



Interfaith
Scotland

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH DIALOGUE



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Friendship • Cooperation • Dialogue • Respect • Understanding

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Scottish Interfaith Week 2013

Scottish Interfaith Week was a great success with over 60 events taking place across Scotland. Here is a sampling of these events below. We are grateful to the many partners and participants that helped advance the spirit of interfaith during this eventful week.

Interfaith Scotland's National Celebration for the week took place in Kirkcaldy on Tuesday 26th November 2013. Participants enjoyed a variety of speakers from different faiths and organisations, and a book launch of Rev Finlay Macdonald's book, 'Luke Paul and the Mosque'. From his experience as Principal Clerk and Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Finlay gave a fictionalised account of a minister who wrestles with interfaith relations both within and between faiths.

Also on the programme were talks by Zahida Ramzan, Equalities Co-ordinator for Fife Council; Gael Logan, Legacy Manager at Glasgow 2014, the Organising Committee for the 2014 Commonwealth Games; Joe Brady, Head of Integration Services at the Scottish Refugee Council; Mohamed Omar, youth volunteer at Interfaith Scotland and working in Edinburgh as Policy Officer for the Joint Improvement Team, and Sr Isabel Smyth, Chair of Interfaith Scotland. They spoke on 'Values and Visions for Scotland', which was the theme for Scottish Interfaith Week 2013. In light of the Scottish Referendum in September 2014, Interfaith Scotland found it important to reflect on what kind of Scotland we would like to live in, regardless of the political outcome.

(As it happens, the Scottish government's White Paper entitled 'Scotland's Future' had been released that very afternoon.)



Participants were treated to a demonstration of Scottish-Indian fusion dance by Sudakshina Kundu. There was also an exhibition of Interfaith Scotland's artefacts from major religions, and one organised by Fife Interfaith Group of the different faiths in Fife. At the end of the evening, participants discussed the future shape of interfaith dialogue in the emerging Scotland of the 21st century.

Note: a short film of this event has been created, with interviews and extracts from some of the talks. It can be found on the Interfaith Scotland website, on the Interfaith Scotland YouTube channel, or can be borrowed from the office in DVD format.



Fife Interfaith Group Annual Lecture

A lecture was delivered by Neil Douglas-Klotz, co-founder of the Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace, on Thursday 28th November 2013. The author of such books as *Desert Wisdom*, *The Tent of Abraham* and *The Hidden Gospel*, he is a former chair of the Mysticism Group of the American Academy of Religion and member of the Scientific and Medical Network UK. In his talk he traced the history of the interfaith movement since World War II. His deep knowledge of Abrahamic texts and Sufism brought his subject to life, highlighting the importance of language and alternative interpretations of texts.

Oneness – an interfaith event in Skye

Faiths Together held a wonderful event around the theme of Oneness, at St Columba's church in Portree on the island of Skye, on Saturday 30th November 2013, as part of Scottish Interfaith Week. Participants were first invited to walk around the room, reading quotations on the walls from many religious traditions, organised on posters into nine basic themes: The Golden Rule, There are many paths to God, There is One God, Heaven is within, The peace that passes understanding, God is found in the heart, Living in Unity, God is Love, and Better to examine the self. Participants then sat round a central candle placed on a rainbow design, ringed by unlit votive candles, designed by Ruth Goodheir. Gerry Layton narrated her personal experience of the oneness of humanity from places she has lived, and Jim Towers spoke about the common essence of religions.



Those present were invited to say which of the many wall quotations spoke to them most and why, and light a candle. This main part of the event unfolded as a surprisingly rich and variegated discussion, with such refreshingly coherent presentness by all involved that the discussion truly took on a rare and sacred character informed by the wisdom and perspective of those present.

At the end, Sonja Eckl-Riel led a Metta (loving kindness) Meditation, wishing safety, peace, happiness, and health, firstly to oneself, secondly to a good friend, thirdly to a “neutral” person, fourthly to a difficult person, and lastly to the wider community.

Glasgow Interfaith Week Events

Over 25 events took place across Glasgow for Scottish Interfaith Week 2013, of which six are reported on below. Please see the Interfaith Glasgow website for more details: www.interfaithglasgow.org

Faith & Poverty Event

Interfaith Glasgow held an event in partnership with St Mary's Justice & Aid Network exploring how faith communities are helping challenge poverty and addressing the need across Glasgow, on 27th November. Kindly hosted by the Lord Provost of Glasgow in Glasgow City Chambers, it brought together over 60 delegates from a wide range of faith and belief communities and anti-poverty organisations.

Hanzala Malik MSP convened the meeting after a civic welcome from Bailie Scanlon. Speakers included Morag Gillespie (Scottish Poverty Information Unit), who gave vital insight into the extent of poverty in Scotland today, Kathy Galloway (Chief Executive of Christian Aid Scotland), Venerable Rewatha (Scottish Buddhist Vihara), Dr Rizy Mohammed (Islamic perspective), and Charandeep Singh and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Glasgow Gurdwara).



Following the talks, ten simultaneous interactive workshops began. The event was a unique opportunity to discuss poverty – an issue of great common concern – as a community of differing faiths and belief systems, and seek avenues for collaboration in future.

Women's Interfaith Coffee Morning

The overall atmosphere of the interfaith coffee morning that took place in Pollokshaws Burgh Hall on Monday 25th November was generosity. Women from different faiths gave of their time to do hand massage, henna painting and jewellery making. Others brought food and gifts to be sold, in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The event made over £200, and many of the women attending expressed a desire to host their own coffee morning – a fruitful and interesting result.



A Lecture by Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel

Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel made a welcome return to Glasgow University's Theology Department on Thursday 28th November to launch his new book, 'Pluralism in Chinese Religion'.

Interfaith Family Fair

An “Interfaith Family Fair” was held in St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art by Interfaith Glasgow on the last day of Scottish Interfaith Week 2013. Members from ten faith and belief traditions hosted stalls, showing sacred objects, sharing foods from their traditions, and most of all speaking to one another and asking questions. Stalls were also hosted by the Scottish Football Association, Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, and the Forestry Commission Scotland, all seeking to reach out to Glasgow’s diverse communities. Children and adults enjoyed henna, face-painting, Arabic art, making their own mini Zen gardens, and a Treasure Trail that took them around some of the religious artefacts in the Museum.

The day was brought to a joyful close by a fashion show and dancing of the Maryhill Integration Network dancers, whose mix of cultural costumes, dance styles and music illustrated so well why Glasgow’s diversity is worth celebrating. This event assembled over 150 people from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and religions, with the hard work of six volunteers from five religions.

As one organiser, Alan McGlashan of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, noted: ‘[T]he event captured what I take to be the true spirit of Interfaith. We are all Children of God, no matter what individual label that we attach. (...) The Family Fair symbolised that very concept as all who entered enjoyed the experience as one.’



Photo: Dr S Multani



Interfaith Dialogue at Deaf Connections

This event on 26th November was attended by deaf, hearing and hard of hearing individuals from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu backgrounds, all willing to discuss what it is actually like to be deaf or hard of hearing. Topics included the barriers that exist in becoming a fully engaged part of one’s faith community, and examples of good things that have been done to include people in their faiths. People felt they were sharing an experience that was common, discussing solutions and a positive way forward. Hopefully this interfaith dialogue will continue on its shared journey towards lasting change.

Conversations in Faith

The Ignatian Spirituality Centre hosted an evening of conversation on Wednesday 27th November. Sr Isabel Smyth, a Christian, and Ms Fariha Thomas, a Muslim, discussed what it means to be a Muslim living in Scotland today. Participants asked their own questions of Fariha and there was a lively discussion about the place of religion in Scotland today and issues such as the wearing of the veil, extremism and the involvement of young people in faith communities.

Renfrewshire Interfaith Group Opens its Doors

Renfrewshire Interfaith Group celebrated its launch at Wallneuk North Church on 24th November 2013. Wallneuk's minister, Rev Peter Gill, has been chosen as Chairperson of the group.

Rev Gill gave a very warm welcome as people of seven religious communities came together to worship under one roof—Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Bahai's, Roman Catholics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Church of Scotland. A special welcome was extended to Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland. Deputy Provost John Caldwell and Councillors Bill Perrie, Andy Doig, Bill Brown and Eddie Grady also attended.



Local bagpiper Steven Bright welcomed all at the church gate in a traditional Scottish style. Rev Gill preached on The Good Samaritan. He urged all in attendance to “love each other with unconditional love” and invited members of all faiths and none to join the Wallneuk North congregation for a cup of tea or coffee with pakoras after the Sunday Service. The Sikh community invited everyone at the church for an interfaith lunch. The Renfrewshire Interfaith Group is open to all. Please contact: Rev Peter Gill, telephone: 07951764262, email: petergill18@hotmail.com

Ayrshire Event for Scottish Interfaith Week

The Ayrshire Interfaith Forum held an event for Scottish Interfaith Week at the East Ayrshire Council Headquarters on Saturday 30th November. Representatives from five different faith communities gave presentations on the Interfaith Week theme of ‘Values and Visions for Scotland’. Interfaith Scotland’s Development Officer, Frances Hume, led attendees in a group dialogue, and there was a display of Interfaith Scotland’s new exhibition of religious artefacts.

Attendees were invited to view pictures that children from local primary schools had made on the theme of peace. The pictures had been entered in a competition for the Peace One Day event which Ayrshire Interfaith Forum held in September.

Ayrshire Interfaith Forum is pleased to have worked in partnership with Interfaith Scotland in hosting this event.



Dundee Interfaith Association: The Search for Inner Peace

The Director of Interfaith Scotland was delighted to speak at a public event organised by Dundee Interfaith Association to explore the role of faith in facilitating inner peace. The event was well attended, and fellow speakers included representatives of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Latter Day Saint, Hindu, Muslim, Pagan and Christian Communities.



Inverness 'Gifts of Ageing' Interfaith Seminar

During Scottish Interfaith Week the Inverness Interfaith Group organised an informative and engaging seminar on 'The Gifts of Ageing'. The keynote speaker was Dr Harriet Mowatt, who skilfully led participants on a journey of discovery; they began the journey unsure what the gifts of ageing were, and ended it feeling that indeed old age does hold many treasures.

Dr Mowatt has carried out extensive research on how to have a good old age and the conclusions of the research offer deep insights on the importance of spirituality, self-transcendence, community and connection. Below are excerpts from an abstract presented by Dr Mowatt at the 2004 Conference on Spirituality and Ageing held in Adelaide.



Dr Mowatt offers a 'theory of successful ageing that makes central the spiritual journey'. In our current Scottish society, as with most European countries, ageing is seen as something to be feared and rejected, something to be ignored, something that happens to other people, a problem to "fix" through social, economic or health policy or a biological mistake that will eventually be rectified through scientific endeavour. All these reactions can be understood as a fear of death and the instinctual drive towards denial of death. For in a secular environment the reality of death has the potential to render life meaningless. Meaning of life questions, in our current society, are bound up with maintenance of youth and continuity of 'youthful' practice. When illness occurs, as it does increasingly with old age, the individual is required, mostly unwillingly, to reflect on his or her position and the meaning of his/ her life in a wider context. The old order gives way to a new one. The questions posed by TS Eliot – 'What does life mean' and 'what are we going to do about it' – loom large as the youthful well-being and confidence gives way to middle aged angst...The task of old age and its fundamental purpose is therefore to search for meaning through a search for spiritual self.

Edinburgh Celebrates Scottish Interfaith Week

Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association celebrated Scottish Interfaith Week in 2013 with a typically diverse programme! Here are some highlights below.

Edinburgh Interfaith Week Launch Event

The week kicked off on Sunday 24th November, as in previous years, with an Interfaith Week Launch event held in St John's Church. The evening featured a cello performance by Emma Turley, a performance by jazz vocalist and Just Festival star Cynthia Gentle, presentations from EIFA board members on new membership and funeral card schemes as well as a presentation and a musical performance from EIFA General Secretary, Iain Stewart.



Long time EIFA friend and colleague Dharmveer Singh of Edinburgh's Sikh community closed the event with a story about Guru Nanak, and a beautifully read blessing for all those present.

Religious Leaders and Faith Representatives Conference

The Edinburgh Religious Leaders and Faith Representatives Conference on Tuesday 26th November was also well attended by a variety of communities. How a faith community can respond to the conflict in Syria was a focal point for the first half of the meeting. Dr Thomas Pierret of the University of Edinburgh gave an engrossing summary of the political environment from which the conflict has developed as well as giving those present an idea of the ongoing instability of the situation. Next came a presentation from Syrian Manhal Alnassar, who described the humanitarian effort of Hand in Hand for Syria, a charity for which he is Scottish representative. After a Q & A session chaired by Rabbi David Rose, Barnado's made a presentation about domestic and sexual abuse in Scotland. A group discussion about Scottish Independence closed proceedings, and such was the lively debate on how faith groups can engage with this question that a separate event is being planned for 2014 to continue it.

Jesus and Guru Nanak Event

On Tuesday evening the similarities and differences between Christianity and Sikhism were tackled in Jesus and Guru Nanak. The event featured discussion from various representatives of Edinburgh's Gurdwara, based in Leith.



The Common Threads of World Religion

On Wednesday 27th November, Iain Stewart presented The Common Threads of World Religion to attendees at St Mary's Primary School. The talk gave those present an introduction to the essence of interfaith work and the similarities and foundations that bond all belief systems together.

Breaking Barriers, Multi-Faith Women's Fayre and Interfaith Quiz

Breaking Barriers, a Christian/Muslim Youth Conference, was held on Saturday 30th November. Through scriptural reasoning, discussion, and relaxed, casual conversation, participating students learned about each others' beliefs and in doing so, no doubt learned more about their own.

Also on Saturday 30th was the Multi-Faith Women's Fayre featuring community and charity groups from around Edinburgh, and the Multi-Faith Meal and Cinema Screening organised by the Edinburgh University Chaplaincy team.

Interfaith Week 2013 was closed officially by the Interfaith Quiz – an always popular fixture in the Interfaith Week programme. With even more teams than expected, guest host Paula Fortier did a wonderful job keeping everyone in check and making herself heard over the (traditionally) rowdy attendance. A big thank you is due to everyone who helped.



Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group Event

The Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) met at the Methodist Church in Nicolson Square on 20th November 2013 as part of Interfaith Week activities. Over 30 women enjoyed the meal and proceedings, from Sikhism, Catholicism, the Unification Church, Baha'i, Quaker, Church of Scotland, Agnostic, Eclectic, Judaism (Orthodox and Liberal), Methodist, Hindu, Islam and the Pagan Federation. The meeting was chaired by Nila Joshi.

Rev Ali Newall, from Edinburgh University Chaplaincy Centre, discussed Advent as a time for reflection on the divine within all of us and the need to trust in God for peace and justice to be born throughout the world. Kulwinder Singh from Sikh Sanjog spoke about Diwali from the Sikh perspective. Elizabeth Carnell from the Quaker Tradition spoke about the current commercialisation of Christmas. Lalitha Natarajan from the Hindu Tradition spoke about Diwali, a Festival of Light. She brought a traditional lamp to show and said Diwali was a time to remember that God resides in us. Aisha and Zareen Taj spoke about Ramadan, Eid and Hajj in the Muslim tradition. Eid is a community celebration during which people gather together to be with loved ones and children are given gifts.

Department for International Development: Faith Principles Partnership



Mr Mike Battcock, Dr Julie Clague, Dr Maureen Sier and Mr Habib Malik

The Director of Interfaith Scotland was delighted to chair a panel of distinguished speakers at the Department for International Development (DFID) Interfaith Week event. The three guest speakers were Mr Mike Battcock, who works in the Civil Society Department at DFID and leads on faith in development; Dr Julie Clague from Glasgow University, whose academic research experience in Catholic ethics and her consultancy work have involved numerous collaborations with academics, faith-based practitioners and UN representatives, and Mr Habib Malik of Islamic Relief, who is well known in Scotland for his human rights work and who has received numerous awards for humanitarian and community work.

The seminar explored the role of faith and faith-based organisations in international development. DFID had published a document in 2012 called 'The Faith Partnership Principles' which was a key focus of the seminar. In its opening foreword it states that 'faith makes such an important contribution to development. Most people in developing countries engage in some form of spiritual practice and believe that their faith plays an important role in their lives. Faith groups can inspire confidence and trust... [F]aith groups are doing excellent work in providing not only humanitarian relief but delivering health, education and other services in some of the most troubled parts of the world. They are making a real difference to countless lives'.

The three speakers focused on diverse ways that international development agencies and faith-based organisations can work together to provide humanitarian relief and deliver health, education and other services in the most troubled parts of the world. The seminar was very well attended and there was ample time for questions and answers.

Being Jewish in Scotland: An Event for Interfaith Week

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) has been running a project called, Being Jewish in Scotland, a series of conversations about participants' experiences as Jews in Scotland. As a part of Scottish Interfaith Week, SCoJeC arranged for people from all faiths and none to come together at the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy Centre on Tuesday 26th November 2013, to eat kosher food, hear about the Being Jewish in Scotland inquiry, and think about their own experiences as a minority – or a majority – in Scotland. Three quarters of the group were Jewish, and there were Christians, atheists, a Muslim woman, and representatives from the Scottish Secular Society. There were single people, working people, retired people, parents, grandparents, students, and even a set of baby twins.

Fiona Frank, Projects and Outreach Manager at SCoJeC, identified the main Jewish communities in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee. She observed that there are rather too many incidents of ignorance, discomfort, and blatant anti-Semitism, especially on campuses around Scotland.

Group discussion then explored how the questions resonated for the different minorities present. An older gay man found it reassuring to hear younger gay people being open about their identities – something that he hadn't been able to do when he was younger. A Christian man said that such groups enabled us to emphasise our humanity, that we are all humans striving to lead decent lives. One Jewish woman reminded us that identity is different depending on whether you claim it yourself or whether it is thrust upon you. And a young North American Jewish student noted: 'These were great conversations; I'm often the first Jewish person that someone's ever met – and you have to decide how you will represent yourself as a Jew – and to be aware that you are representing all Judaism!'

Central Scotland 'Soul Space' Events

'Soul Space' is a gathering hosted by Central Scotland Interfaith Group in Stirling Methodist Church roughly every six weeks, and the December 2013 event on 'Inspirations from other faiths' was the largest such gathering to date. Baha'is and Christians read from the scriptures of other faiths, and a Hindu spoke of growing up alongside other faiths in India. Interfaith Scotland Director Maureen Sier attended, and her husband Nick closed the event with a musical piece, 'The earth is but one country'.

In January 2014 the theme was 'Journeys', to tie in with this year's Holocaust Memorial Day theme. Rev Colin McIntosh shared an excerpt from his final service before retiring from Dunblane Cathedral, in which he reflected on his faith journey through his 37-year ministry career. All are welcome to attend future Soul Space events. For dates and further information please contact Graham at: stirlingsoulspace@irenic.org.uk

Interfaith Scotland News

Annual General Meeting and Public Talk

Interfaith Scotland's Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place on 8th October 2013 at the Burgh Halls in Linlithgow. The event included a public talk entitled New Models of Community Leadership for 21st Century Scotland, by Barbara Simpson, Professor of Leadership and Organisational Dynamics at the University of Strathclyde.



Just steps down the path from medieval Linlithgow castle, where Mary Queen of Scots was born, adherents from numerous faiths, associate members old and new, and representatives of the Scottish government gathered to reflect on the notable recent progress of Interfaith Scotland.

In fact this was the very first AGM of Interfaith Scotland in its new guise, since changes in format, constitution and name took effect in August 2012, when the organisation became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This has also necessitated a new website, and a new board of Trustees.



In her talk, Professor Simpson spoke about the importance of 'Relational Leadership'. Relational dialogue must be skilful, she emphasised, explaining the complex and evolving interchange of provisional meaning which is present in face-to-face communication, replete with emotion and gesture. From this she identified the transformational potential of a shift from traditional leadership, as more interpersonal models move to the fore. Those gathered discussed how this approach could be of benefit in an interfaith context, and an invitation was extended for the professor to return and explore this exciting theme further in a future meeting.

Indeed, this discussion exemplifies a shift over the recent year to a greater focus on dialogue generally in members' meetings. This has been accompanied by a broadening of membership to include additional faith communities, as well as non-religious communities and belief groups.

The Trustee report signalled a very healthy year overall, in the period up until 31st March, with a strong balance of unrestricted funds bolstering organisational resilience in meeting needs.

Board Member Rita Docherty announced her retirement at the AGM, and was formally thanked for her many years of service.



Women's Interfaith Dialogue Events

Interfaith Scotland continues to run women's dialogue events across Scotland, looking at 'Values and Visions for the future of Scotland' in the light of the Scottish referendum in September 2014, and thinking about how women of all faiths and none can contribute to that vision. Most recently, interfaith dialogue events took place at the Best Western Queen's Hotel in Dundee on 11th November 2013 and at the University of Aberdeen on 6th March 2014. While in Aberdeen, Interfaith Scotland had a stall at the busy International Women's Day event hosted by Aberdeen University.



The Development Officer, Frances Hume, joined the South Lanarkshire Abrahamic Roots Group on their 3 day retreat to the Island of Iona. During her time with the women she lead workshops looking at pilgrimage and journeys of faith.

Staff at Interfaith Scotland

There have been a number of staff additions over recent months. Interfaith Scotland welcomed Jamie Spurway to their ever growing team at the Glasgow office. Jamie is the Religious Equality Officer, available to offer training in all religious equality matters. Jamie worked for a number of years at the Scottish Refugee Council as a case worker, information and training officer and now works as a freelance trainer.

Michael Wilson is currently on secondment from his role as Deputy Director of the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council. He is covering the position of Project Manager at Interfaith Glasgow while Rose Drew is on maternity leave until September 2014.

The newest addition is Media Intern Andrew Singer, responsible for the Interfaith Scotland newsletters. Andrew is the director of Trafika Europe, a project being set up to showcase new literature from across Europe in fresh English translation. He can be contacted at andrew@trafikaeurope.org



Jamie Spurway



Michael Wilson



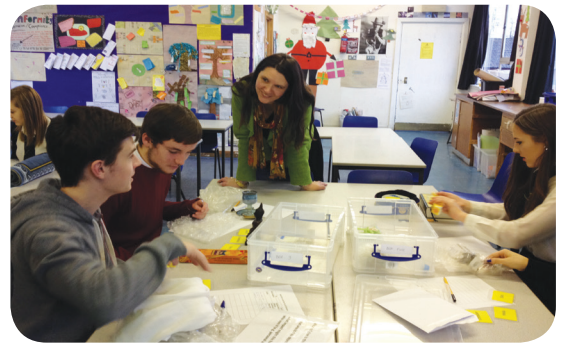
Andrew Singer

Youth News

Interfaith Scotland youth work continues to cover the length and breadth of Scotland, with an enthusiastic team of young (and not so young!) volunteers from seven world religions. The volunteers share with school pupils about the main tenets of their religion and what their faith means to them in their own lives. Interfaith Scotland gave a training session for its schools volunteers on 19th February 2014. We are delighted to have schools volunteers from each of the major faith communities.

Since the Autumn term, two 'Interfaith days' have been held in Trinity High School in Cambuslang for 250 pupils from S5 and S6, and there have been interfaith days at St Modan's High School in Stirling and Oban High School for S6 pupils.

Interfaith Scotland has also been excited to team up with AMINA Muslim Women's Resource Centre, which runs a programme in schools to challenge the negative stereotypes that some people hold of Islam. A member of AMINA accompanied Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer to Dumfries High School. Pupils from S4 enjoyed a variety of interactive activities, including using Interfaith Scotland's latest resource – handling boxes with artefacts from seven world faiths.



The University of Strathclyde has a new interfaith chaplaincy centre which is situated at the Graham Hills Building in Glasgow. The University organised an interfaith dialogue session for students and staff of the university as part of their Scottish Interfaith Week celebrations. Michael Wilson from Interfaith Glasgow and Frances Hume from Interfaith Scotland ran an interfaith dialogue workshop at the event.

The Development Officer, Frances Hume, was pleased to be invited to Shetland to speak in both primary and secondary schools. She brought two young volunteers with her, Dharmveer Singh from the Sikh faith and Mohamed Omar from the Muslim faith, on the request of Rev Tom Macintyre from Shetland Interfaith Group, who had organised the busy programme. Mohamed shares his reflections on his time in Shetland in the next article.



A Journey to Shetland

A reflection by Mohamed Omar, a Muslim youth volunteer at Interfaith Scotland

They say 'every day is a school day'. This couldn't be a more accurate description of the invaluable experience I had in Shetland in September 2013. I had the pleasure and privilege to travel to Shetland with Dharmveer Singh, a youth volunteer from the Sikh community and Frances Hume, Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland. The aim of our visit was to tour local schools to share how our respective faiths have an impact on our daily lives. We were welcomed by local people from different faith groups. I received warm hospitality from a local Baha'i family that I stayed with, and I enjoyed not only the sense of community feeling but also the stimulating conversations we had, such as whether the proliferation of social media boosts or limits authentic dialogue between people.

We visited several schools in Shetland, leading classes in three Primary Schools with Primary 1 – 7 pupils and giving talks with Q&A with S3 pupils at Anderson High School. I discussed the five pillars of Islam and demonstrated to pupils how a Muslim prays five times a day. One small child thought my prayer mat was a 'magic carpet' so I used this to explain how my prayers flew up to God! I reminded pupils of how Mo Farah, a Muslim, knelt down after winning at the Olympic Games, and the importance for Muslims to always be grateful to Allah regardless of the situation.



The S3 Religious Education classes at Anderson High School had been assigned to research the attitudes of different faiths to poverty and social injustice. I explained that Muslims are encouraged to be generous and altruistic in general and also that we are required to give Zakat (2.5% of our income) in order to help reduce inequalities in society. I told them that education should be a right for every child but unfortunately it is only a privilege for some children in developing countries. I was very impressed by the attentiveness, curiosity and engagement demonstrated by pupils during and after our presentations. I was touched by their critical thinking, shown by some interesting questions. I invited the pupils not to be afraid to ask and to always try to research from multiple sources regardless of the topic.

On the night before we left Shetland we visited the local library to deliver our individual speeches to members of the community about our values and visions for Scotland. In my speech I emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive society by celebrating and embracing our diversity and by engaging in constant dialogue to learn from each other. It is fundamental to involve all sections of society regardless of background and beliefs to create a more healthy society.



Pupil-led Equality Forum in Lossiemouth

The Director of Interfaith Scotland spent an inspiring afternoon with pupils of Lossiemouth High School who had decided to form a pupil-led Equality Forum. The four senior pupils were seeking advice and guidance on what the Equality Forum could do and how they might begin the work of the Forum.

Initially great fun was had finding an appropriate name for the Forum, and eventually it was decided that the Forum would be called the 'Leaders' (Lossiemouth Equality and Diversity Education Representatives). The pupils are currently designing appropriate questionnaires to distribute around the school to ascertain how many students are affected by the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act and also to find out how the school can be an Equality and Diversity Champion.

Interfaith Scotland is currently determining if this is the first pupil-led Equality Forum in Scotland, and if it is, to look at how this model can be piloted to other schools in Scotland.



Mossvale and St James Primary School Assembly

This event took place on 31st January and was attended by members of the Renfrewshire Interfaith Group – Rev Peter Gill, Ranjith Sankaranarayanan and Fashina Olufemi.

The head teacher of the school introduced members from Renfrewshire Interfaith and Father Oliver to pupils. A main topic of the assembly was Peace and Harmony. Pupils developed logos and mottos to encourage harmony between Mossvale and St James Primary school. The kids displayed great creativity in coming up with inventive and colourful materials.

Rev Peter Gill gave a presentation on various faith symbols, explaining their meanings to pupils. Father Oliver gave a talk on inner peace. Both of these involved great interaction and were well received by pupils.

Feedback showed that the session was informative and interesting for pupils as well as teachers and members who were present.

Annual Networking Seminar for Local Interfaith Groups

Interfaith Scotland's Annual Networking Seminar for local interfaith groups took place at Pollokshields Church Hall in Glasgow. Members of interfaith groups from across Scotland were in attendance, including members from Central Scotland, East Renfrewshire, Shetland, Edinburgh, Dundee, Ayrshire, Fife, Dumfries and Galloway and, of course, Glasgow!

In the morning, participants heard from staff about the work of Interfaith Scotland over the last year and the new Interfaith Glasgow Project. There were a number of presentations, including using Facebook and Twitter for local interfaith groups, the work of Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre in schools, interfaith primary school resources and Interfaith Scotland's 'Interfaith Days' in secondary schools.



Members of interfaith groups had expressed an interest in learning about how to use educational interfaith resources in schools, so in the afternoon, participants experienced a variety of interfaith dialogue activities, including active listening techniques, interacting with religious artefacts and taking part in a role play, all designed to help people find out more about different faiths, what they have in common, and what it might feel like to be a person of that faith.

The day concluded with a visit to the new purpose-built Sikh Gurdwara in Albert Drive, where participants were given a tour of the Gurdwara, followed by delicious food in the larger hall of the Gurdwara.



Interfaith Scotland has produced a number of resources for interfaith dialogue activities. Please call the office for more information or go to the web link below:
<http://www.interfaithscotland.org/resources/>

Holocaust Memorial Events 2014

National Scottish Holocaust Memorial Day Event 2014

For the past three years Interfaith Scotland has been tasked by the Scottish Government with organising the National Holocaust Memorial Event for Scotland. Interfaith Scotland is extremely grateful for the support and help given by all on the Steering Committee.

As we reflect on the Holocaust some seventy years later, a twin challenge presents itself: how do we keep alive a vital link to this event as even its oldest survivors will soon all be gone, and how do we update its lessons to be directly relevant for those just coming of age who will inherit this legacy. The Scottish Holocaust Memorial Day Event held at the MacRobert Arts Centre of the University of Stirling on Monday 27th January 2014 did just this, moving and serving thereby all who attended.

Following introductory remarks by Stirling's Provost Mike Roberts and Ms Fiona Hyslop, MSP, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Ben Freeman gave a brief presentation on the work of his educational charity, *From Yesterday to Tomorrow*.

Then came the deeply-moving story of Dr Alfred Munzer. Born in the Netherlands in 1941, Dr Munzer was a very young child during the Holocaust, separated from his Jewish parents and sheltered by an Indonesian-Dutch family for several years. With an original photograph slideshow and much eloquent detail, he recounted the story of his experience and impressions, revealing the often tragic fate of his relatives as the Holocaust unfolded. Successive speakers then deepened and broadened on this, first to include the fate of the Roma and other minorities in the Holocaust, and then later genocides, documenting and communicating how the pattern of ethnic mass killing has persisted in recent decades – in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfour.



A performance by Music of Strangers, with Roma and non-Roma of both Scottish and central-eastern European members, sang of the Roma of Eastern Slovakia, then and now.

Following this, guest of honour Arn Chorn Pond silenced the auditorium with his etched and harrowing account as a child slave worker, soldier, and ultimately escapee during the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia in the mid-1970s. The auditorium of hundreds became as one body experiencing his frail grief on stage – and then the sweet redemption of his ethereal flute playing transported this grief, to something equally fragile, yet life-affirming. Arn has brought help and comfort to thousands during his long career with charity foundations. In recent months, he has arrived to the point where he is finally able to bring his healing message back to Cambodia, with a new project to recover the few old masters of traditional Cambodian music. By reconnecting and travelling with them to villages and towns,

he is helping re-seed the great folk culture of his homeland which the Khmer Rouge sought utterly to exterminate. So the great wheel of life comes around, as Cambodian roots are purified again.

Marie Claire Uwamahoro Nyinawumuntu spoke in relation to the more recent genocide which swept Rwanda in 1994. In an excerpt from her long poem, *Time to Remember*, she gave direct testimony to the pain and helplessness of this staggering mass slaughter, yet managed to find the spirit in her poem to celebrate the present in this act of remembering.

Maureen Hunter closed the evening with a vocal performance of a Robert Burns poem; her stirring rendition allowed the complex emotions called up during the evening programme to remain intact.



For those present – especially for the scores of students in attendance, this event served the memory of the Holocaust and gave voice to its lessons with vigilant presentness. Ultimately we enact such rituals, together with strong efforts to educate on this topic, with the hope that humanity can be turning a corner and learning to eliminate genocide from our human civilisation. It was in this spirit that the event in Stirling served such a vital link.

Sarah McIlwham, S6 pupil at St Ninian's High School, Giffnock, shares her thoughts on this moving event as follows:

When Mrs Baird asked me to go to Stirling University for National Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January, I was a bit sceptical. I was until the moment we heard the first speaker (...) Dr. Alfred Munzer, a man whose family was torn apart by the actions of the Holocaust when he was just an infant. The thing which stuck with me the most was when he said "the worst part of the Holocaust was not the numbers who died, or the numbers who suffered, but that we did not learn from it, and genocide has happened several times since, that is what upsets me the most." And that to me was moving on so many different levels, that he, despite all he had gone through was not bitter or angry, but had accepted what had happened and has been doing all he can to make sure that it never happens again.

We later heard from Arn Chorn Pond, a survivor of the Cambodian Genocide, who used music as a way of coping with all that he has seen as a child while forced to work in a children's work camp after the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975. His story of events was emotional and touching and again his strength was inspiring, as no matter what he had been through, he never let it defeat him.

For me this was a very emotional night, and something I will not forget lightly, I am thankful to have been asked to go to the event and I am truly honoured to have been able to hear the stories of each individual and their experiences of the Holocaust and genocide. These are things we as humanity cannot accept and we must learn from them, and address them fully.

Scottish Education and Holocaust Memorial 2014

Dr Alfred Munzer, Mr Arn Chorn Pond and Dr Racelle Weiman visited schools and colleges across the central belt of Scotland from 27th- 30th January 2014. The school visits began on Monday 27th January in Stirling where Stirling High and Wallace Academy welcomed the international guests. Children were visibly moved by the stories of Alfred and Arn, and pupils from Wallace High were also Masters of Ceremony and ushers for the Scottish National Event held at the Macrobert Arts Centre in Stirling.

During the week further schools in Glasgow (Bellahouston Academy and The Gaelic School) and East Renfrewshire (The Isabel Mair School and St Ninians) were visited by the international guests, and Arn spoke at the Edinburgh HMD 2014 event which was hosted by Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association and held in the Royal High School.

A schools highlight was the HMD 2014 schools event held in the City Chambers in Glasgow where a school choir (from Oakgrove Primary Music Project) and a combined school orchestra (from St Andrew's Secondary, St Mungo's Academy and Eastbank Academy) sang and played music reflecting on the Holocaust, subsequent genocides and the need for change. Again the international speakers Dr Alfred Munzer and Mr Arn Chorn Pond spoke movingly of their experiences and the importance of building a world where such atrocities do not ever again take place.



On Wednesday Arn, a classical flute player, was able to engage with students at the Royal Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. Both students and staff were so inspired by the work that Arn is now doing with Cambodian Living Arts and the Cambodian Magic Music Bus that there is now ongoing discussion of international musical exchanges between Cambodia and Scotland.

During the week of Holocaust Memorial activities, Education Scotland used their intra-net medium 'Glow' to ensure that schools throughout Scotland could engage directly with the international speakers. A highlight of the week for the 'Glow' team was an arts exchange between numerous schools across Scotland and Arn Chorn Pond. Pupils read poems, sang songs and listened to Arn on the flute, and asked many questions about Arn's life and experiences.

At the National Scottish HMD 2014 event, students from Glasgow Caledonian University displayed prototypes of exhibitions they are designing that capture the journeys of Jewish refugees who settled in Scotland. The colourful exhibition was enjoyed by all those who attended the commemorative event.

Edinburgh Holocaust Memorial Day 2014 event

For Holocaust Memorial Day 2014, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association worked in partnership with the Royal High School. The theme of 'Journeys' ran through the event and not only in the miraculous stories of the two international guests (Bosnian camp survivor Adem Repesa and Cambodian camp survivor Arn Chorn Pond). The theme was also reflected in students' contributions to the evening, with musical performances, testimonial readings and personal reflections on their own journeys to Rwanda and Auschwitz. Cambodian guest Arn Chorn Pond summed up the positive message of HMD by emphasising the importance of music in his own recovery. His hope that musical instruments can replace weapons in the hands of children around the world was a message felt by all present. The event also featured contributions from Royal High Rector Jane Frith, Rabbi David Rose of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and the Rt Hon Donald Wilson, Edinburgh's Lord Provost.

Interfaith Scotland Members Dialogue Event

Members of Interfaith Scotland and additional faith community members gathered at the Du Vin Hotel in Glasgow to meet the International guests of Interfaith Scotland, Arn Chorn Pond, Dr Alfred Munzer and Dr Racelle Weiman, who had been brought to Scotland to engage in the Scottish Holocaust Commemorative event and further educational engagements.

The evening included a lovely two-course buffet, roundtable discussions on the theme of 'Journeys' and intimate engagement with visitors. During the Q & A, a Hindu guest asked how such prejudice and injustice could be challenged, and Dr Weiman shared inspirational examples of people who had stood up to the Nazis at risk of their own lives. Dr Weiman suggested that we need to focus on the heroes of the Holocaust and genocides so that young people have concrete examples of what it takes to challenge such hatred and bigotry.



A Muslim at Bishop's House, Iona

A reflection by Qaisra Khan

Iona has been a place of pilgrimage and reflection for generations, particularly since Saint Columba (521 – 597) founded his monastery and was a major influence in the spread of Christianity. Iona's spiritual importance endures, enhanced by the founding of Bishop's House in 1894 and the Iona Community in 1938. What is less clear is why a Muslim would choose to live and work there. I have, however, spent two wonderful months doing just that. Most of my experiences were not peculiar to my being a Muslim but to the beauty and tranquillity of Iona and the generosity and welcome of the team at Bishop's House, a busy Anglican Christian retreat centre.

A friend asked why as a Muslim I was going to live and work in a Christian community. I hold the following verses from the Qur'an close to my heart, that we have been created from 'a male and female, and... into nations tribes so that [we] can come to know one another' (Surah 49) and that 'every community has had an apostle' (Surah 10) who I believe has been able to throw light on the path. I feel that I have no right to dismiss the truths that others hold dear. I explained to my friend that, being from the UK, 'my faith is Islam but my culture is not'. I had only recently visited the holiest sites in Islam, Christianity and Judaism so it was important to continue to be in places where it seems that, according to the founder of the Iona Community, George MacLeod, only a tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual world.



The first time my Islamic faith made a significant impact on my life at Bishop's House was during the evening meal. When I first arrived on Iona sunset was at about 7pm when we all sat down to dinner. This coincided with Magrib, the fourth formal daily prayer, so for me it is often the most visible call to prayer. For several days when I sat down to dinner I would notice the sun go down and ask, 'Is that the sun setting'? A few days later I was given a printout of sunrise and sunset times. I was overjoyed at this thoughtfulness which enabled me to continue with the formal prayers and remain comfortable with the rhythm of the house. In addition, we often had a grace of sorts at mealtimes and I was invited to say something which was the 'Bismillah', so we began our meal in the name of the Infinitely Compassionate and Merciful.

The first service that I attended at Iona Abbey was the weekly 'Healing Service', which was beautiful. A group of guests invited me, and because my head torch proved useful, I felt as if I was shining God's light on the path. The Abbey had a very embracing feel and the service included a reflection on those that are suffering, and then they had the laying on of hands for healing. I was tempted to join in with the healing prayer, except for the fact they ended it "in Jesus' name".

The group then invited to me to an 'Agape Service', which is described as a fellowship meal, something I had never seen before.

We all sat together around a large table so it felt rather homely, the bread was passed around so when it came to me I took some but did not take the wine. I was given a 'holding cross' when the group left. I never knew such a thing existed but it is easy and comfortable to hold.

One thing which surprised me most was how connected I felt despite being on a remote island. This was largely due to the internet, television and also being part of a community that included me in friendship, community and spiritual engagement. The views were breathtaking, and I can still recall the sound of silence when sitting by Loch Stanoig with a friend: no waves, no ripples, no footsteps or anything. The following words that I read on my return journey, by Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, seem poignant:

'Farewell. Return. Farewell. Return Again. Here home and elsewhere share one mystery. Here love and conscience sing the same refrain. Here time leaps up and strikes eternity'

Religious believers meet atheists

An international panel discussion designed to help strengthen the bridge between adherents of organised religions and secular humanists was held in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, on 9th November 2013. Panelists included Isabel Smyth (Catholic Committee for Interreligious Dialogue), Rory Fenton (British Humanist Association), Chris Stedman (Humanist chaplain at Harvard University), and several others.



The event was a highlight of a 3 day-long conference hosted at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge, bringing together some 40 participants, mostly from the UK and US. The larger conference helped participants examine perceptual and conceptual differences between theistic and atheistic worldviews and activities, and seek mutual understanding toward establishing better working relations and common ground.

Participants reported a sense of co-operative progress by the end of the conference, with a better sense of others' feelings and experiences in light of differing theist-atheist approaches. A follow-up conference on the theme of education is expected to be held in Scotland in 2014.

Upcoming Events in 2014

Religious Leaders Meeting, Edinburgh, 27th March

Interfaith Scotland Members Event, 'Faith Communities and Effective Local Government', 2nd April, The Golden Lion, Stirling

National Seminar for Interfaith Professionals, The Bield, Perthshire, 20th May

Interfaith Scotland Members Dialogue Event, Conforti Institute, Coatbridge, 29th May

Women's Interfaith Dialogue, Portree, Skye, early June (date tbc)

National Seminar for Local Interfaith Groups, The Bield, Perthshire, 17th June

Women's Interfaith Dialogue, Moray, September (date tbc)

Annual General Meeting, Burgh Halls, Linlithgow, 30th October

Launch of Scottish Interfaith Week, Kilmarnock, 23rd November

Scottish Interfaith Week 2014, 23rd – 30th November

About Interfaith Scotland

The aim of Interfaith Scotland is to provide a forum for people from different religions to dialogue with one another on matters of religious, national and civic importance, to support a wider interfaith dialogue with other religion and belief groups as appropriate, to support educational activities in connection with interfaith dialogue, to encourage civic engagement by religious communities in Scotland and to support religious equality.

Interfaith Scotland runs dialogue events for young people, women, faith communities, religious leaders, Members and Friends of Interfaith Scotland and local interfaith groups. We run interfaith workshops in schools and produce interfaith publications and resources. We provide on-going support to local interfaith groups. We give public presentations, seminars and training on interfaith dialogue, faith awareness and religious equality issues. We promote and encourage participation in Scottish Interfaith Week and host a national event to celebrate the week.

Get in touch!

Interfaith Scotland publishes a newsletter two to three times a year, in order to let people know about a variety of interfaith initiatives happening in Scotland. We welcome short articles for inclusion in future newsletters.

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Interfaith Scotland



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