishing bases for the project in Leeds, Manchester and London. Then work on practical projects began.

The Diversity and Dialogue Project brings together young people from different faiths and focuses on issues on which young people can unite. It encourages them to campaign for positive change and for a just world for everyone, rather than focusing on more divisive issues. For example, young people are being involved in the Make Poverty History Campaign, a campaign to encourage girls' education and in promoting fair trade. Sometimes global issues can be seen as irrelevant and in some areas it is more important to tackle more local or specific issues first. The project has been experimenting with a variety of models.



The project involves setting up regional projects for young people interested in inter faith development issues, holding seminars at a regional level and creating resources based on these, such as an online directory and interactive resources with campaigning tools and discussion guides.

The British Museum has been the main site for Diversity and Dialogue's London projects. It has been a good opportunity to think about how to connect with wider world issues through history. People often assume that a multi cultural society is a new phenomenon. But this project uses treasures from world history to provoke discussion about today's society. It hopes to get participants thinking about the role of religion in the development of past civilisations and about their own identity within a multi faith society.

There are two main parts to the project: the Faith Trail and a conference. The Faith Trail involves a multi faith group of young people creating a trail round the Museum, selecting different objects and relating them to contemporary issues of faith and identity. The young people, between the ages of (15-18), created a faith trail through the museum during a five day summer project in August 2005. Six curators were used within their appropriate areas to do introductory talks and help the young people to interpret the exhibition and apply it to their own lives. This also raised issues and discussions around identity. The young people were then involved in developing the trail further through their own experience. The idea is that those people taking the Faith Trail will start thinking about what it means to live in a multi faith society and to connect past societies with the present. Some examples of objects that might have to be found by participants on the Trail are: a Hindu King smoking a shish pipe; a Buddhist statue, re-carved as a mosque adornment on the other side; a back-scratcher; and a Goya print.

On 2 October there will be a conference at the British Museum inviting up to 100 young people (aged between 15 and 19) from all faiths and backgrounds to come together and discuss their values and to think about what it means to be citizens of a city like London. In the first session the participants will be getting to know one another and to feel comfortable with one another's company and will be thinking about questions of personal identity. They will then go on the Faith Trail and start to link this to the Museum and history. After the afternoon workshops there will be a final session for the young people to express what they have learnt through writing, art and even dance.

The aims of the British Museum project are: to encourage an institutional bastion of traditional British identity to contribute to the development of a new sense of identity which encompasses all faiths; to get the British Museum to be part of the future too; and to go some way towards addressing the issue that museums are in general very poorly used by London's teenagers and those from ethnic minorities. Funding for this project has come from both the Department for International Development and Save The Children.

Another event organised by Diversity and Dialogue, through its Leeds office, in association with Christian Aid and Islamic Relief, was a 'Fair Trade Football' event held in Bradford. This received a lot of positive media coverage and is a model on

which various agencies can build. However, it was recognised that the value of this experience for the young people involved was limited as it was only a one day event.

In discussion, the Workshop also heard about a project in Manningham, in Bradford, involving two local churches and a mosque, from which the leaders met and began to do the groundwork for a youth project. School half-term break was used as an opportunity to get young people to come together in participation workshops. Options from Go-Karting to skill-based activities were on offer, as well as a residential trip on which the young people began to plan summer activities.

Several issues were noted by the workshop:

- Communities were not ready to take on fundraising or taking ownership of the project.
- There are questions about sustainability of the relationships being built between faith communities.
- There can be difficulties when you are not from the local area where an event is held and are viewed as an “outsider” or “neutraliser”.
- There are differences between what young people want out of a project and what experience the adults want the young people to have. We need to distinguish between the two!
- What is important to young people must be prioritised if an event is to succeed, but parents have to be sufficiently at ease to allow their children to attend.
- Should people without a formal religious faith should be part of an inter faith dialogue project?

## **Workshop 6: Educating for inter faith awareness**

***Facilitator:* Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Scottish Inter Faith Council and Glasgow Sikh community**

***Presenters:***

- **Rauf Bashir, Project Manager, Building Bridges Pendle, Community Inter Faith Project**
  
- **Ramona Kauth (Dhamma Talaka Pagoda), Rev Jo Mason (St John's and St Peter's Ladywood) and Yvonne Stollard (Progressive Synagogue Birmingham) from the Ladywood Interfaith Education Project, Birmingham**

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar opened the workshop by underlining the need for inter faith awareness in schools to prepare young people for the wider world.

The first presentation was made by Rauf Bashir from Building Bridges in Pendle, Lancashire. Building Bridges Pendle is an inter faith organisation whose main aims are to:

- advance the education of the public in the study of religion of all denominations and creeds, in particular, but not exclusively, with reference to the Christian and Islamic faith;
- work primarily with people of faith to come to terms with their prejudices and thereby to provide an unequivocal example to the community at large to promote change in Pendle;
- work towards the elimination of racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity, and good relations, between persons of different racial groups; and
- provide opportunities for people of faith to recognise, confront and deal with their prejudices.

Building Bridges has developed three interactive learning programmes based on Government guidelines for PSHE/Citizenship education, based on Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 criteria: Marriages Around the World; Many Communities, One World; and Building a Better World. The programmes are run over a six-week period in schools where the one-hour long sessions are delivered by a multi faith and multi racial team from Building Bridges, together with classroom teachers. The core aims of all three programmes are to bring the diverse communities of Pendle towards a better understanding of each other's race, religion and culture and to promote mutual acceptance of, and respect for, differences and similarities which exist. For the pupils

who study the programme, an opportunity is provided in a safe and comfortable environment to study and discuss aspects of diversity, such as culture, customs, faith, religions and values, on both macro and micro levels; conflict and conflict resolution; facts which cause social division; and, ultimately, how we can achieve a cohesive society where there is respect and acceptance of people regardless of their backgrounds. A variety of methods are used during the programmes including: discussions, task sheets, OHP presentations, drama, debate, videos, artwork; and presentations by outside agencies (eg police, mosques, churches).

Rauf Bashir said that only 10% of schools in the Pendle area have students from faiths other than Christian. For Year 6 pupils there is a focus on global diversity. This is a reality, but is it a positive or a negative one? The pupils look at attitudes and the situation in their local neighbourhoods. There is discussion on making choices and resolving conflict. Vocabulary covered includes: 'faith', 'inter faith', 'stereotype', 'diversity', 'empathy' and so forth. Year 7 pupils focus on social division and cohesion. They learn how their local Pakistani community came to be here (history of mill towns) and discuss how their local school and community can be better.

The focus of the education is not learning about religious ideas, but exploring and understanding religious diversity. It is not Religious Education but it complements RE (and there is no parental withdrawal from it!). A two year pilot project with teachers has been completed but there is now a difficulty with getting funding in order to make its use more mainstream and widespread.

The project has a significant impact on all children, people, agencies and schools who are involved in its set up and delivery. Primary schools and secondary schools are able to take up a community provision from an organisation which has expertise in social cohesion education and are able to get involved in projects with other schools as a result of Building Bridges initiatives. Class teachers and classroom assistants are a strong link in the setup and feel a great sense of belonging to the project. Police officers from the Community Safety Department (Pennine Division) who take part in the primary school programme are able to address issues which have been linked to a school. Pupils who take part in the programmes are able to, and are encouraged to, express their true feelings in a comfortable and well-managed environment.

Rev Jo Mason, Ramona Kauth and Yvonne Stollard then introduced the Ladywood Interfaith Education Project which is based in inner city Birmingham. The organising group is composed of some 13 teachers representing four faiths - Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim. Children growing up in Birmingham, especially inner city Birmingham, may have as many as six or seven different faiths represented in their year groups at school. They have a wonderful opportunity to grow up understanding each other's faiths and cultures and not being threatened by, or defensive about, their differences.

The project began six years ago when Rev Jo Mason observed RE teaching in various infant and junior schools to see just how the essence of different faiths was taught. There was much good intention but a lack of the sense of *living* faiths and a lack of the sense of the whole child being engaged in the enterprise. What might be offered to introduce more vitality, a sense of the sacred and a sense of mystery?

Local schools were approached to discuss how programmes might be designed to be presented in places of worship and to suit their RE syllabuses. Starting from a small pilot scheme and just two member schools, nine schools now visit regularly, participating in teaching, reflections and art work of various kinds. There are visiting professional artists: drama teachers, potters, dancers, musicians, stained glass artists - and they attend some visits to encourage and allow each child their own individual expression and response to the theme in hand.

The programmes delivered from each faith are unified and complement each other, for example on the subjects of Fear and Anger or Creation and Respect for Life. Children can learn from this about the same topic from more than one faith perspective. This academic year the project will have provided 55 visits and around 1450 primary school children will have participated in the scheme.

The project emphasises experiential learning, with children appreciating with all their senses the atmosphere of the place of worship. They are able to gain understanding that books alone cannot provide. This too is a principle of good inter faith work, that merely learning about or simply gaining knowledge of is not sufficient when it comes to belief. The project tries to provide what the teachers themselves say they find most difficult to convey: a sense of what it is to believe in a certain way. It does this by not only talking about it, but by *experiencing*, too. Meeting people that practise their religion puts a human face to this otherwise strange phenomenon. This too is putting good inter faith principles into action.

Children are, of course, central to the project. It aims to:

- encourage in them a curiosity about different religions;
- foster a positive attitude to people of different faiths;
- provide them with opportunities to explore their own spirituality.

Most of the schools follow up on their initial visits with the children with subsequent visits. This helps to promote the idea of inter faith activity. Through cycles of visits the children become familiar with the buildings, but more importantly, they begin to make relationships with real people of different faiths. It is good for the teachers and the children to see leaders working in a cooperative way. Leaders hope the inter faith character of this initiative will be incorporated into the Birmingham Agreed RE Syllabus when it is revised in the near future.

The project is also inspiring to the teamleaders. It challenges each of them to embrace and celebrate their differences; it encourages them to be as clear as they can be about the tenets and teachings of their own faiths and it helps them to question and hopefully not to stand still. The project is absolutely rooted in respect for one another and the spiritual friendship they have discovered together.

## **Workshop 7: Europe, the Commonwealth, the World!**

***Facilitator:* Deepak Naik, Minorities of Europe and International Interfaith Centre**

***Presenters:***

- **Susanna Darch, Royal Commonwealth Society, Project Manager - Public Affairs, and manager of the “Youth CHOGM” project and Clare Linton and Niamh Quille, youth presenters from the recent Coventry Youth CHOGM.**
- **Preet Majithia and J R (Adseina) Alli from the multi faith youth team who went with Minorities of Europe to the Council for a Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona last year.**

Susanna Darch gave a brief introduction to the Commonwealth and to the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS). The Commonwealth comprises 53 countries (previously 54 but Zimbabwe has now withdrawn) and is a voluntary association. There are 1.8 billion people spread across the Commonwealth, 47% of whom are Hindu, 27% Muslim and 17% are Christian. The RCS is based in London but has branches all over the world. It aims to promote awareness and understanding of the Commonwealth.

Work on inter faith issues is a recent development at the RCS. In March 2003, the RCS and the Government’s Golden Jubilee Office jointly organised a Commonwealth Faith Forum on “Having Faith in the Commonwealth”. Following this event the RCS has held annual Faith Forums where religious leaders asked the young people questions, rather than the other way round as is more common, and the answers were fed back to those attending annual the Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey. (Information on this event can be downloaded from the RCS website at [www.rcsint.org](http://www.rcsint.org).) Following on from these Faith Forums the RCS has developed the Youth CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) programme. During a Youth CHOGM young people role play as the Heads of different Commonwealth Governments. Although these are not specifically inter faith projects, they do have a large inter faith element.

Ms Clare Linton and Ms Niamh Quille are both members of the Coventry Youth Council, which has members from a diverse range of faith backgrounds. Ms Linton attended the Youth CHOGM held in Coventry Cathedral in January and represented Singapore. She said that this was a good opportunity to meet interesting people and to share feelings and debates on issues about which young people felt strongly. She

learnt a lot from it about the Commonwealth and about the nature of political processes. Ms Quille had also attended the Youth CHOGM in Coventry Cathedral and represented the country of Malta. She was also present at the National Youth CHOGM held at the Commonwealth Secretariat in March this year. Each CHOGM is divided into three sessions and the main theme of this one was education. In the first session educational issues relating to democracy, freedom and terrorism were debated. In the second session the debates focused on education in relation to issues such as health, fair trade and the environment. During the third session the young people came out of the role play and debated issues of concern to them in their own contexts including sexual health, access to information and tolerance of others.

Mr Deepak Naik recommended that everyone should take some time to visit Coventry Cathedral, the venue for the Youth CHOGM in January, because of its unique atmosphere. Ms Darch said that it was the best venue for a CHOGM to which she had been because the tourists who were walking round could hear all the debates.

There was then a presentation by Preet Majithia and J R Alli from Minorities of Europe, which is an organisation for young people. Mr Majithia talked about his experience of the World Parliament of Religions held in Barcelona in 2004. The first Parliament of World Religions was held in 1893 in Chicago and a centenary event was held in 1993 in Chicago. A Parliament has been held since then once every five years. Mr Majithia went to Barcelona as part of the Minorities of Europe project on Sharing the Sacred, Serving the World in which he got involved through an inter-faith youth media group formed by Sandra Herbert from BBC Radio Leicester. The three main aims of the project were:

- To involve young people in inter faith activity
- To create a travelling exhibition (which was on display in the main hall for this National Meeting of the Network)
- To produce an inter faith resource pack, which was in development

Some of the young people were lucky enough to attend the Assembly held in Montserrat before the main Parliament gathering. This was an invitation-only event, attended by 400 senior religious leaders and inter faith people, and held at Montserrat Monastery, a very special and tranquil place. The issues discussed in this Assembly were:

- Access to clean water
- Eliminating debt in poor countries
- Overcoming religiously motivated violence
- Supporting refugees worldwide

During their time in Montserrat the young people were given media training so that they could record the events in Barcelona where there were over 4,000 people from many different backgrounds, including Mayans, Aborigines and Pagans. Everyone was most impressed by the food in Barcelona which was provided for all participants by members of the Birmingham Sikh community! The Parliament included many separately scheduled sessions. The best part about it was the free time in between these when there was an opportunity to meet so many different and interesting people.

Mr Alli showed the workshop the Unity in Diversity posters which were part of the travelling exhibition which they had created. This showed portraits of numerous people each wearing a different item of headdress. He said that he had found it enormously inspiring to talk to each of these people individually and find out about them and their faiths. His mother is a devout Christian and his father a devout Muslim and his parents are living proof that people of different faiths can survive under one roof without problems.

During the general discussion after the presentations, the following points were made:

- The young presenters at the workshop were themselves a positive sign of hope for the future.
- Coventry Cathedral is involved in other reconciliation projects. Canon Andrew White, Canon of Coventry Cathedral, has been involved in the Alexandria-linked Middle East peace process and is now the Chief Executive of the Foundation for Reconciliation in the Middle East.
- It is not just youth work that is needed, but inter-generational work too. There is a need to get members of the older generation to talk to young people and to put their confidence in them. It is also important to identify groups which want to be involved in inter faith activity with young people.
- Today's meeting does show hope for the future, but realistically, despite all the efforts which are being made, life is still difficult for those from Muslim communities. During the last 6 months, young Muslims on trips to Europe have been very fearful.
- The Leicester Inter Faith Youth Group has just been started and funding is being found for a more formal Young People's Council of Faiths there.
- It is important for religious leaders to teach members of their communities to be more tolerant of those who belong to other religions. But it is not necessarily just the religious leaders who need to speak out. We each have a responsibility to promote understanding and togetherness.
- Teenagers and young people in general are very easily influenced by their parents and religious leaders and there is a need to look at the grass roots to discover why young people are so angry and committed that they are ready, for example, to shoot people. The importance of inter faith work is to help people to get to know each other as individual friends, not, for example, just as "a Muslim" or "a Paddy".
- There is a need to press the agenda of inter faith cooperation. For example, in Bolton the City Council consults with faith communities separately, but could be asked to meet with communities jointly.
- There are not enough young people involved in inter faith dialogue. Adults need to devote time to talking to young people and to promoting togetherness.



- If there is one God of the universe, regardless of the name we give Him, then we are all equal under Him. Religious leaders should promote this perspective more publicly so that we grow to respect each other's traditions and beliefs, rather than just tolerating them.
- Work for understanding and respect needs to be done at all levels, but those committed to inter faith work can still hold firmly to their own beliefs. Inter faith does not mean one faith.
- The military intervention in Iraq and the subsequent conflict there has adversely affected inter faith work here in Britain. Political development and terrorism can completely negate all the good inter faith work which is being done.
- Although we all have different opinions and beliefs, we all share the same planet. So we need to promote acceptance of one another and to celebrate our diversity.
- We all have a duty to promote forgiveness and reconciliation and to heal the wounds of the past.

## INTER FAITH ISSUES AND RE

**Graham Langtree, RE Adviser at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority**

It is good to be able to share with you some thinking about the role of Religious Education and it is a particular joy for me to be here at the National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network. The Network was a key partner in developing the new national non-statutory *Framework for Religious Education*, which was published last year. The document attempts to create a national perspective for religious education. It is really asking the question, does RE matter? If we didn't have religious education in our school curriculum, in what ways would that impoverish our children's learning?

I would like to give you a very brief overview of RE, in fact the history of RE in two minutes! RE is an interesting but unusual subject. It is statutory for all children from the ages of 5 to 19 if they are in a school-based sixth form. But it is not statutory in sixth form colleges and in FE institutions after the age of 16. It is the fastest growing subject in the curriculum as far as qualifications are concerned. In 2004 just over 400,000 young people took a GCSE in RE, either the full or the short course. Nearly all these courses focus principally on what we might describe as philosophy and ethics. This means that young people engage with questions of meaning and powerful questions to do with: good and evil; suffering; beliefs about God and humanity; complex moral issues; and the ways in which people from differing religious traditions, as well as non-religious traditions, think about ethics and values. The high number of students taking GCSE RE has had a beneficial impact on the number of students taking 'A' level RE. Right now in England there are roughly 40,000 young people who are taking 'A' level RE, making it the fastest growing subject at 'A' level which it has been for the last 7 years. Having said that, there still remain, it seems to me, some important misunderstandings about RE. There is no national curriculum in RE. It is not like English or Maths or Science where youngsters all follow the same programmes of study regardless of where they live. RE is locally determined and has been so for a long time, which means that in England there are 151 different agreed syllabuses. Obviously those 151 syllabuses lead to huge diversity in terms of content and expectations and so on. So the framework asks whether or not we can have nationally agreed standards in RE.

Even if you don't get the opportunity to read anything else in the framework document I would encourage you to read the important statement right at the beginning of it which is headed "The importance of religious education". It says this:

“Religious education provokes challenging questions about the meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God and the self and the nature of reality, the issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human”.

It goes on to talk about RE developing particular key skills. In this busy, hectic, test-led curriculum, where do children and young people genuinely develop the skill of reflection? To be able to stop and think about themselves, about their place on this planet, about their uniqueness as individuals? Where do they learn both about Christianity and the other principal religions and where do they learn from them? To go back to the history of RE, for a long time RE in England was essentially probably seen as nurturing children in the Christian faith. Two researchers, Loukes and Gorman, in the 60s showed that on a very basic level of education, ie a retention of knowledge, children were spectacularly confused. They were coming up with muddled answers to questions such as: “Why is Jesus a special child?” Answer: “Because he was found in a cot floating down the Nile!” and “Who was Noah’s wife?” Answer: “Her name was Joan of Arc!” So there were big misunderstandings of basic knowledge. Then there was a phase which I would describe as the “Cooks’ tour” approach to RE, which means that you take one theme and focus on that. For instance, it might be buildings – Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh buildings. But the end product is massive confusion in children’s minds. Because what the Cooks’ tour did not do was engage the children with the question of what their special place was like by asking them questions such as, “When you are in a place that is very special to you what kind of thoughts and feelings do you have?” Instead the Cooks’ tour was just concentrated on knowledge.

I used to mark GCSE scripts for many years. Every year I would think “Graham, give full justice to every candidate. This is the culmination of 11 years work”. Then I would look at their answers and wish I had been a fly on the wall in their classroom in order to help me understand why they had written their answers. One year, the very first script I looked at said: “Can you name an organisation that has helped prisoners and ex-prisoners?” The answer was: “There are many organisations that help prisoners and ex-prisoners. The best known is called Group 4 Security.” Another question was: “Can you explain the phrase ‘the quick and the dead’?” Answer: “Yes, I can. The quick is the person who got out of the way!” Evidently they thought an epistle was the word to describe the wife of an apostle! And apparently a ‘just war’ was one in which no one knew what was going to happen because it had only ‘just’ started! Children’s ingenuity really is fantastic. I remember one question in particular which was approximately: “How important is the place of worship in the Sikh tradition?” I think the question was trying to get at the significance of worship in the gurdwara as opposed to other key aspects of Sikh belief. But this youngster in a beautifully prosaic style of writing, wrote: “The Sikh place of worship is very special. Very early in the morning a Sikh holy man climbs to the top of a tall tower called a minaret. At the top of this tower he blows a horn called a *shofar*. This is to call all the people to worship. When they get there they change into brightly coloured orange and yellow robes, sit cross legged on the floor and sing some songs to themselves. They then listen to a very, very long talk.” – so Christianity just finding it’s way in there! “Once they have listened to the long talk they share bread and wine with one another. When that is all finished they leave by a different part of the building. A *bulla* is the Sikh holy symbol – it is called the Star of David!” I haven’t made that up. Now, on the one hand, does that candidate use specialist language? Absolutely –

terms such as minaret and Star of David were used. But is anything in that remotely accurate about the Sikh tradition? No. That for me is the end product of the Cooks' tour, where we just pump factual information into children without engaging with them.

So what the framework has tried to do is to say that there are two critical elements of RE. The first is learning about religion. In that aspect it looks critically at religious beliefs and teachings. It looks at practices and ways of life and at how religion expresses itself. But there is an equally important dimension which is the second one and it is called learning from religion. Learning from religion is where I think young children develop the abilities to communicate and to evaluate, where they begin to develop the capacity to empathise. In other words, they begin to understand another person's point of view. And so in learning from religion we are addressing the big questions of identity and belonging, questions of meaning and purpose that human beings have grappled with since time began.

Before I joined QCA I used to have the privilege of being one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. We did some work in primary schools where we were looking at the impact of RE and the literacy strategy. I was present at a beautiful lesson on the story of the Good Samaritan in a reception class, where the children did a 'freeze frame' story. In other words they re-enacted a part of the story and then talked about what was happening, what the feelings of the characters were. I have to say that the children who were the robbers were particularly enthusiastic and authentic in their role! The teacher summarised the lesson at the end and she said "Now, children, this story is very special for Christians because it teaches you that your neighbour is anybody you meet who is in need and Christians believe that God has given them this story to make sure that we look after the people who we meet who are in need." And little Andrew, who was 4 years old, on the front row put his hand up and he said, "Miss, can you tell me who or what exactly is God?" That is a great question when you are 4 years old, but it is not a great question for the teacher when the HMI is sitting in the corner! She said, "What a brilliant question Andrew! Did everybody hear Andrew's question? Now, children, who can help Andrew answer his question?" I thought that was very skilful. But Andrew was not going to be fobbed off by that and what I love in his phrasing was the word "exactly". You could see him thinking "Don't give me some vague ontological argument, I did all that in nursery and I have moved on!" He said, "No, no, Miss, I want you to tell me who or what exactly is God." By this time the teacher had abandoned all hope, the colour had drained from her cheeks. But she was very skilful because she said, "Andrew, that is a very good question and aren't we lucky today, children, that we have a special visitor. This is Mr Langtree, he is kind of like the HMI for God!" I thought that was very inspirational! So we talked with Andrew and his friends about ideas we might have about God, what kind of images and thoughts people have about God and it seemed to me that grappling with those big questions of meaning and purpose and truth was important. I think the critical question in which children are interested is "Is it true?" It might be better phrased to say "What is the truth in this story?"

The final dimension of this framework is about values and commitments. We are suggesting here that there should be nationally agreed standards where we are all working towards the same learning goals for our young people. Central to that, and I want to finish on this note, is really the development of particular attitudes. What

would it be like if we didn't have RE is a subject I have thought a great deal about as we developed the framework. I originally had in mind the obvious audience, people like yourselves in faith communities, LEAs and SACREs and so on. I also had in mind this bigger audience of every child in England. But as the framework developed this new audience came and it is basically the media of England. I do not know whether I am proud or embarrassed that we managed to get the national framework on page 2 of *The Sun*! There it was in *The Sun* – “Atheism for infants!” The word “atheism” never appears in the national framework at all. But that is what the press picked up. What I was more interested in was the heading underneath – “A special report by *The Sun*'s religious affairs correspondent”. If ever there was a contradiction in terms! It was mind-boggling. I also remember reading *The Observer* which said “Children to study atheism in schools” and the following week in the letters column somebody said, “At last, children are to study atheism in our schools. Thank God for that!” I think they slightly missed the point!

One of the things that was right at the heart of our work on this, and what I remain passionate about in RE, is that RE is uniquely placed in this busy, hectic curriculum to get children to develop some central attitudes. One is sensitivity and the other, (and it is a much-banded about word at the moment but it is at the heart of the framework), is respect. We don't show respect for people if we haven't got a clue about where they are coming from or what their core beliefs and identity are. One of the things that Brian Pearce, in his role representing the Inter Faith Network, continually and helpfully reminded us as we developed the framework was to recognise that for many children their perception of the world of religion is one that actually in immediate terms is characterised by hostility and indifference. They don't see it in terms of a real living experience that human beings engage in and encounter every day within their local community, within their national community, within the global community. So central to the development of the framework is the concept of thinking seriously about what it means to be effectively religiously educated as a human being. Part of that means to understand the significance of the work that you do in the Inter Faith Network, which is the critical nature of dialogue. One of the central themes that we have put in Key Stage 3, which is for 11 to 14 year olds, is the role of inter faith dialogue, the study of relationships, of conflicts and collaborations within and between religions and beliefs.

I for one would like to again thank the Inter Faith Network for its contribution to the new framework for RE. I genuinely believe if it is put into practice then our young people of today, who will be the citizens of tomorrow, will be more reflective, more sensitive and more understanding through the sense of respect that they develop.

## CONNECTING FOR THE FUTURE: FINAL PANEL

### **Preet Majithia, President of Cambridge University Hindu Cultural Society, Leicester Youth Inter Faith Group**

I think we have had a fantastic day and have learnt a lot about the different activities and programmes in this country and abroad on the inter faith scene. I would like to convey a message which I hope everybody will take away with them. I take you back to 11 September 1883, when a young man in orange robes stood up in Chicago at the first Parliament of the World's Religions. This is an extract from his speech, the first sentence of which is a quote from Hindu scripture:

*“ Whosoever comes to me through whatsoever form, I reach him. All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.’ Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But the time has come and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”*

*Swami Vivekananda*

I hope that we will go away from today's gathering with a similar message and on a similar quest.

### **Rowena Loverance, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Commission for Inter Faith Relations and member of the Society of Friends**

It must be a good conference when the questions that I wrote down at the very beginning of the day was answered in my workshop just a few minutes ago. As well as my involvement with the Churches, I work in the British Museum. So it is perhaps not surprising that what I picked up from this morning's session was the wonderful range of physical spaces in which the inter faith work that we have heard about is being practised. To hear, almost in one sentence, about the different kind of work that had been done in Starbucks and Buckingham Palace, Arsenal Football Club and Holy Island is just so exhilarating that it made me write down immediately, “Are we together thinking of new spaces that we can create?” Lo and behold, in the workshop I was at just now, somebody spoke about a piece of work being done in Manningham in Bradford where banners are being created to make the space around the police station a more welcoming and positive experience. That was a miniscule example for me of just what a satisfying day this has been.

The day has also been a fantastic example of all-age participation. I think we should congratulate the organisers for working so hard to make a space in which people of

different ages, (I notice you are still working on the 5 year olds, Harriet!), could take part in the day so evenly. We can all learn from that because in all of our faith communities there are probably things that we do well together as regards all-age participation and things which we do not. I think the Quakers, my own religious community, would think that they do well the group meeting side of things together, as we give our young people a lot of space to represent Quakers. We are less good in our form of worship, because that consists of complete silence which is often seen by young people as quite excluding. So we are having to work quite hard to get a more inclusive all-age participation. The more we come together like this to share our experiences, the more we can understand and improve, I think, our own practice.

Also, we have not shied away today from the difficulties involved and that is always a danger when we come together on these happy occasions. But I have heard people honestly admitting the difficulties of what we might call capacity building, 'Are we really up for all this child protection stuff?' and people saying 'Yes, we have to be'. 'Can we cope with bringing people of no faith into our discussions?' and where that sits with the new legislation that is going through at the moment which is an issue for all of us. And, of course, the issue that has been bubbling away about whether young people are really different or whether they are just like us. And that seems to be answerable both ways. Yes, they are just like us, we are them in different guise, but equally they have to have even more space perhaps than those of us who are a little more set in our ways and not quite as imaginative as we used to be. So I think that is quite an interesting question that is still open at the end of the day.

I have enjoyed it immensely and look forward to the future.

### **Rauf Bashir, Building Bridges Pendle**

Building Bridges Pendle works with all faith communities in the Borough of Pendle. Today we made a presentation in our workshop on the interfaith education programme we deliver in primary and secondary schools and how we are playing our role in educating young people to respect and appreciate the diversity which exists around them - to bring to them a realisation that they are going to grow up into this society that we all live in. This is all part of "Connecting for the Future". The other project which was presented in our workshop was very different to the work of Building Bridges Pendle, but with the same aims of trying to connect communities, be it young people or older people. We must all use our roles in community work to help make a difference, regardless of what level that may be on.

My message from today is quite simple (please do not take this literally!) and it is that we are all the prophets of today and we have to carry forward the message that we are one human family and should see diversity as goodness. It is beneficial to come to events like today as there is much we can gain from each other. We have to take this learning back to our communities, and to our projects, and use what we have learned as an inspiration to move forward in our work.

**Rosalind Preston OBE, Vice-Chair Inter Faith Network for the UK**

I stand before you filled with pride: proud to be part of the Inter Faith Network, proud to be part of this conference today. The presentations we have heard today, especially this morning from the younger people, were so rewarding, so encouraging. If the future of inter faith dialogue is going to be in the hands of these young people then I think that we can feel that we have really achieved something worthwhile and that we are on the right path. The day has been absolutely outstanding.

All the years that I have worked in the Network I have felt it to be an enormous encouragement and comfort to be in the company of people of faith. Because you know then that you are not alone. You are part of a community of communities, people who have belief and faith and goals in life which bind you together; and although we know through our many discussions that we have different points of view about certain issues, the fact of the matter is that we all want to find positive answers. As I am sure you know, I am a member of the Jewish community. One of our basic tenets is *tikkun olam* which means “to heal the world”. Being part of the Inter Faith Network is for me one of the ways to help to heal the world.

I want to thank each and every one of you for your friendship and your comradeship and your support and most particularly, if I may say so, to the people who have been Officers with me and, of course, to Brian, Harriet and Bhupinder and the many, many other people who have worked with me over the years. I am sure that the Network will continue to blaze a path. When we are talking about religious education and about inter faith dialogue, the Network has set the standard for this country and I am very pleased to have played some small part in its work. Thank you very much indeed.



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

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

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

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

Further information about the Inter Faith Network can be found on its website: [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://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 2005-06

### Faith Community Representative Bodies

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 and Afro-Caribbean  
Churches (UK)  
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order  
Hindu Council (UK)  
Hindu Forum of Britain  
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)  
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park, London  
Jain Samaj Europe  
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of  
Muslim Scholars)  
Muslim Council of Britain  
National Council of Hindu Temples  
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 and Wales  
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB  
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission  
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches  
Interfaith Subcommittee  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)  
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League  
World Islamic Mission (UK)  
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

### Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum  
Scottish Inter Faith Council  
Inter Faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cymru  
Ffydd Cymru  
Alif Aleph UK  
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme  
Council of Christians and Jews  
Interfaith Foundation  
International Association for Religious  
Freedom (British Chapter)  
International Interfaith Centre  
London Society of Jews and Christians  
Maimonides Foundation  
Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme  
Religions for Peace (UK Chapter)  
Three Faiths Forum  
United Religions Initiative (Britain and  
Ireland)  
Westminster Interfaith  
World Congress of Faiths

### Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group  
Bedford Council of Faiths  
Birmingham Council of Faiths  
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council  
Bolton Interfaith Council  
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society

Brent Inter Faith  
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group  
Bristol Inter Faith Group  
Burnley Building Bridges  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group  
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action  
Cardiff Interfaith Association  
Cleveland Interfaith Group  
Coventry Inter Faith Group  
Coventry Multi Faith Forum  
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group  
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network  
Gateshead Inter Faith Forum  
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action  
Harrow Inter Faith Council  
Hounslow Friends of Faith  
Huddersfield Interfaith Council  
Lancashire Forum of Faiths  
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship  
Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum  
Leicester Council of Faiths  
Loughborough Council of Faiths  
Luton Council of Faiths  
Manchester Interfaith Forum  
Medway Inter Faith Action  
Merseyside Council of Faiths  
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)  
Newcastle Council of Faiths  
Newham Faith Sector Forum  
North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council  
North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths  
Northampton Faiths Forum  
Nottingham Inter Faith Council  
Oldham Inter Faith Forum  
Oxford Round Table of Religions  
Building Bridges Pendle  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council  
Reading Inter-Faith Group  
Redbridge Council of Faiths  
Rochdale Multifaith Partnership  
Sheffield Interfaith  
South London Inter Faith Group  
Southampton Council of Faiths  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource  
Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Group  
Warrington Council of Faiths  
Watford Inter Faith Association  
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group  
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group  
Wolverhampton Inter Faith Council  
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

### Educational and Academic Bodies

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



**Published 2005 by the Inter Faith Network for the UK**  
**(registered charity no 1068934 and company limited by guarantee no 3443823 registered in England)**  
**8A Lower Grosvenor Place**  
**London SW1W 0EN**

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**ISBN 1 902906 21 7**

**Price: £3.50**