



Interfaith Scotland

NEWSLETTER 2017: ISSUE 29



SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK
RELIGION AND THE MEDIA

LOCAL INTERFAITH GROUPS
SHARING POSITIVE STORIES

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY
HOW CAN LIFE GO ON?

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH DIALOGUE

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to *love*.”

Nelson Mandela



EDITORIAL

At a recent Interfaith Scotland staff and board strategic planning day I was astounded at the level of commitment of everyone present. The energy in the room was positive and palpable. We explored all the different areas of our work, from interfaith dialogue events, to seminars, school visits, training, Holocaust remembrance, Parliamentary engagement, publications, Scottish Interfaith Week, supporting local interfaith groups and more – and once we drew breath we looked long and hard at what we wanted to prioritise – not an easy task as everything felt important.

Unsurprisingly one of the key areas that came up to focus on was the engagement of young people in Interfaith Dialogue. Our strategic planning away day was held just as a new funding round was put in place by the Scottish Government and allowed us to input 'engagement of young people' as a priority on the application. We already hold interfaith days in schools, and recently assisted in the delivery of a youth-led quiz night in East Renfrewshire and involved hundreds of school children in Holocaust Memorial in East Dunbartonshire but a coherent and robust strategy for engaging young people from all walks of life and all age ranges is just tantalisingly out of range. We would welcome any thoughts and ideas.

Another key area that emerged was to continue to support, wherever appropriate, local interfaith groups. There was a real recognition that engagement takes place most often in local contexts. We are proud of all that the local interfaith groups in Scotland accomplish, very often on a completely voluntary basis and we hope that this year's annual newsletter continues to capture some of the great engagement events you have held throughout the past year.

Once again we can be heartened by the commitment of the Scottish Government to equality and human rights and indeed to interfaith dialogue. A second Interfaith Summit was held in November 2016 and the central item on the agenda was community cohesion and what faith communities do to assist communities in Scotland to flourish. It was heart-warming to hear just how much faith communities do to make Scotland a better place to live. I am sure all of us echo in our hearts and our actions the words of our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon;

...if you live in Scotland, regardless of where you come from, regardless of the colour of your skin or the faith you practise, all of us can make it a better country to live in if we have the courage to do that.

The staff and board of Interfaith Scotland look forward to engaging with many of you in the coming year and hope that you and your communities continue to grow and flourish.

Dr Maureen Sier
Director



Interfaith Scotland provides a forum for people from different religions and beliefs to dialogue with one another on matters of religious, national and civic importance. We run dialogue events for young people, women, faith communities, religious leaders, members of Interfaith Scotland and local interfaith groups. We run interfaith workshops in schools and produce interfaith publications and resources. We provide ongoing support to local interfaith groups. We give public presentations, seminars and training on interfaith and faith awareness. We promote and encourage participation in Scottish Interfaith Week.

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INTERFAITH SUMMIT WITH THE FIRST MINISTER



‘*THROUGH STRONG AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES
A RISE IN HATE CRIME COULD BE AVOIDED*’

Interfaith Scotland was once again honoured to be asked to organise an Interfaith Summit on behalf of Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister. Representatives from Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow and Edinburgh Interfaith Association along with religious leaders from diverse faith communities were invited to attend. The meeting was also attended by the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance. The First Minister sought responses from three critical questions.

‘*INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT
IMPROVES RELIGIOUS
LITERACY*’

How do faith communities and interfaith organisations work with young people and support community cohesion?

Marcella Foong from the Catholic Community and Laura Westring from the Baha'i Community addressed this question. Marcella shared the importance of Religious and Moral Education in schools and how interfaith engagement improves religious literacy while Laura spoke of how the youth programmes within the Baha'i Community and her engagement as an Interfaith Scotland youth volunteer both led her to work in the field of empowering others. Discussions then focussed on the need to develop a strategy to allow young people of faith to speak with others of different and no faiths to help break down the barriers, stereotypes and negativity often presented through social media. It was agreed that through building skills in the interfaith forum, young people will be better enabled to engage with their peers on different viewpoints and broaden their horizons.

How does faith groups' support for asylum seekers and refugees impact on community cohesion?

Mohamed Omar, from Interfaith Glasgow spoke about his experiences of starting the Interfaith Weekend Club for asylum seekers and refugees and David Bradwell from the Church of Scotland spoke of the wider churches continuing their on-going support for asylum seekers and refugees. The need to continue to integrate such support with local

communities was understood to be highly beneficial. Both the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary spoke of the importance of this work by the third sector, faith communities and interfaith organisations.

How can faith groups support community cohesion in the context of Brexit?

Rabbi Rubin and Nasim Azad spoke of the impact of prejudice on their respective Jewish and Muslim Communities. The impact of Brexit on faith communities in Scotland was noted - although the spike in hate crime recorded elsewhere in the UK has not happened in Scotland, there was agreement that we must not be complacent. Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland thanked the First Minister for showing leadership in responding to Brexit and was a great example for communities across Scotland. It was recognised that through strong and resilient communities, a rise in hate crime could be avoided. Those in the meeting noted that the approach of Interfaith Scotland of bringing people together to dialogue on common issues was a great strength to Scotland and the model should be emulated across the country. It was felt that interfaith work is increasingly important as the country faces ongoing difficult times. The First Minister said:

'The vital work of Interfaith Scotland in raising awareness of the importance of interfaith dialogue and increasing our understanding of different traditions and practices enriches our communities. By working together with Interfaith Scotland and all communities I hope to see a safer, stronger and more inclusive society which we are all able to fully contribute to and benefit from.'



SCOTTISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS' FORUM: KAGYU SAMYE LING MONASTERY AND TIBETAN CENTRE



Twenty five religious leaders and associates gathered at Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Centre on 4th May 2016. The meeting began with a welcome from Lama Yeshe Rinpoche and then everyone present shared news from their respective religious communities.

At the morning meeting there was a frank and open discussion about radicalisation and its impact on all communities. The religious leaders confirmed the need to assist young people to work with the texts of their religious scriptures and to understand them in specific contexts. Often the internet misquotes texts out of context and young people need to know the reality of the text and not the misunderstandings of extreme minority views.

The rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism were discussed in relation to what is happening in Europe with mass migration. The conversation continued in a frank, open and friendly manner and it was commented on, that the many years of the religious leaders meeting together, had allowed complex and challenging issues to be shared without fear of causing offence and was an excellent example of interfaith engagement.

After lunch the religious leaders and children from Lincluden Primary School in Dumfries gathered in the Buddhist Temple to experience a Buddhist service.

After a photo opportunity the young people gathered with the religious leaders in the conference room and asked a series of searching and interesting questions.

In the late afternoon the religious leaders met with representatives of the 'Getting it Right for Every Child' team, Mr. Ronnie Hill & Hannah Keats. They briefed the religious leaders on 'The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014' and the introduction of the 'named person' scheme for every young person in Scotland. The religious leaders rigorously questioned Ronnie and Hannah and the engagement assisted in a greater understanding of the purpose of the scheme and the evolution of the 'getting it right for every child' programme.



RELIGION AND BELIEF EQUALITY TRAINING

It has been another busy and successful year for our external training programme. Our Religion and Belief Equality Training Officer, Jamie Spurway, continues to provide interactive and engaging courses to a range of organisations, on how to work with people from diverse religion and belief backgrounds. Although in previous years, local authority staff were the main audience, in 2016 most of our training work was with colleges. Perth College and University of Highlands and Islands, Glasgow Clyde College, West College Scotland and North East Scotland College all received our usual half-day training, and in most cases, we worked with two or three different groups of staff. We were also delighted to be commissioned by ScotRail and Network Rail to deliver a one hour input to a staff event they held to promote a range of equalities issues.

In most cases our training begins by comparing Religion and Belief to the other eight Protected Characteristics in the Equality Act – such as race, disability and age. We discuss the perceived element of choice, which distinguishes religion and belief from most of the other characteristics. We then use an always popular group exercise, which challenges participants to create a table comparing elements of the six religions we focus on (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism). The course also covers the main beliefs and cultural practices of these faiths and allows time for delegates to discuss how religion and belief may impact on their work. A key aim for the training is to help delegates become more comfortable discussing religion and belief (and the needs arising from it) in their professional roles.

Earlier in the year we also facilitated a lively discussion on Freedom of thought and belief as part of the Declaration Fest organised by the Mental Health Foundation. The session saw a group of about 30 members of the public discuss this key principle of Human Rights law in modern British society.

INTERFAITH PEACE AND RECONCILIATION SERVICE



Every year Interfaith Scotland hosts an event to allow our members to meet the key note speakers for the National Holocaust Memorial Event in Scotland. This year Interfaith Scotland tried something different and decided to hold an open event for members and for the wider public. On 22nd January in partnership with Glasgow University, Interfaith Scotland hosted an Interfaith Service for Peace and Reconciliation. In the stunning setting of the Glasgow University Memorial Chapel almost 200 people gathered to share in a collective service for Peace.

Rev. Stuart McQuarrie welcomed everyone to the Chapel and Dr. Maureen Sier led people through the service. Music was beautifully provided by East Dunbartonshire Orchestra and pupils and readers from 7 faith traditions shared a short excerpt from their scriptures on peace. Saskia Tepe shared the story of her mother who was a Holocaust survivor and also movingly told of their time together as refugees. Saskia ably linked her difficult time as a refugee with the plight of the thousands of refugees who are currently fleeing war zones.

Many commented on how healing the service had been and how refreshing to have a collective opportunity to reflect together on peace and reconciliation when the world is facing a time of conflict and strife.



PARLIAMENTARY WORK

Our Parliamentary Newsletter has been produced several times over the last year – there has been lots happening in politics in Scotland – most notably the EU Referendum on Brexit. The implications of this vote have significantly impacted on the work of the Scottish Parliament, and will continue to do so for years to come.

In the wake of the Brexit vote, there was a spike in reported hate crime in England in Wales. Whilst we can seek some comfort in the news that Police Scotland reported that there was no such impact in Scotland, we should not be complacent as there are still examples of it happening north of the border. Annabel Ewing, the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs said "Scotland is an open and inclusive nation, but we are not immune from such hateful behaviour."

With this in mind, Interfaith Scotland welcomes the recent announcement of an independent review of hate crime legislation. The review aims to ensure that the Scottish judiciary is adequately able to deal with criminal conduct that is motivated by hatred, malice, ill-will or prejudice. Part of this process will involve public consultation,

which we look forward to engaging with and encourage others to do so too.

We are proud that Scotland continues to be a welcoming environment for people of all faiths and none.

INTERFAITH BLOG PAGE

Interfaith Scotland has established a blog page where members of staff and volunteers have written up a number of events and talks including those during Scottish Interfaith Week and Holocaust Memorial Day.

The blog can be found online at:

<https://interfaithscotland.wordpress.com>

MEMBERS MEETINGS

TAKING INTERFAITH WORK INTO THE FUTURE

Two significant member's events in 2016 were held in May and October. In May members gathered to explore the role of the members of Interfaith Scotland in promoting dialogue in their respective faith communities and also how Interfaith Scotland could support them in continuing to promote good relations through their respective networks. Over 75% of our members came to the meeting indicating once again the strong commitment of the faith communities to dialogue and working to build a safe and inclusive Scotland.

RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In October the theme of the Dialogue was 'The continuing story of Religion and Human Rights' and was held at the Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh. A big turnout demonstrated that there is a real interest in issues of Human Rights. Guest speakers for the night were Alan Glazer the Chief Lawyer from the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Naomi McAuliffe from Amnesty International. Both gave riveting presentations on the complex issues of religion and human rights; Alan focussing on the national and European situation and Naomi presenting the complex international picture. Sadly the violation of human rights on the grounds of religion and belief is still common. Facilitated dialogue allowed for interesting discussions.



AGM AND PUBLIC TALK

The public lecture that preceded our Annual General Meeting was given by Ruth Harvey, Director of 'Places for Hope'. She spoke on 'Creative Conflict Transformation' and focused on the need to transform crisis into something positive rather than to suppress it and not effectively deal with it.

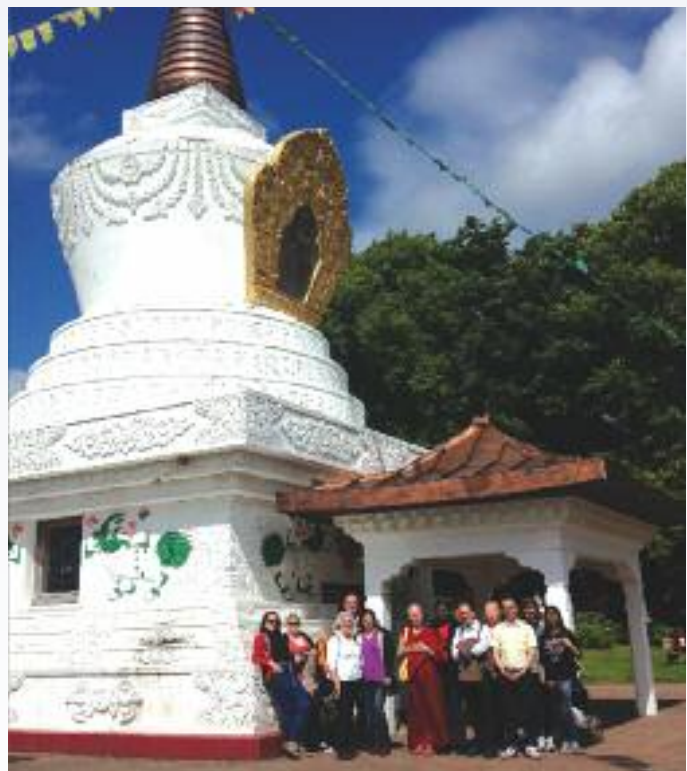
The public lecture was followed by an opportunity for dialogue on the topic. At the AGM Dr. Satwant Multani stepped down from the Board of Interfaith Scotland and Dr. Inderjit Singh replaced him as a representative of the Sikh community on the Board. Interfaith Scotland is grateful for the many years of service given to the Board by Dr. Multani.



VOLUNTEERS TRAINING AND AWAY DAYS

Two training days for volunteers were held in April and June 2016 at our dialogue centre in Glasgow. 20 people from a variety of faiths attended to find out ways in which they could volunteer for the organisation. These volunteers were able to give help and support at a number of our national events throughout the year as well as getting involved in our schools programme.

To show our appreciation for their support, Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Glasgow held a joint volunteers away day to Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery on 6th August.



NETWORKING SEMINARS

Interfaith Scotland hosted three national networking seminars in 2016 as outlined below.



INTERFAITH PROFESSIONALS NETWORKING SEMINAR - RESPONDING TO CRISIS

Every year Interfaith Scotland offers a networking seminar for those whose paid employment is in the field of interfaith relations. In 2016 the focus of this networking seminar was on 'crisis management' and staff of Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow and Edinburgh Interfaith Association travelled to the Bield in Perthshire to explore together how best and most appropriately to respond to crisis.

Increasingly Interfaith organisations are asked to respond to local, national and international crisis situations and we were honoured to have Chief Inspector Shaheen Baber share with us the perspective of Police Scotland. Chief Inspector Baber outlined the various types of crisis that they would wish an interfaith organisation to respond to and it was agreed that later in the year Interfaith Scotland would host an

event for Police Scotland during Hate Crime Awareness Week (October 2016).

Participants were then ably led through a workshop hosted by Rev. Cedric Blakey whose academic background is in this field. Those present began to work on developing a coherent 'crisis management strategy' and Interfaith Scotland has committed to develop a simple 'go to' document on managing crisis and this will ready to launch at the Networking Seminar to be hosted in 2017. For light relief the Art Director at The Bield led all of the participants in creating a mandala together helping each of us to personally reflect on our response to crisis and the support needed to most effectively handle difficult situations.

LOCAL WOMEN'S INTERFAITH GROUPS

Interfaith Scotland hosted the first seminar of its type focussing on women's interfaith groups and issues that might be important for them. The seminar took place on 15th September at our dialogue centre in Glasgow. To open the seminar, the staff gave an overview of Interfaith Scotland's work with interfaith women's groups in Scotland over the years and outlined the various women's seminars hosted by Interfaith Scotland around the country.

There were presentations from three women's interfaith groups: the Abrahamic Roots Group based in Coatbridge, the Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group and Women of Faith and Community, based in Glasgow. These talks gave a brief history

of the groups, an outline of the kind of activities that they have been engaged in, the 'joys and challenges' that they have experienced over the course of the group's history, and examples of how they overcame any challenges as these have arisen. This was followed by dialogue in small groups looking at what women had learnt and valued about being part of a women's interfaith group, looking in more depth at what challenges they have faced and how they overcame these and sharing ideas on how to get women more involved in interfaith dialogue in their local areas. It was a wonderful time of sharing and it is hoped that the shared learning that took place during the event will be helpful for the groups in years to come.

ANNUAL SEMINAR FOR LOCAL INTERFAITH GROUPS

The annual seminar for local interfaith groups took place at Interfaith Scotland's dialogue centre in Glasgow on 22nd August. 40 Representatives from 12 interfaith groups throughout Scotland were in attendance. A theme of 'crisis management' was chosen as a response to a number of recent national and international events. Chief Inspector Shaheen Baber led a workshop highlighting ways to respond to these events and their effects on a local level. Frances Hume, Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland, led a workshop looking at conflict management for individuals and local interfaith groups, drawing on her training at the Kinharvie Institute.

Lynnda Wardle, interim director of Interfaith Glasgow, and Andrew Sarle from Central Scotland Interfaith Group gave presentations on the activities of their organisations. Dr Maureen Sier led a discussion on sharing ideas for local interfaith groups organising activities for Scottish Interfaith Week. Paul Daly outlined Interfaith Scotland's newly published Media Guide designed to assist groups to get their 'good story' out there via social and traditional media. Hard copies are

available from our office and a PDF version is available to download from our website's resources section. Dr Jane Bentley, a prize-winning community musician, led those gathered in various community music techniques which could add energy and inspiration to an interfaith gathering. After the seminar there was a tour of the recently opened Sikh Gurdwara in Berkeley Street, Glasgow, for attendees and staff, kindly hosted by Ravinder Kaur Nijjar.



LAUNCH OF SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK 2016 RELIGION AND THE MEDIA



Scottish Interfaith Week 2016 took place from 13th - 20th November. The theme was 'Religion and the Media'. Media reporting can have a powerful effect on people of different faiths, both positive and negative. The 2016 theme gave us an opportunity to explore our complex relationship with the media, how we can share the positive stories of faith and interfaith work and challenge some of the negative reporting and stereotypes about people of different faiths in the media. A programme of 50 events that took place during the week can be found on our website and hard copies are available at the office.

The launch of Scottish Interfaith Week took place on Sunday 13th November at Paisley Town Hall. Interfaith Scotland was delighted to host the event in partnership with Renfrewshire Interfaith Group and Renfrewshire Council. Members of Renfrewshire Interfaith group met regularly with Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, Frances Hume, on the lead up to the event and showed great enthusiasm, commitment and creativity in the planning process!

The event began with a delicious vegetarian lunch. During the lunch there was an opportunity to view stalls with artefacts from eight world faiths as well as exhibitions from Interfaith Scotland, Engage Renfrewshire, Paisley 2021 and Police Scotland. There was also an exhibition of the winners of the Scottish Interfaith Week art competition on the theme of 'religion and the media' which was won by pupils of Wallace Primary School in Elderslie, Renfrewshire. Those gathered were delighted by the dulcet tones of Emma Durkan on the clarsach during the lunch.

Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, was the compere for the afternoon and also introduced the theme of Scottish Interfaith Week, 'Religion and the Media'. Provost Anne Hall welcomed those gathered on behalf of Renfrewshire Council. Stephen Haggerty then gave a welcome on behalf of Renfrewshire Interfaith Group.

Those gathered experienced a powerful drama written by Shelagh McKay and Jean Urquhart from Renfrewshire Interfaith Group which illustrated how invisible and vulnerable people of faith can feel when they are portrayed negatively in the media.

Cathy MacDonald, a bilingual broadcaster, gave the keynote address. Samina Ansari, CEO of Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre, spoke about the effect that negative media reporting can have on people of faith. Jennifer Jones, researcher at the University of the West of Scotland, spoke about ways in which community groups can access and utilise social media.

There were also wonderful performances by Aria, an award winning choir, and Abhinaya, an Indian dance academy, both based in Glasgow. The event was a great success with 100 people in attendance from different faiths and walks of life. Interfaith Scotland would like to thank Renfrewshire Council who donated the Grand Hall at Paisley Town Hall as well as making a generous donation towards the catering costs.

*Frances Hume, Development Officer,
Interfaith Scotland*



VOLUNTEER AMBASSADORS FOR SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK

Throughout Scottish Interfaith Week 2016, we had a group of volunteer Ambassadors from across the country who attended a variety of events. They wrote about these events on our blog page <https://interfaithscotland.wordpress.com> and three of their stories are below.

RELIGION AND THE MEDIA: AYRSHIRE INTERFAITH FORUM EVENT

Unless you have been living off-grid in a tent near to the Arctic Circle you will have been unable to avoid the news of Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election. I had thought to myself, as I watched, read and listened to the story unfold, what is the message the media are trying to convey? How is that authoritative voice – the person looking straight down the camera and delivering to me – trying to spin this? What are the reporters trying to impart to me in the newspapers and across the internet? Such is the power of the modern media.

In these digital times what exactly do we mean by 'media'? How, perhaps, are different religions portrayed by the media? Are the various religions portrayed differently? What slots are religions given in the media schedules (if at all)? How would religions like to be represented via media outlets and does this differ from the usual output?

This week I was in the privileged position of being a Scottish Interfaith Week Ambassador and feeding back on an event taking place in Kilmarnock at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So, there I am, at the door to the event and I am thinking, no backpackers who have been living off-grid in a tent near the Arctic Circle...? Well no. But the event did attract nearly 50 people from several different faiths, involved four excellent speakers on the theme of 'Religion and the Media', and generated some lively discussion.

The audience was given a warm welcome by Jon Herd of Ayrshire Interfaith Forum. The first speaker, Svend Kamming, spoke about the topic from a Baha'i perspective. Howard Bartlem from the Quakers, presented a lively, thoughtful presentation on Quaker stillness, in an increasingly 'loud' social media world. Shahbaz Mirza of Ayrshire Central Mosque felt that social media could be harnessed to spread messages and to help innovate and bring modernity to his faith. He posed the questions: why is Islam being negatively portrayed, what is it doing to change the rhetoric and how can it have a more structured response to negative media portrayals? Jon Herd, from the Church of Scotland tradition asked the question: what does faith have to say about the media?

The assembly was then treated to a musical interlude from Robert Yates on piano. The attendees then retired to the church hall where the hosts had graciously provided food and drink, a lively hive of buzzing discussion taking place at each table. Of course, the off-grid backpacker living near the Arctic Circle didn't arrive, but he certainly would have been made welcome if he had!

*Sergio George Burns,
Scottish Interfaith Week Ambassador*



‘WHY IS ISLAM BEING
NEGATIVELY PORTRAYED,
WHAT IS IT DOING TO
CHANGE THE RHETORIC AND
HOW CAN IT HAVE A MORE
STRUCTURED RESPONSE TO
NEGATIVE MEDIA PORTRAYALS?’

LIGHTING 1008 LAMPS FOR PEACE

“ A VERY POWERFUL VISUAL MESSAGE WAS CREATED BY INCLUDING THE INTERFAITH SCOTLAND LOGO WITHIN A VERY SACRED HINDU SYMBOL ”



A special interfaith service was conducted at the Hindu Temple of Scotland in Rutherglen, as a part of Scottish Interfaith Week 2016. The aim of the service was to welcome people of all faiths and none to participate in celebration of harmony. The service was conducted in English and Sanskrit (an ancient Indian Language). The hymns recited at the service were composed 1000s of years ago saying prayers for peaceful co-existence between humans and the surrounding nature.

A special part of the event was the lighting of 1008 lamps. A very powerful visual message was created by including

the Interfaith Scotland logo within a very sacred Hindu symbol, the Shiva Lingam. True to the ethos of interfaith, the temple invited Venerable Bhante Rewatha Thero, the chief monk of the Buddhist Vihara in Scotland, to guide those gathered in a mindfulness meditation to bless the congregation with peace and harmony.

The meditation was followed by sounding of drums. It was very exciting to see Mr Ranjith Sankarnarayanan, an Indian playing on a very traditional South Indian drum joined by Mr Chief Suleman Chebe who hails from Africa, playing his traditional drums. The event concluded with people meeting and greeting over a light vegetarian south Indian lunch.



*Srihari Vallabhajousula,
Scottish Interfaith Week Ambassador*

FAIRWEATHER HALL DROP IN CENTRE, CELEBRATES SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK



Fairweather Hall is being utilized every Thursday as a drop in centre. The aims are to provide services for the local Asian community though in practise it's a drop in centre that is open to all. The drop in provides a get together for the over 50's with activities such as a lunch club, educational trips, professional advice, yoga and exercise, chilling out and breaking solitude.

I was initially greeted by Jagdish, a dignified looking gentleman from the Sikh faith, who made me feel very welcome and offered me a seat at the head table along with a line of other people I'd never met before. I proceeded to sit with some guys who turned out to be of the Hindu and Muslim traditions. We found our common ground quickly and shared our beliefs in the oneness of humanity, agreeing that folk are folk – it doesn't matter what tradition we come from, it's what we do that really matters. We talked about getting older and how getting older forces us to consider

the virtue of humility, and how humility is a strength, not a weakness. We moved on and shared our common interest in the growing of food including chillies!

After a speech from Jagdish talking about the drop in events and their activities, he proceeded to introduce representatives from the "Queens Award". Fairweather Drop in Centre is being put forward to be in next year's list of nominees to 'celebrate its local heroes' for the work they do within the community.

This occasion of celebrating interfaith in the community was a gathering of people, connecting, food sharing and fellowship and I really enjoyed it. Many thanks to all the cooks and the people who served and cleared away.

*Nick Sier,
Scottish Interfaith Week Ambassador*

A DAY OF GREAT EXCITEMENT

The winners of the Scottish Interfaith Week art competition on the theme of 'Religion and the Media' were pupils from Wallace Primary School in Elderslie, Renfrewshire who won £50 for their school and a tour of BBC Scotland. Two of the pupils take up the story below.

"As a result of being selected in the top 10 entrants of Interfaith Scotland's Religion and the Media art competition, we were very excited to have won a tour of the BBC studios arranged by Tommy Weir from the BBC.

The moment we stepped foot on BBC soil everyone was ecstatic and anticipating the sights that we would see (and maybe even meet a celebrity!). The first thing we saw was the huge building and the mammoth 'BBC' sign.

“EVERYONE WAS ECSTATIC AND ANTICIPATING THE SIGHTS THAT WE WOULD SEE AND MAYBE EVEN MEET A CELEBRITY!”

After meeting Tommy Weir, we were amazed by the number of stairs and the interesting things in the foyer. We particularly loved the little stage and Tommy said that there are regularly bands playing there who feature on television or radio.

We learned so much during the tour; we got to be news presenters and learned how to use the three main different types of cameras. We visited the children's TV department

and got to hold lots of awards which had been presented to programmes like Officially Amazing, Copycats and Who Let the Dogs Out?

We also got to record our thoughts about Christmas and this, along with our festive photograph, featured on the BBC Twitter page as well as the school's.

As we were about to leave we spotted, out of the corner of our eyes, the one and only Jackie Bird! We were all so star struck but she was so nice and as well as having her photograph taken with us, gave us all her autograph.

We had so much fun at the BBC studios...we want to say a huge thank you to Interfaith Scotland and Tommy Weir!"



*Katie Ponsonby and Alba Kinnear
Wallace Primary School*



PROMOTING INTERFAITH RELATIONS WITHIN OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES

An important part of interfaith relations, I think, is within our faith communities and not just between them. At present there are significant individuals engaged in the work of interreligious dialogue but many that don't recognise its importance or have any interest in engaging in it. Within the Catholic Church in Scotland we have a committee, set up by the Bishops to encourage Catholics to be aware of and engage in interreligious dialogue. There are two aspects to our work – dialogue and education. It is this last one that we tend to focus on so that we have a number of initiatives that prepare for Interfaith Week, hoping that Catholics will attend the many events happening all over the country that week.

“THE GOOD STORIES NEED TO BE TOLD”

This year our preparation began at the end of October when we had our annual Reception for Faith Communities. This is an opportunity for individuals from different faiths to get to know one another and spend some time together. It has been going on for many years now so that people who come greet one another as friends. It is mainly a social event but we always have one or two short speeches. This year Dr Maureen Sier, the Director of Interfaith Scotland spoke about Interfaith Week and Anna Magnusson, who produces, writes and broadcasts on BBC radio, spoke on Religion and the Media which was the theme of 2016. Anna's talk was stimulating and challenging. Rather than bemoan the bad stories about religion and a recognition that the good stories need to be told, she told us that on the whole the media were not really interested in religion, that we spoke a language they did not understand, that so much of religion felt alien to their experience. This was a good lesson and one which I hope religion will take seriously. It seems important in an increasingly secular age that we learn to express the values of our faith in ways that people will understand and recognise the profound human wisdom at the heart of them.

It has now become a pattern for us to send a letter to every Catholic parish in Scotland a few weeks before Interfaith Week. The letter is signed by Archbishop Mario Conti who is the Chair of the Bishops' Committee. This letter alerts parishes to interfaith week, encourages them to do something, no matter how small, during that week and connect with any events going on in their area. Included in the letter are prayers to be said during the Sunday morning Eucharist as well as a statement for the parish newsletter. We are not very good at monitoring the success of this but do know that Interfaith Week is brought to the attention of Catholics in many parishes in some way or other. What we are not good at doing is alerting the Catholic press and we need to work on this in future.

For the past few years we have put a lot of time and energy into working with schools to make sure that they are aware of the week. In the past we have had several days at the Conforti Institute for Global Learning in Coatbridge but this year we decided to hold a one day conference in a hotel in Strathclyde Park. We had over 130 pupils accompanied by a teacher from 31 Catholic Schools. This covered more than half the Catholic Secondary Schools in Scotland. It was a great day, hosted by Michele MacManus who got the pupils really buzzing. Input from speakers, a workshop on Religion and the Media and an opportunity to speak with and ask questions of representatives of different faiths made the day an interesting and busy one. Part of the day too was the opportunity for individual schools to plan what they might do in their school during Interfaith Week. We then had a commissioning service in which all of the pupils stated their commitment to be interfaith champions and posted for all to see what their plan was for interfaith week. Some schools sent us news and videos of their activities.

We shall continue this approach in future, hopefully with a bit more monitoring of what has happened in parishes and schools, but in the belief that this approach will bear some fruit.



Sister Isabel Smyth

*Secretary, Scottish Bishops' Committee
for Interreligious Dialogue*

TIME FOR REFLECTION

Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, Frances Hume, delivered the Time for Reflection at the Scottish Parliament on 15th November. This is available to view on YouTube under the heading: Time for Reflection – Scottish Parliament: 15th November 2016. A transcription of the article can be found on the Interfaith Scotland blog: <https://interfaithscotland.wordpress.com/>

ACROSS THE DIVIDING LINES

‘THE FILM EXPLORES A HOST OF COMPLEX AND UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES OF INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS’

2016 marked my first experience of Scottish Interfaith Week as the Church of Scotland's Interfaith Programme Officer. I chose to host an event that combined all my interests – religion, interreligious relations and their representation in cinema. One of the films that immediately came to mind was Ken Loach's *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004) as it was made on location in Glasgow and covered the story of a romantic relationship between a young Muslim man and Catholic Irish woman. Entitled 'Optimism and Humanism: Interfaith Relationships on the Big Screen' the event was intended as an opportunity to both watch the film and discuss some of the issues raised in a Q&A afterwards. We were lucky enough to be joined by Atta Yakub who plays one of the main characters as well as Dr Steve Innes, a trained dialogue facilitator with a great interest in religion's representation in cinema.

The film explores a host of complex and unpredictable consequences of interfaith relationships and came onto British screens a year after the impact of 9/11 drew a great deal of negative media attention on Muslims living in the

UK and Islam more generally. Twelve years on and the anti-Muslim sentiment seems to have continued and developed in ways that seem impossible to curtail with a more positive and nuanced message. This film was an attempt at humanising some of the issues and an unapologetically complex portrait of what happens when cultures, values and mind-sets interact across society's dividing lines.

As interfaith officer, I hope to take part in many more events like this one such as an upcoming conference on Abrahamic faith relations. *Honest Conversations: Mission and Belief in Dialogue* is particularly aimed at Christians living in Scotland to learn more about their faith in relation to Islam and Judaism and will include a panel discussion on the significance and meaning of 'Mission' in Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

Mirella Yandoli

*Interfaith Programme Officer,
Church of Scotland*

HUMANIST DIALOGUE



During Scottish Interfaith Week 2016 an evening dialogue and dinner was held with staff and board members of Interfaith Scotland and staff and board members of Humanist Society Scotland. The evening began with a Caribbean themed supper and although it was not intended to hold this dinner by candlelight an electricity power cut precipitated the need for candles – the power cut also allowed for some well-placed jokes on who was cutting the power and why! After dinner Gordon MacRae (Chief Exec of Humanist Society Scotland) and Dr Maureen Sier (Director of Interfaith Scotland) gave short presentations on their respective work and this was followed by table discussions on 'common ground and challenging issues'.

A follow up meeting was held in February 2017 with the Director of Interfaith Scotland speaking at the Humanist Society's monthly gathering.

MEET THE PRODUCERS

BBC Scotland hosted a "Meet the Producers" event on November 23rd, at their Pacific Quay building in Glasgow. The session was hosted by presenter and broadcaster, Stephen Jardine and organised to take place the week after Interfaith Scotland's "Religion and the Media" week of activity.

As a public service broadcaster BBC Scotland is keen to ensure it connects with all audiences in Scotland. The Meet the Producers event provided a good opportunity for programme makers to meet face to face with a group of people from various cultural backgrounds in order to discuss what's important from each other's perspectives, explore ideas and exchange contact information. The event invitation was issued via Interfaith Scotland and although the guests all shared a collective interest in religion and ethics the purpose of the event was to introduce a cross-section of Scotland's population to the wide range of programme teams based here in Scotland – from news and sport to radio features; from children's to drama; from learning to Gaelic – to inform the content being made. BBC Radio Scotland programming was highly represented as the event was conceived of and planned by the then Editor of General Programmes, Colin Paterson and Marketing Executive, Tommy Weir.

Feedback after the event from Interfaith Scotland members and BBC Scotland teams has been extremely positive and from this it's clear that everyone who attended benefited from the experience whilst widening their contact network at the same time. BBC Scotland is planning similar events with other sections of the population in the year ahead.

GET INVOLVED!

There's lots of ways of getting involved in the work of Interfaith Scotland. Here are just a few!

BECOME A FRIEND

Becoming a Friend of Interfaith Scotland is a great way to support our work. Our Friends are individuals, groups and organisations who are passionate about interfaith work and the impact it makes on communities. For a small subscription fee you can receive our newsletter, annual report and invitations to attend interfaith events organised by Interfaith Scotland.

SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK

We can provide you with ideas and advice for setting up an interfaith event in your area to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week. We can advertise your event on our website and to our contacts list. Small amounts of funding are also available to assist with events.

LOCAL INTERFAITH GROUPS

We can help you get in touch with the nearest interfaith group in your area. If there is no interfaith group in your area we can help you to set one up and provide advice and support for the group.

SCHOOLS AND YOUTH GROUPS

We have volunteers from different faiths who are available to speak in schools and youth groups about their faith and/or the importance of interfaith dialogue. We have also created interfaith resources for schools and youth groups.

WOMEN'S INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

We host women's interfaith dialogue events in different towns and cities in Scotland throughout the year. Get in touch if you would be interested in us hosting a women's dialogue in your area.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

We provide training to voluntary and statutory agencies on faith awareness and religious equality. We have also produced a number of useful publications and resources which are available at the office or can be downloaded from our website.

EASY FUNDRAISING

We are signed up to an organisation called *Easyfundraising*. If you buy on-line, many retailers will add a percentage donation to our organisation. All you have to do is register at www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/interfaithscotland. Having registered, whenever you are thinking of buying something on-line, log into EasyFundraising and see if the retailer you want to buy from contributes. If they do, simply by clicking through to their retail site from the Easyfundraising site can earn up to 7% of anything you spend.

DONATE TO OUR WORK

You can donate to our work by posting a cheque to Interfaith Scotland at our new address. We use Gift Aid so please let us know if you would like to make a Gift Aid donation.





NEWS FROM LOCAL INTERFAITH GROUPS

INTERFAITH GLASGOW: A 'COMING OF AGE' CELEBRATION

On the 14th November 2016, Interfaith Glasgow celebrated its independence at a launch at the City Chambers, hosted by Glasgow City Council and the Lord Provost. 120 guests from various faith communities, partners, charities, statutory agencies, funders and friends of Interfaith Glasgow attended our flagship launch event. It was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the history of Interfaith work in the City over the years, as well as celebrate the 'coming of age' of Glasgow's own interfaith organisation. The Interfaith Glasgow Board of Trustees played a crucial role in helping select and invite guests from their own faith communities for the launch and there was time for networking both before and after the event.

As part of the event we invited people to sign an Interfaith Declaration setting out broad principles of interfaith cooperation and engagement for Glasgow. So far 95 signatories, many representing their faith communities, have signed. See here for Declaration: <http://bit.do/support-interfaith-glasgow>

THE FAMILY FUN DAY

*‘IT IS GREAT TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THEM
FEEL WELCOME IN A MULTICULTURAL CITY’*

The Family Fun Day is Interfaith Glasgow's flagship event which has been running annually for the last four years. Initially hosted at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, it has been held for the last two years at Hillhead Primary School, attracting more and more people each time with nearly 250 attendees at the last event.

The focus of the Family Fun Day is always on giving people a chance to socialise in a fun and friendly atmosphere with people from a diverse range of religious traditions and to learn something about those traditions in the process. We had 'Faith Table Workshops' where people had the opportunity to make something associated with a particular religious tradition whilst hearing about its significance from volunteers belonging to that tradition. Sikh calligraphy, Hindu rangoli, traditional Muslim henna and St Brigid's crosses from the Catholic faith were just some of the arts and crafts on offer this year. Other activities included Chinese origami, lantern making, chess and a 'smoothie bike'.

With the inclusion of participants from Interfaith Glasgow's Weekend Club we have noticed an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers participating in the Family Fun Day. It is great to have the opportunity to make them feel welcome in a multicultural city.

The Family Fun Day was also supported by BEMIS which allowed us to offer a delicious vegetarian buffet courtesy of

Ruzbowl, an aspiring social enterprise focused on healthy, sustainable and locally sourced foods. There were also more performances this year than ever before, showcasing diverse talent from across the cultural spectrum with Indian, Syrian and Flamenco dancers and a solo performance by guitarist and singer Nick Sier.

The Interfaith Family Fun Day has proven itself to be a great platform for promoting good interfaith relations at a grassroots level.

*Lynnda Wardle & Kemal Okan
Interfaith Glasgow*



EDINBURGH

A LEGACY OF COMPASSION



Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA) was proud to support the capital city and its faith communities as they participated in Scottish Interfaith Week in November, which included over 50 events with more than 20 of these being held in Edinburgh.

There were several highlights to the week, including Edinburgh's launch event hosted by the Lord Provost's office at Edinburgh City Chambers, at which we gave a preview of what events were to take place in Edinburgh that week and guests were entertained by diverse music and dance performances.

The Keynote lecture, co-hosted by EIFA and the Edinburgh University Chaplaincy, was another high point. Aaqil Ahmed, Head of the BBC's Religion and Ethics, spoke to a packed room on the topic of Fearmongering, faith and the responsibility of the media. He addressed many current and controversial issues, coming out quite critical of the printed press and making the case for tighter and stricter regulation to protect minority groups and stop negative stereotyping of people of faith.

All the diverse events, including those by EIFA's members and partners across the city, demonstrated the value of Scottish Interfaith Week, however this was particularly well showcased by the annual Edinburgh Religious Leaders and Faith Representatives Conference. This year the meeting took as its theme compassion, and proposals for Edinburgh to become part of the Compassionate City movement.

A presentation by Dr Gillies (Director of Edinburgh University Compassion Initiative) gave background to the theme, and was followed by a talk by Nick Croft from Edinburgh City Council on the city's vision for Edinburgh in 2050. These provided context and participants were given further food for thought with short presentations from existing interfaith compassion-based projects, including blood donation, the multi-faith court chaplaincy and homelessness aid.

Table-based discussions followed, giving space for the participants to explore how communities might work together more, and build on the initiatives already in place to promote and increase people's experience of compassion.

Overall the event achieved several objectives: bringing together community leaders who do not usually meet

with a common agenda; raising awareness about the Compassionate City project and giving space for its discussion and contemplation; creating opportunities for networking and sharing; and catalysing action with some people committing to volunteer with existing projects or starting new ones within their own communities.

One challenge faced every year is how to ensure the ideas and connections made do not simply fade at the end of the day, as thus far it has not been practicable for the whole group to come together more than once a year.

However despite this, the trickle-down effects of the leaders taking the messages to their own communities can be immeasurable. Representatives from Edinburgh Central Mosque, for example, later commented in their blog, "As a community, we thought: instead of waiting for 2050 to come, why not embrace the vision right now? How are we going to be a mosque serving a City of Sanctuary & Compassion? We aspire to do that through a dedicated ethos of serving Edinburgh through our space, our facilities, in our outreach activities and especially through knowing and understanding each other."

“AS A COMMUNITY, WE THOUGHT:
INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR 2050
TO COME WHY NOT EMBRACE
THE VISION RIGHT NOW?”

The legacy of Interfaith Week, and all the meetings, conversations and new connections that were made, is only just beginning.

Iain Stewart

*General Secretary of Edinburgh
Interfaith Association*



SKYE AND LOCHALSH

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE: CHALLENGING THE HEADLINES

‘DEBATE ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS OFTEN FRAMED BY APPEALS TO EMOTION... TO WHICH FACTUAL REBUTTALS ARE IGNORED’

Skye and Lochalsh Faiths Together Group marked Scottish Interfaith Week with a local event on Saturday 19th November 2016 in Breakish Community Hall by Broadford. It was a cold frosty day outside but inside the hall it was warm and friendly. Some 14 people came along to discuss and comment on 'A World of Difference – Challenging the Headlines' over a shared lunch. We first settled into a thinking mode by watching a clip from the film 'Beyond Tolerance', the section titled 'Religion, Politics & the Media', made by Sonya Sier. We then split into three groups to discuss how the media can affect our view of religion and the role the media should play in influencing society's view of religion. We all recognised that good news is no news, and therefore the media will always concentrate on the bad. False stereotypes of faith groups are built up as people often only read/listen to what they want to hear. Media moguls tend to be bedded into the establishment and tell stories that support the establishment view, and this can lead to minority faith groups being stigmatised to take the blame for government and societal failings. A recent study has shown that our brains respond more strongly to information about groups who are portrayed unfavourably, and thus negative depictions of ethnic/religious minorities in the media can fuel racial bias.

After lunch we looked into aspects of social media in more detail. Social media is a free and powerful tool with virtually unlimited scope. It allows personal expression to be disseminated immediately 24/7 at the click of a button. However, there is a lack of control in the systems, and it is easy to post toxic views. Cyber bullying and trolling is a real danger. We noted the new term "post truth" whereby debate on social media is often framed by appeals to emotion and the repeated assertion of views to which factual rebuttals are ignored. We decided that probably the pros of social media outweigh the cons, and it is a must-use tool for small voluntary groups such as ourselves. Social media enables us to put out information and advertise meetings/events. It lets us share positive stories of faith and interfaith work, and maybe allows us to challenge some of the negative reporting and stereotypes about people of different religions, faiths and beliefs in the larger media. We ended the day by watching a video clip of the 'The Interfaith Amigos' on YouTube. It cheered us up no end and we went back out into the cold feeling fairly positive about the future.

Pat McNicol

Skye and Lochalsh Faiths Together Group

INCLUSIVE CHAPLAINCY

At the University of Stirling, where I am at present the Baha'i representative for the university chaplaincy, the chaplains are now including representatives of 'other faiths' at their planning meetings. As a result we initiated a Scottish Interfaith Week meeting attended by myself, several of the chaplains, Christians, Muslims and quite a few members of the Chinese community. We watched the part of the video 'Beyond Tolerance' concerning Religion and the Media followed by discussion. The meeting was chaired by Rev Dominic Ind of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Hopefully this will lead to further encounters.

Jeremy Fox, Central Scotland Interfaith

JOURNEYS OF FAITH



Fife Interfaith Group held two events to mark Scottish Interfaith Week. The first was held on Monday 14th November at All Saints' Episcopal Church in St Andrews. The Chaplain of the University of St Andrews, Rev Dr Donald MacEwan, gave a talk entitled 'But by me - a Journey of Faith'. The presentation traced his journey from knowing only Christianity to gradually understanding other faiths and following the path of interfaith in his ministry. It was a very interesting audio-visual presentation of his process of learning while working in various locations around the world.

The second event was held on Saturday 19 November and consisted of a guided 'Walk of Faith' through the ruins of St Andrews Cathedral led by archaeologist Edwina Proudfoot who is Chairman of Fife Interfaith Group. Those who attended were treated to an exciting talk concerning the Cathedral and its rise and fall as the centre of Christian worship in Scotland.

Frank Bowness, Fife Interfaith Group

JUST A SUGGESTION

‘THE GROUP WERE A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE
BUT EVENTUALLY A CHOIR TOOK SHAPE’

Fife Diversity Week took place from 5th – 11th September 2016. A new member of Fife Interfaith Group, Rachel Watson, suggested that an Interfaith Choir should take part in the Diversity Gala, which is the grand finale of the week.

At first members of the group were a little apprehensive but eventually a choir took shape, and with limited time an easy programme was devised. The choir was able to perform at the Diversity Gala on 11th September at the Adam Smith Theatre in Kirkcaldy. A medley of Spirituals, a Muslim hymn,

and the Christian hymns 'Amazing Grace' and 'All things bright and beautiful' were followed by some enthusiastic community singing with members of the audience being invited to come and join the choir. The performance was well received and the choir plans to have further rehearsals and learn more harmonies for future performances.

Fife Interfaith Group

GOOD FOOD GOOD DIALOGUE

‘IN VIEW OF RECENT GLOBAL EVENTS IT HAS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA’

Inverness Interfaith Group was set up to promote dialogue, understanding and cooperation between different faiths and to develop bonds of friendship and trust. The group meets regularly. We organise religious, social and educational events, annual picnics, faith sharing, music, dance and poetry, and are involved in social action initiatives, such as helping and supporting refugees. Meetings usually take place in people's homes and often with a shared meal.

On Sunday 20 November, members of Inverness Interfaith Group met by invitation at Inverness Mosque to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week. The mosque was beautifully decorated with oriental rugs and a wood burning stove, just right for a winter evening. A wonderful selection of delicious food was available as well as good company. The meeting involved a workshop on the theme of 'Religion and the Media'. In view of recent global events it has become more important to maintain a positive relationship with the media. Insensitive media reporting has left some faith groups feeling threatened, particularly the Muslim community. In the workshop we were divided into groups and each group was given a different topic that had been reported in a particular newspaper. We then had to decide how accurate the article was: did it have a bias, was it objective, and was it

true or false? There has been a lot of misinformation, distorted information and fake news reporting linked to the rise of social media in recent years. What can you believe? How trustworthy are our politicians or do we prefer to listen to our faith leaders?

Towards the end of December there was an enjoyable Chanukah celebration in the Green Drive Hall where we learned about the historic basis for the Festival of Lights, were entertained by some wonderful Jewish music and song, and provided with an opportunity to sample the delicious foods typical of these events.

In January 2017 we had a Sharing of Faiths evening of shared food and discussion. The latter part was introduced by a presentation by our chairman Rolf Schmidt, with various contributions on the theme of 'Science and Religion'.

Last year the group went on a pilgrimage to Iona and another trip is planned for later in 2017.

*Eleanor Fairclough, Sila Collins-Walde
& Tom Mackenzie*

Inverness Interfaith Group



POSITIVE NEWS FROM DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group organised an event for Scottish Interfaith Week on Wednesday 16th November on the theme of 'Religion and the Media', focussing on the perils of stereotyping, so common in all parts of the media. We discussed a number of questions in small groups: how can we make positive news; how can we contribute to local media; and what qualities would be needed to engage with the media about religion, faith and belief, in a constructive way?

Our preparatory work for the event involved looking through newspapers to collect examples of favourable and unfavourable reporting. This showed us that, aside from the tabloid press, many newspapers seem largely indifferent to religious matters and/or reporting is neutral. Some younger people shared with us that the really negative stuff is to be found on the internet and in social media. We mounted a display of our findings, including material from the magazine 'Positive News'.

Locally we are often able to have our own reports of interfaith events published, but our events are too small to warrant actual press attendance. So we need to be confident in our dealings with the press, and be regular and consistent in our contacts. Alongside members of local faith communities, we were fortunate that our local Council supports us practically, as well as having staff present; police representatives attended in connection with their equality/diversity work, and the Dumfries & Galloway Multicultural Association also supported us.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Dumfries organised an event for Scottish Interfaith Week on the theme of 'Religion and the Media' on Saturday 19th November. Members of other faiths were represented and took part in a discussion that followed a presentation on the

impact of the various forms of media and its role in forming our views and opinions especially about religion and people of faith. The evening came to a close by participants reading the Golden Rule as stated in all major faiths which is about treating others the way we would like to be treated, and the quote about 'so powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth'.

“ WE NEED TO BE CONFIDENT IN OUR DEALINGS WITH THE PRESS, AND BE REGULAR AND CONSISTENT IN OUR CONTACTS ”

The Women's Group that meets at Dumfries & Galloway Multicultural Centre organised an event for Scottish Interfaith Week. The gathering focussed on well-being; pictures and words that lift the spirit. Using largely recycled materials, we constructed small personal books, which in themselves are our own "good news". Pictures of the natural world, particular colours, and words that have special meaning featured prominently. It was a happy, relaxed and industrious afternoon.



CHANUKAH CELEBRATION

“ FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY 50 YEARS, JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE REGION GATHERED FOR A PRE-CHANUKAH CELEBRATION ”

Members of Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group have long wondered if there were any Jewish residents in the area as there is no local synagogue. Apparently from the 1860s to the 1970s there was a small Jewish community, dispersed as an unintended consequence of town centre development. Now, for the first time in nearly 50 years, Jewish people in the region gathered for a pre-Chanukah celebration organised by a local Christian minister and members of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities. Members of the public were invited via the local newspaper and those gathered included representatives from a number of local churches and those of other faiths or no religious affiliation.

The history of Chanukah was described to us, commemorating the reclaiming of the Temple in Jerusalem, and emphasising the importance of the preservation of culture. Religious objects such as the menorah (eight-branched candlestick) and the dreidl were explained

and there was the opportunity to try out some artwork too, for adults and children.

There was a delicious supper spread out before us, including latkes, and much animated conversation accompanied the meal. The highlight for me was a conversation with a woman currently embarking on the process of converting to Judaism. Her husband is not Jewish, but fully supports her. To me this was something rare and inspiring to hear, especially given the detailed process of conversion through which she has to go.

Having made contact, Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group now hopes to be able to work with the Jewish community of the region on interfaith activities in the future.

Jan Lethbridge

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

A FUN FILLED 2016



Our first venture in 2016 was the **JOURNEY OF HOPE** event which took place in Thortree Hall in March. Our objective was to welcome Syrian refugee families and hear accounts of their journeys and to provide hope through listening to the successful journeys of refugees from many different parts of the world who have found welcome and settled in Scotland throughout the years. We received a small grant from East Renfrewshire Council to help fund this and MSP Stewart Maxwell was in attendance.

The **FESTIVAL OF COLOUR** event took place in Rouken Glen Park on 30th July. Again it was a hugely successful event and there was fun and laughter from both volunteers and those who were participating in the throwing of the colour.

In July we were invited to Erskine's Boden Boo Wood and **FUN IN THE FOREST** - a joint venture with Renfrewshire Faith Forum. The Forestry Commission who supported the event offered wonderful family entertainment including den building, face painting, storytelling and leaf painting.

Our sixth annual **DIVERSITY FUN DAY** took place in Barrhead Foundry on 1st September. More than 300 children took part. The youth leaders who volunteered for the day represented the Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths and they did a fantastic job with the children who visited the faith and culture exhibits and had great fun dressing in the various cultural traditions, trying on turbans and saris. The children also experienced sports and dancing sessions including Israeli and Indian/Bollywood dancing. The kosher bread went down very well. The children were each given porcelain pens to illustrate a mug outlining what they had learnt on the day, to be given to parents after the event. The venture was funded by Asda Carrier Bag Community Grants administered by Foundation Scotland and by Claremont Trust to whom we owe a huge thank you.

“ *THE CHILDREN WHO VISITED THE FAITH AND CULTURE EXHIBITS HAD GREAT FUN DRESSING IN THE VARIOUS CULTURAL TRADITIONS, TRYING ON TURBANS AND SARIS* ”

In October, a **PAKORA MASTER CLASS** was arranged at the Salvation Army, Barrhead. Farkhanda Chaudhry from East Renfrewshire Council was the chef/teacher and at the end of the night everyone had achieved a measure of success in the preparation and cooking of pakora.

SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK was launched in Paisley Town Hall on Sunday 13th November with guest speakers and entertainment. East Renfrewshire had joint ventures with Renfrewshire Faith Forum throughout the week. The highlight of the week for me was the ceilidh which took place in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Paisley.

At a recent meeting it was suggested that senior pupils from all the high schools in East Renfrewshire could get involved with the Forum. A meeting was arranged at St Ninian's High School and it is now hoped that the head boy and head girl from all the high schools will have a role to play in the Forum.

Grace Brookmyre
East Renfrewshire Faith Forum



DEEPENING FAITHS

‘ OUR GROWING GROVE, NOW STANDS AT 38 TREES ’



Interfaith Moray meets every other month in Elgin. In 2016 we completed the cycle of every member introducing their faith tradition. We found this immensely helpful, as we got not only a deeper understanding of the faiths, but also had a chance for extensive question-and-answer sessions.

With the introductions complete, we wanted to bring in a more contemplative component to our gatherings. To that end, we now select one topic for each meeting. In the first round everyone explains something about that topic from their faith tradition. The second round is a chance to introduce something participatory. The chants, songs, prayers, stories, and readings people share bring a wonderful new and deep dimension to our meetings. And we recently used the NHS / Interfaith Scotland publication, Reflections of Life, to help choose a topic.

In the wider local community, 2016 saw us host the second annual Celebration of International Peace Day. Held at Newbold House in Forres, the afternoon was very well

attended with lots of activities for both adults and children: a talk by Paraic Reamonn (a Church of Scotland minister in Jerusalem), the World Peace Prayer Society's flag ceremony, songs by the local Interfaith choir, and more.

‘ THE CHANTS, SONGS, PRAYERS,
STORIES AND READINGS
PEOPLE SHARE BRING A
WONDERFUL NEW AND DEEP
DIMENSION TO OUR MEETINGS ’

For Interfaith Week, we compiled a list of our member groups' public meetings and made it a point to try to visit each other. Our Growing Grove, started during the 2015 Interfaith Week with support from Interfaith Scotland, now stands at 38 trees. Individuals or groups can add to this grove at any time by purchasing a tree online. We do this through the local charity Trees for Life, and in 2016 we organised a day out for Interfaith Moray members with the charity.

Looking forward, we are now starting to map the Peace Poles that are already in place in Moray. We are hoping that more faith groups will join Interfaith Moray in 2017.

For more info and photos, please visit our Facebook page at <https://en-gb.facebook.com/interfaithmoray/>

Claralynn Nunamaker, Interfaith Moray

WEST LoTHIAN

“LET’S EAT TOGETHER”

West Lothian Faith Group and Race Forum organised a “Let’s Eat Together” event in May aimed at bringing together local people of different faiths and beliefs.

About 70 guests came along representing the Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Brahma Kumaris faiths as well as members of local churches, Deans Mosque, the One World Group, Milan Group and the Edinburgh Woman's Interfaith Group. The event was held in West Lothian College with a delicious buffet prepared by the college cookery students. Lots of good links were made that evening. People reacquainted themselves with old friends and new relationships were formed. The interest shown as people spoke was tremendous.

As a Police Scotland Engagement Officer, I work with both the Faith Group and the Race Forum, and attended with my Partnerships Superintendent, Bryan Rodgers and local Constable, Lee Brodie. As a police officer who often sees



conflict based on race and religion, it was great to see people from different faiths share their stories, experiences and learn from each other.

‘ IT WAS GREAT TO SEE PEOPLE FROM
DIFFERENT FAITHS SHARE THEIR
STORIES, EXPERIENCES AND
LEARN FROM EACH OTHER ’

PC Rona Duncan

West Lothian Faith Group and Race Forum

PEOPLE WHO CARE

‘KEEP ALL SPECIAL THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES FOR LIFETIMES TO COME. SHARE THESE KEEPSAKES WITH OTHERS TO INSPIRE HOPE AND BUILD FROM THE PAST, WHICH CAN BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE’

Mattie J.T. Stepanek (1990-2004)



In May 2016, members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group shared an **INTERFAITH WALK BY THE SEA** to share our stories and views and get to know each other better. We ended our walk with a gracious welcome at the Varapunya Meditation Centre where they provided us all with refreshments and we all shared in a meditation.

We shared our own faith's experiences of **rites of passage** in our September meeting with discussion about each important stage of life. We were delighted to have some new faces present from different faith groups including a Jewish Canadian with Scottish roots. It was interesting to hear what other faiths do in connection with Rites of Passage – so many different ideas on what needs to happen at key points in life.

For our **INTERFAITH WEEK** event, Anna Magnusson gave us a very thought provoking talk on the theme of Religion and the Media, which led members present to ask for some training in media releases and giving presentations, which we hope to take forward in 2017.

The Rev. Caroline Cormack conducted a themed **INTERFAITH SERVICE FOR ONE WORLD WEEK** on Sunday 23rd October. The theme was “Including You - Acting Together for One World in Peace”, taking action for justice, locally and globally. Present and contributing to the service were members of the Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Church of Scotland, Hindu, Mormon, Muslim, Pagan, Quaker and Unitarian faiths. As well as readings, meditation and thoughts there was Hindu chanting and the distribution of written peace messages between those attending.



In December we shared some **WINTER WORDS**, as we reflected together with words from our different faith traditions about winter, darkness and light. This was a lovely peaceful evening which could have gone on all night!

On a very dreich Saturday in January, a number of folk gathered to take part in a Genocide Memorial Walk across the bridges and along the river Dee, and to share breakfast together. The lovely fresh bread was from the 'Breadmaker', a Social Enterprise in Aberdeen, the left over bread in the baskets were donated to the Holy Family Little Sisters of the Needy, and given out that day to homeless people. Those who took part wrote a short reflection (below) about the walk and the readings we shared, from Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, Cambodia and the Holocaust.

'God let us come together and hold all the victims of genocide in our hearts'.

'Always good to remember in the hope we can prevent future atrocities'.

'Change starts with myself – when I change the world changes'.

'It is moving to know that even up in the north-east of Scotland people care about coming together to remember atrocities committed in other places of the world'.

Aberdeen Inter Faith Group

YOUTH INITIATIVE: EAST RENFREWSHIRE



positive difference that interfaith dialogue can make in society. A follow up meeting was held during Scottish Interfaith Week when plans were made to host an interfaith quiz. Twelve of the young people then formed a steering group and organised an 'Interfaith Quiz' for World Harmony Week which took place at St Ninian's High School in February 2017. Around 200 pupils from six local schools attended a fun and informative evening and it is planned that this will become an annual event for local schools in East Renfrewshire.



Interfaith Scotland was contacted by East Renfrewshire Council to discuss the development of a local interfaith group for young people aged 15 – 18 in East Renfrewshire. A first meeting was held at Eastwood House in August 2016 where 20 young people from local schools were in attendance. After some 'getting to know you' team building exercises, the young people spoke passionately about the

GLOW MEET

Interfaith Scotland was asked to deliver a 'Glow Meet' for teachers of Religious and Moral Education on the topic of interfaith dialogue. Glow is a web-conferencing service managed by Education Scotland that aims to enhance learning and teaching in the classroom. Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, Frances Hume, was interviewed for a 45-minute after school programme for teachers. This can be viewed online at: <https://vimeo.com/184655807>

FAITH SHARING SCHOOLS PROJECT

It has been another busy year for Interfaith Scotland's schools volunteers. Nila Joshi, a Hindu volunteer and Mohamed Omar, a Muslim volunteer, travelled to Fort William with our Development Officer to talk about their faiths at three primary schools in Fort William and Spean Bridge. Sukhcharan Kaur from the Sikh faith, travelled to Lincluden Primary School in Dumfries with a car full of Sikh artefacts and instruments to show to the pupils.

St Modans High School in Stirling and Oban High School invited volunteers to their annual 'interfaith days' and Interfaith Scotland provided eight volunteers from the Christian, Muslim, Baha'i, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish faiths. The Development Officer also delivered sessions on interfaith dialogue to Rainbow Guides aged 5 – 7 at Stirling North Church and S5 pupils at Airdrie Academy.



'SIDE BY SIDE'

‘THERE WAS A SENSE OF UNITY AND WOMEN POWER!’

Following on from the success of last year's event, Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Glasgow jointly hosted a Women's Interfaith Fair organised as part of Refugee Festival Scotland at our dialogue centre in Glasgow. The theme this year was 'Solidarity' which was the theme of the 2016 festival. Approximately 100 Women attended the event, from 10 faiths and beliefs!

The participants had the opportunity to meet each other, engage in meaningful conversation and enjoy various interfaith activities, organised around interfaith craft activity tables which were hosted by volunteers from different faith and belief traditions. These included learning to tie a hijab, paint Diwali lamps, paint pagan stones, try Arabic calligraphy and Chinese origami and engage in interfaith dialogue at the Dialogue Tree on the theme of 'Solidarity.' New Rhythms for Glasgow provided the choir who gave us some wonderful opening songs and hosted two singing workshops. A drama



teacher provided a drama and movement session. Local complementary therapists generously provided massage, nail treatments and reflexology free of charge for participants. We also had information stalls from North Glasgow Community Food Initiative, Springburn Jobs and Business Glasgow, the Forestry Commission, RNIB, Waverley Health Care and Kidney Research UK.

We asked one of our refugee women to speak at the event – she is originally from Ivory Coast and came to Glasgow as an asylum seeker in 2012. Her story of hope was definitely a highlight of the event. There was a free lunch provided and as the event was during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting during daylight hours, plastic containers were available for Muslim participants to take away some food for the evening. The activities took place in a welcoming, relaxed and fun atmosphere. We had some wonderful feedback from the event which is highlighted below.

'Another fantastic event by a fantastic organisation. So glad to be part of it again this year. My kids had a blast!'

'Loved meeting the people'.

'So so Fun! What an amazing mix of women and different activities'.

Lynnda Wardle

Acting director of Interfaith Glasgow

SUPPORTING FRIENDSHIPS

Under the leadership of Khalida Akoub, Women of Faith & Community meet at 9.30am on the first Monday of every month (except where it falls on a holiday) in the Napiershall Street Centre in Glasgow. Up to 20 women of different faith traditions gather in a spirit of enquiry, sharing and interest in each other.

From September 2016, two women each month from the group have volunteered to prepare a topic for dialogue. This has had the advantage of sharing preparation time and engaging people fully in the process. These topics have included: 'what gives us hope in our lives', 'our life experiences as women' and 'what aspects of our faith have provided reassurance when we are anxious'. Friendships have developed and support has been given to those in difficulties. When asked for her views on the value of the group, one member replied that it provides a safe place in which to ask questions about each other's lives and beliefs and to learn about our shared concerns.

In January 2017, several members attended an Interfaith Burns Supper at the new Gurdwara in Berkeley Street, Glasgow. This was a joyful occasion. In thanking the Sikh community for their wonderful hospitality people wrote the following:

'It was good to see different communities gathered together and to see what it is like to feel Scottish'.

'You were all so welcoming. I think of you all often and wish you all well'.

Women of Faith & Community wish to express their appreciation of the assistance of the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council in practical support for the group.



Alison Spurway

Women of Faith & Community

FAITHS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE MEDIA

‘IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT THE MEDIA HAS NOT MADE THE PUBLIC MORE AWARE ABOUT THIS’



On Wednesday 16th November 2016, The Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) celebrated Scottish Interfaith Week at the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh, on the theme of 'Religion and the Media'. The event provided an opportunity for local women to get together and promote understanding and co-operation between diverse religious communities and an understanding of people's personal journeys of faith.

After everyone had introduced themselves, speakers from three faiths shared information about their faith and its relationship to the media. Jo from the Baha'i Community explained that this world faith emphasizes that we are all connected to each other. Anjam, from the Shi'a Muslim faith, shared about her faith emphasizing that it is a peaceful religion in which women are respected, based on the fact that we are all brothers and sisters. She said that this is generally ignored by the media and that the reporting in the media regarding Islam was mostly negative. The Pope was

about the only person to get good reports! She pondered how to unite all faiths in the present situation in the world.

Paramji shared about the Sikh faith which evolved from Hinduism in the 14th century. Sikhs believe that all religions are equal, with one creator and aiming for peace. Over 90,000 Sikhs died in World War Two and it is unfortunate that the media has not made the public more aware about this. Mary from the organisation "The Art of Living" explained that it is active in 155 countries and aims to reduce stress by advocating healthy food, good sleep, a calm meditative state of mind and an emphasis on breathing.

Finally Ann Milles gave an appreciation of Elizabeth Carnall who died on 23rd December 2015. Ann met Elizabeth when she worked in the Peace and Justice Centre at St John's Church in Edinburgh and also when Elizabeth became involved in a project about four Quaker women who fought to abolish the slave trade. The project was on display at the Museum for three months. Elizabeth's knowledge and quiet confidence was inspiring. She was a remarkable woman who is much missed.

After that, the group enjoyed a delicious vegetarian finger buffet with traditional homemade Indian sweets. Over 30 ladies from various group and individuals took part in the event which was a great success. EWIG is very grateful to Interfaith Scotland and The Quaker Meeting House for their support for this event.

A SPIRITUALLY UPLIFTING DAY

Our summer day trip to Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Eskdalemuir was organised on Saturday 30th July 2016. Forty-two women and children from diverse faiths came and had a memorable day at the Buddhist Temple. The group shared the picnic lunch, visited the Stupa and tied strips of coloured ribbons to the Cloutie Tree to symbolise their prayers and good wishes to their friend and family members.

We visited the Temple and enjoyed the chanting of mantras and meditations and the group had the chance to attend the Puja (worship) followed by Q&A. In the afternoon the group enjoyed ginger tea and Pakoras and a visit to the herb garden, gift shop, exhibition and a walk by the river.

Our journey home was enlivened, by some singing, and we all felt that we had really enjoyed our outing. It was a great opportunity to meet with women of other faiths in a relaxed and informal way.

All in all, it was a wonderful and spiritually uplifting day out.

We are extremely grateful to the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association for funding our multi-faith outing this summer 2016.



Nila Joshi

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group

TEACH US ABOUT LIVING



The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2017 was 'How can life go on'? Interfaith Scotland worked in partnership with East Dunbartonshire Council to host the National Holocaust Memorial Day commemorative event, which took place in Bishopbriggs on 26th January 2017.

The aftermath of the Holocaust and of subsequent genocides continues to raise challenging questions for individuals, communities and nations. This year we asked people to think about what happens after genocide and of our own responsibilities in the wake of such a crime.

The key note speakers for 2017 were Saskia Tepe who is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and author of 'Surviving Brigitte's Secrets', which tells of her mother's journey after liberation and Umutesi Stewart, who is a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, now living in Scotland.

UMUTESI'S STORY

Umutesi was born near the small city of Gisenyi, Rwanda, in 1984. When the genocide engulfed the country in 1994 she fled her home with her brother and two younger sisters. She spent the next four years on a dangerous march for survival through the jungles of Congo, during which time her brother was murdered. Umutesi now has a message of hope. She explains, "we should not be slaves of our past but learn from it to shape a better future".



SASKIA'S STORY

Saskia Tepe is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and refugee. Her mother, Brigitte, was a Sudeten German who experienced the tribulations of WWII during the Holocaust and again during the ethnic cleansing that occurred in the former Sudetenland between 1945 and 1947. Brigitte only told Saskia the barest minimum about her war time

experiences. It was not until after she died that Saskia was able to piece together the remainder of her mother's story, and understand and fully appreciate the choices Brigitte was forced to make. Saskia's memoir 'Surviving Brigitte's Secrets' was begun for cathartic reasons. Once she came to terms with her loss, she realised how important it was to share her and Brigitte's remarkable stories of triumph over adversity in their personal struggles to overcome the deep emotional wounds of war and its aftermath, and rebuild their lives in the UK.

In total, Saskia and Umutesi spent a total of 8 days speaking to hundreds of school pupils in Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire, Edinburgh, East Renfrewshire and Shetland as well as visiting and speaking at Low Moss prison and holding workshops at a youth conference at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow. This packed programme of events and workshops touched many young people's hearts and allowed our speakers to tell their stories of how life can go on, giving many of us hope for the future in these uncertain times.



Umutesi and Saskia have shared their moving stories on the Interfaith Scotland blog page:
<https://interfaithscotland.wordpress.com>

22 January

Over 100 people attended a Peace and Reconciliation service at Glasgow University Chapel. Saskia Tepe told her story of survival and living on and we enjoyed some powerful music from the East Dunbartonshire senior orchestra.

23 January

Saskia visited HMP Lowmoss to speak to a group of prisoners about her and her mother's experiences of war and living on. Twelve men in Lowmoss had been working with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust to become Youth Champions and they were awarded with their certificate from Saskia, alongside pupils from Bishopbriggs academy who too had studied to become Youth Champions. In addition to this, many of the prisoners from HMP Lowmoss had been working on moving art and poetry which was displayed at the National Memorial event.

In the afternoon, Saskia visited Isobel Mair school in East Renfrewshire where she spoke to pupils and lit a memorial candle.



24 January

Saskia and Umutesi attended two East Dunbartonshire schools events. In the morning they were invited to St Ninians High School in Kirkintilloch and in the afternoon they attended Boclair Academy in Bearsden.

They were welcomed by Provost Una Walker and the staff teams who were responsible for working with the students who were performing for the guest speakers. After watching the moving and powerful acts from the pupils, Saskia and Umutesi both had the opportunity to present to the students and take questions afterwards.

25 January

After the success of 2016's event, Museums Learning in Glasgow held their second one-day conference for young people at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. The young people debated and explored the reasons for genocide and how we can all live on after such atrocities. They heard from Saskia and Umutesi and had the opportunity to ask them questions after the presentations.

Umutesi and Saskia then travelled through to Edinburgh to attend and speak at an evening of readings, personal reflections and musical performances by the students of Drummond Community High School in partnership with Edinburgh Interfaith Association and take questions afterwards.

26TH JANUARY BISHOPBRIGGS ACADEMY



On Thursday 26th January, candles were lit at Bishopbriggs Academy, in front of 300 guests on the eve of the Holocaust Memorial Day. Scotland's Deputy First Minister John Swinney spoke about the dangers of denying fundamental human freedoms and allowing bigotry to flourish. Provost Una Walker of East Dunbartonshire, spoke of how commemorating the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz helps the world to remember everyone affected by the Holocaust, as well as other terrible genocides around the world in places such as Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

The key note speakers for 2017 were Saskia Tepe and Umutesi Stewart. Saskia and Umutesi both bravely shared their powerful stories at the National Memorial event.

The evening also included performances from young people from across East Dunbartonshire, interpreting this year's Holocaust Memorial Day theme - How can life go on? From poetry, to dance, to music, everyone was deeply moved by the young students' passionate and powerful performances.

Also, thought provoking art exhibitions interpreting this year's theme were on display with contributions from Low Moss Prison and East Dunbartonshire students.

27 January

Saskia and Umutesi presented at the annual Glasgow Schools Holocaust Memorial Day Event which brings together pupils from schools across the city who have been involved in Holocaust Education.

This event was held in the City Chambers, where pupils shared some of the work they had undertaken in the classroom through music, drama and presentations.

It was hosted by pupils from St Roch's Secondary School who took part in the Holocaust Education Trusts's 'Lessons from Auschwitz' Programme who also shared their learnings from this unforgettable visit.

Mel Grossman

Project Officer Interfaith Scotland

TIME FOR REFLECTION



A transcript of 'Time for Reflection' delivered at the Scottish Parliament on 17th January 2017 by Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland

Today is the 17th of January. It was on the 17th of January 1945 that SS units began the final evacuation of prisoners from Auschwitz marching them on foot toward the interior of the German Reich. These 'death marches' caused thousands to perish. SS guards shot anyone who fell behind or could not continue. Prisoners suffered from starvation and exposure and it is hard for us to imagine what was endured in the depth of winter 72 years ago today.

On 26th January Scotland will remember the Holocaust and subsequent genocides at our national event to be held in Bishopbriggs Academy. Speaking at the event will be daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Saskia Tepe and survivor of the Rwandan Genocide Umutesi Stuart.

The theme of the Memorial this year is 'How can life go on' - a question that survivors must have asked themselves. It is a question that we in Scotland must also ask ourselves when we consider the refugees and asylum seekers who arrive in our country - many having already suffered war, deprivation and trauma - just how can life go on when any sense of normality is removed - what is needed to help people live on and live on with hope. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said

'For the survivor death is not the problem. Death was an everyday occurrence. We learned to live with Death. The problem is to adjust to life, to living. You must teach us about living'.

**“JUST HOW CAN
LIFE GO ON WHEN ANY
SENSE OF NORMALITY
IS REMOVED”**

I have often thought how difficult it must be to 'adjust to life' after devastating trauma. My mother-in-law struggled to adjust to life after being sent as a child on the kinder transport to the UK and then learning that her parents had been killed in Hitler's gas chambers. Later, unable to adjust to family life she walked out when her children were still infants and it was only at her

funeral 12 years later they learned they were Jewish. 'Living on' can be a struggle that impacts on future generations as our Holocaust Memorial guest speaker Saskia explores in her book - 'Surviving Brigitte's Secrets'.

But what does this mean for all of us - how do we help individuals, families and communities 'live on' in the aftermath of terror and displacement? Scotland is home to many who are 'living on' away from their homeland, sometimes facing discrimination, and always living with memories and loss. It is easy for us to feel overwhelmed with the magnitude of suffering and become paralysed by it but I have read stories of how acts of kindness during the Holocaust gave someone the will to 'live on' and I have witnessed asylum seekers weep at a kindly gesture. Never underestimate the power of simply being kind.

I would like to end with an adapted excerpt from a poem by Naomi Nye from Columbia

KINDNESS

....Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the refugee
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.
Before you know kindness as the deepest thing
inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
..... Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and
purchase bread, only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

Dr. Maureen Sier

RAISING AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

On 12 January 2017 the Scottish Interfaith Group on Domestic Abuse hosted a lunchtime event in the Robert Burns Room of the Scottish Parliament, to which all MSPs and Faith Leaders were invited. George Adam, MSP, sponsored this event and we are grateful to him for making it possible for us to raise the issue of abuse to a wider audience. After beginning with a prayer, the history of our group and the work we have been involved in over the years was outlined as well as some exciting new developments in schools, the prison service and hopefully, the production of an educational DVD, should funding become available.

To increase understanding of the complicated issues facing someone fleeing from abuse, an interactive exercise was used to illustrate some of the common misunderstandings of the

process of abuse and how it develops. Everyone took part in a quiz, which helped to dispel some of the myths relating to the effects on families and individuals.

After a question and answer session we finished with a prayer and a few words about our basis in faith. Networking time followed, allowing useful connections to be made for future events and new fields of work. Many thanks to the Scottish Parliament for allowing this event to take place.

Jean Urruhart

Scottish Interfaith Group on Domestic Abuse

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BUILDING RESILIENCE

One of the pleasures of the role of Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is the opportunity it has given me to engage with people from other faith communities. From attending an event in St Andrews, where along with many others I signed a Declaration of Common Humanity, to participating in an interfaith service in Leith, I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet with fellow travellers on the journey of faith and life.

When I visited London I was welcomed at the home of the Chief Rabbi, and shortly before Christmas I was a guest at a dinner hosted by the President of the Ahlul Bayt Society to celebrate the birth of the Prophet and the birth of Jesus. When a mosque in Cumbernauld was daubed with graffiti, I wrote to express the concern and support of the Church of Scotland and, as well as receiving a very warm reply, I also received an invitation to attend the opening ceremony. I was also able to attend an event during Scottish Interfaith Week hosted by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh which brought together people from a wide spectrum of faith communities.

Recently at a meeting of church leaders with the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, she spoke of her concern for community cohesion, the importance of the freedom of religion and conscience, and the role of the church in taking

the initiative to establish good relationships with people of other faith traditions in order to build strong and resilient communities.

“THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE FREEDOM
OF RELIGION AND
CONSCIENCE”

Given Jesus' command to love our neighbour, and the social and cultural context in which we are living, building good relationships among the faith communities is so important and I have been glad to make this one of the priorities of my year as Moderator.

Russell Barr

Moderator of the Church of Scotland



Into Darkness

I don't like them, they look different from us

*They come over here, take our jobs and our
own people can't get jobs*

*They bring the trouble here, why don't their
faith leaders speak out about it*

They are all terrorists anyway

They should be banned from coming to Britain

Hate crimes are on the increase

Racist attacks in the suburbs

Into Light

*Are we not all different in style, shape,
colour, ability and character? We each have
a contribution to make to the rich tapestry
of culture in this country*

*There would be serious problems in the food,
agriculture and fishing industries if foreign
workers were not available to take up the jobs*

*Why don't you speak out? It is so easy to
blame others and expect someone else to fix it*

*We should examine what we say and do
that contribute to our culture where
terrorism thrives*

*So should we be banned from going anywhere
else in the world to work?*

*Learning about other faiths increases our
understanding and we find that we have
a lot in common*

*Multicultural events like those arranged by
Interfaith Scotland help to educate and
strengthen communities, build skills and
bring people together in friendship*

Drama by Jean Urquhart and Shelagh McKay from the Renfrewshire Interfaith Group

With every negative statement a piece of silk was placed over the person putting them into isolation and darkness and with every positive statement the silks were removed bringing the person back into community and back into the light.