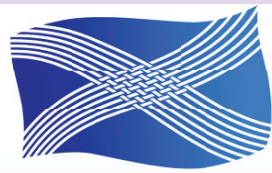


NEWSLETTER SPRING 2015 - ISSUE 27



*Interfaith
Scotland*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH DIALOGUE



Friendship • Cooperation • Dialogue • Respect • Understanding

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Message From The Director

I am delighted to introduce readers to this bumper edition of the Interfaith Scotland Newsletter. It has recently been decided that we will print and distribute one hard-copy annual newsletter to go out in the spring, complemented by our Annual Report in the autumn. I hope that you enjoy reading the newsletter and hearing about all the wonderful interfaith engagement that is taking place across Scotland. I encourage you to share the newsletter with your faith communities and friends.



I would like to say a special thank you to our recent intern Hannah Rastall for the excellent work she has done to prepare the newsletter for circulation. Interfaith Scotland has both a website and a Facebook page - engage with us online for up to the minute news, and keep in touch with your stories of interfaith engagement and dialogue.

Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland

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.

SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK

Scottish Interfaith Week took place from 23rd – 30th November 2014. The theme of the week was 'Journeys of Faith' and many events took place across Scotland to celebrate Scotland's rich religious and cultural diversity. A sample of these events can be found over the next few pages of this newsletter. A list of all events known to Interfaith Scotland can be found on the website.

Interfaith Scotland's National Celebration took place at the Grand Hall in Kilmarnock on Sunday 23rd November. A beautiful vegetarian buffet had been prepared by the Grand Hall staff. Formal proceedings were introduced by Larry Blance, Chair of Interfaith Scotland. A formal welcome was given by Councillor Tom Cook, Depute Council Leader and Spokesperson for Community Safety and Equalities at East Ayrshire Council. Jon Herd spoke on behalf of the Ayrshire Interfaith Forum, which had been instrumental in assisting with the organisation of the event alongside East Ayrshire Council.

Participants enjoyed a variety of talks on the theme of 'Journeys of Faith'. Frances Hume, Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland, gave an introduction to the theme. Marian Mcelhinney and Bushra Iqbal, members of the Abrahamic Roots Group (a dialogue group for Muslim and Christian women in Coatbridge) spoke about their pilgrimage to Iona. Pat Morrissey from the Baha'i faith shared an interesting personal account of his faith journey. Barbara Alexander from Ayrshire Interfaith Forum gave the vote of thanks.

There were a number of musical performances throughout the afternoon. Guests were welcomed at the door by a piper, Daniel Johnston, who is a pupil at St Joseph's Academy, a local secondary school in Kilmarnock. Kirstie Lee, a local traditional musician, played the clàrsach (celtic harp) to welcome guests as they arrived in the hall. Pupils from St Joseph's Academy Vocal Group sang two beautiful songs on the theme of 'Journeys of Faith'. Navpreet Kaur sang a Sikh hymn, accompanied by her husband Gurjit Singh Sidhu on the tabla (an Indian drum).



In 2014, Interfaith Scotland took on a new venture, launching a competition for schools across North, South and East Ayrshire. Young people were asked to submit entries on the Scottish Interfaith Week theme of 'Journeys of Faith', which could be in the form of artwork, music, a song, or a piece of poetry or prose. First, second and third prizes went to pupils at Arran High School and the pupils and their teacher made a special trip over to the launch in Kilmarnock to collect their prizes. These were presented by Graham Short, Executive Director of Educational and Social Services at East Ayrshire Council. In 2015, the competition will be opened up to all schools in Scotland and will be on the theme of Scottish Interfaith Week 2015 which will be 'Care for Creation'.

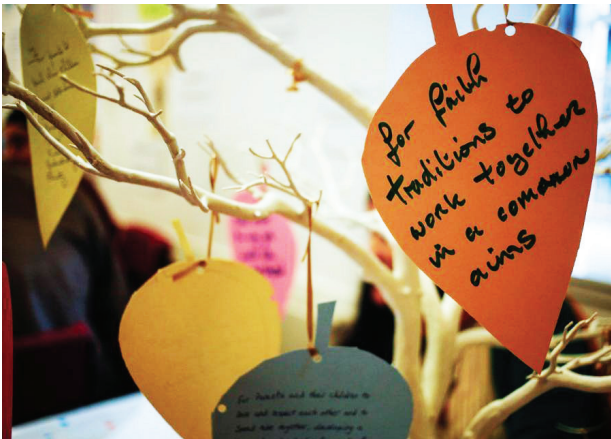


Scottish Interfaith Week events at Interfaith Glasgow

Interfaith Family Fun Day



Over 150 people from diverse backgrounds took part in 2014's youth-led Interfaith Week celebration at Pollokshields Burgh Hall. Over the course of three months, Interfaith Glasgow's Youth Worker Harpreet Khalsa worked with a fantastic group of young volunteers from six different religion and belief backgrounds to plan every aspect of the event. There were stalls hosted by nine of Glasgow's diverse faith communities; an exhibition of inspiring religious and non-religious role models, chosen by the young people; calligraphy workshops in Arabic, Hebrew and Gurmukhi; face-painting and henna; a Wishing Tree workshop; arts and crafts; and delicious Asian food.



The Interfaith Wishing Tree workshop allowed participants to artistically express their hopes for the future of interfaith relations in Glasgow. Wishes included, for example: "For parents and their children... to spend time together, developing a love and understanding for people of all different countries and cultures" and "that it becomes normal for us all to get together and do things together". The aim of events like this is to make a small contribution to realising those wishes in Glasgow. A short film of the day, made with the young people, can be found on Interfaith Glasgow's YouTube channel.

Interfaith Community Meal

During Interfaith Week, the Hidden Gardens hosted the first in a series of interfaith community meals. The aim of these meals is to bring together people from different religious communities in the South East of Glasgow to share good food and good conversation in a relaxed and welcoming environment, with the hope that friendships across religious boundaries will flourish and mutual understanding will deepen. Delicious food was prepared by the Hidden Gardens' cooking group, and presented in an ambient setting conducive to dialogue on the theme of faith and nature. Feedback from all who came was extremely positive. One guest wrote: "It was a fantastic event, I enjoyed the discussion at my table... Faith should bring people together rather than separate them".



‘Faith and Forgiveness’



Working with a Glasgow secondary school, Shawlands Academy, the ‘Faith and Forgiveness’ project was designed to give young people and adults from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds a unique opportunity to explore the difficult and messy concept of forgiveness together.

Although forgiveness is an ideal cherished by people of diverse faiths and none, ideas vary regarding just what it involves and when it is appropriate. This diversity of perspectives is poignantly displayed in the acclaimed exhibition “The F Word: Images of Forgiveness”, which was housed in Shawlands Academy for the duration of Interfaith Week, and served as a powerful stimulus for dialogue. Produced by London-based charity The Forgiveness Project, the exhibition relates personal stories from around the world of forgiveness as a healing process, a journey out of victimhood and as a journey of hope.

In the lead up to Interfaith Week, Interfaith Glasgow’s Development Officer Magdalen Lambkin worked with a religiously mixed group of 16 S5 pupils at Shawlands Academy, giving them a practical introduction to facilitation skills and to dialogue on the theme of forgiveness. These pupils then assisted in the delivery of four dialogue events associated with the exhibition during Interfaith Week itself: three for school pupils and one evening event for the wider community.

Two of The Forgiveness Project’s speakers – Marian Partington and Kemal Pervanic – were invited to speak at two events each. Marian is a writer, whose sister, Lucy, was murdered by notorious serial killers Fred and Rosemary West, and whose journey to forgiveness is one which draws on the wisdom of the Quaker and Buddhist traditions. Kemal is a writer and filmmaker who was sent to a concentration camp set up by Bosnian Serb forces in the early days of the Bosnian War, because he was identified as a Muslim.

Participants said they found the events – which combined hearing personal stories and conversation in small groups – “inspiring,” “powerful,” and “Great for dialogue!” The full report can be read online at www.interfaithglasgow.org.



Places of Peace

At a friendly gathering at Inner Space Meditation centre, attendees enjoyed an afternoon on the topic of Places of Peace. Four speakers shared their experiences and answered questions about both inner peace, and physical places of peace.

Noelle Ryan spoke about how, in her childhood, the Catholic Church had provided a space of safety and calm where she learned to be still. Shagufta Ahmed described the moment of overwhelming emotion as she entered Mecca, the pilgrimage place for Muslims. Jenny Hickey, a Buddhist, told a wonderful story of her journey to Samye Ling (a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Dumfries & Galloway) and the moving experience of seeing the shrine room for the first time. Rose Goodenough of the Brahma Kumaris shared her thoughts on the way in which spiritual places become imbued with peace, as pilgrims, worshippers and meditators who go to receive peace also naturally donate theirs; creating a spiritual presence which builds up over time, making these special places truly places of peace.



The afternoon was punctuated with pauses for peace from www.just-a-minute.org, a website which provides one-minute meditative and reflective breaks. Everyone present had a chance to share their personal experiences of peace, and received a blessing card from the Brahma Kumaris.

Interfaith Meditation in Glasgow

Interfaith Scotland held an interfaith meditation afternoon during Scottish Interfaith Week at the Glasgow Buddhist Centre. The afternoon offered participants a short experience of four different types of meditation, as well as an opportunity to dialogue with one another.

Sister Isabel Smyth, a Roman Catholic nun, led a guided meditation from the Ignatian tradition. In this tradition, participants are guided in 'imaginative contemplation', imagining themselves as a character in a story in the life of Jesus. Shantiketu led a 'metta' loving kindness meditation from the Buddhist tradition. Participants were encouraged to think about someone they care about and send loving thoughts to that person; then to repeat the exercise for a neutral person, and finally someone that they do not like, with the aim of sharing magnanimous loving kindness towards all beings. Larry Blance led a Tibetan Buddhist meditation, which included the chanting of Tibetan Buddhist texts followed by time for quiet contemplation. Liz Anderton led a meditation in the Quaker tradition which involved participants sitting in silence and only breaking the silence to speak as the Spirit moved them to do so.



At the meeting, those gathered were enthusiastic about the idea of starting a monthly interfaith meditation session in Glasgow. These are currently taking place on the last Friday of each month from 4 – 5pm at Kagyu Samye Dzong Glasgow, 7 Ashley Street. Contact Frances Hume for more details: frances@interfaithscotland.org

Interfaith Badminton Tournament

Teenagers of different faiths were brought together by sport at the Glasgow Interfaith Badminton Tournament, held in November at Maccabi in Giffnock. Over 30 young people took part in the exciting and fast-paced event.

Edinburgh Interfaith Week Events

Sharing Perspectives on Family and Faith



The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification hosted an interfaith gathering on St Andrew's Day in Edinburgh, as part of Scottish Interfaith Week. Representatives from the Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim faiths, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the Family Federation, spoke on the theme 'Families and Faith' at Augustine United Church.

Speakers explored the place of family in their own lives and faith traditions. Manjit Singh of the Glasgow Gurdwara spoke of the steps they have taken to involve children in the Sikh faith. Asif Sheikh, of Ahlul Bayt (meaning 'The Prophet's Family House') spoke on the institution of marriage, and the importance of understanding and tolerance in creating respect between faiths; and Carole Sneddon of the Latter Day Saints discussed the way in which her understanding of family is grounded in her faith.

Hamish Robertson, of the Family Federation, expanded on this theme, exploring the spiritual dimension of family, and saying that 'all our faiths are on a pilgrimage where the roads are joining together'. A key theme of the event was the importance of dialogue between different faiths, and the gathering was punctuated by music and prayer, from 'Amazing Grace' from the Family Federation singers, to prayers in Sanskrit and Urdu. The event finished with a rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne' in Korean, which was the South Korean national anthem in the early days of the Republic. Joining together with the well-known words of Rabbin Burns, those gathered shared in a 'cup o' kindness' - tea and cake, snacks and sushi – and plenty of good-natured conversation.

Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association

This year's Interfaith Week saw unprecedented numbers attending all key events in Edinburgh. The week began with an opening event at the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy Centre, featuring wonderful artistic performances, from Kirsten Newell's two Bharatnatyam dance routines, to Akshay Deol's rendering of a Mohammed Rafi classic and Adam Ali's Sufi inspired dance. Ali Newell and the Chaplaincy also hosted another well attended event during Interfaith week: Kishan Manocha's lecture on 'Advancing Religious Freedom'.



This year, a new activity was introduced called 'Faith Exchange', where individuals of various faiths were paired up with someone of a different faith from their own. They were then given a few minutes to answer a previously announced question, with participants swapping partners after every couple of rounds. It was a timed and fast-paced activity, and participants were challenged to answer unusual questions!



On the 24th November, the premiere screening of 'Faith and I' took place at the Scottish Storytelling Centre. The film is a skilful and compassionate presentation of the faiths of three young women, and was well-received by the large audience who gathered to watch it. Visitors commented that the film was a great resource for all ages, saying 'we need to get this DVD into Scottish schools and community youth groups'. One viewer felt that 'We rarely hear directly about faith from young people these days, and it was encouraging and heart-warming that Sehrish, Ekjot and Clare were able to be so articulate about theirs.' The 'Faith & I' DVD is available by donation (minimum £5) from the EIFA office. For more information, e-mail: info@eifa.org.uk



A conference for the religious leaders in Edinburgh was held at City Chambers on the 27th November. This year, Simon Keyes from St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace facilitated the conference, entitled 'Understanding the Role of Meditation in Religion'. Three speakers from different traditions, Alex Holmes (Christian Meditation Scotland), Bryan Webb (Wild Geese Sangha) and Ani Rinchen Khandro (Kagyu Samye Dzong Edinburgh), came together to share their views and experiences. (See photo at the bottom of the page).

On the penultimate day of Interfaith Week, in Edinburgh, Rabbi Mark Solomon led an interfaith Shabbat service at St Mark's, attended by members of different faith communities. This was followed by a shared special Kiddush, the blessing recited to sanctify Shabbat. Rabbi Solomon read a wonderful passage entitled 'The Human Family', which resonated with all who attended:

'Who are our brothers and sisters? Are they only members of our own family or clan or people or nation? All men and women, of every colour and creed, of every race and nation, are our brothers and sisters, for we are all members of the human family. Like brothers and sisters, we should feel a sense of common identity. Like brothers and sisters, we should feel each other's pain, and seek each other's welfare. For God, who created us, cares equally for all of us; therefore we should care equally for one another.'

The week was concluded with the Big Interfaith Quiz. Over 70 participants gathered at the Mosque Kitchen to answer questions from the serious to 'What car does Pope Francis drive around the Vatican?' Thanks to everyone who lent their support through the busy and inspiring week.



Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

This year's Interfaith Week was on the theme of journeys, and people travelled from across the region to attend the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group 'Curry and Ceilidh' on Wednesday 26th November, held in the Multicultural Centre, Dumfries.

Provost Ted Thompson opened the event with a powerful message about working together, co-operation and sharing the same hopes for our region. Speakers then shared their different faith journeys. Elisabeth Manson spoke about the period of Advent in the Christian calendar – the advent candles of peace, hope, joy and love, and the Christ candle on Christmas Day; Jan, from the Society of Friends (Quakers) told of their encouragement to keep a faith journal; Ambour, a Muslim, read from the Qur'an; and Venus of the Bahá'í Community read from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

In the spirit of the evening, the Peacemakers Club (a children's group) sang about promoting peace and harmony. It was then time for enthusiastic dancing, with Scottish dances preceding some 'freestyle' burling and pas de basques around the room! The evening was rounded off with a fabulous vegetable curry.



Fife Interfaith Group

Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, Frances Hume, gave a keynote address at Fife Interfaith Group's Interfaith Week event which was held at the Old Kirk, Kirkcaldy on 26th November. The address was entitled 'Journeys of Faith', which was the theme of Interfaith Week. Frances spoke about her own personal journey of faith, from her upbringing in Northern Ireland, moving to Scotland to study theology, and then living and working in India before returning to live in Glasgow.

Being Jewish in Scotland

A group of interested local people came together in the Tontine Hotel in Peebles, to hear about the experience of being Jewish in Scotland and, in the spirit of Scottish Interfaith Week, also found out more about each other's religions and identities. Not only were local Jewish people welcomed to the event, but also members of the Baptist Church, the Church of Scotland, the Unification Church, and the Baha'i faith, all of whom were fascinated by the links between Judaism and their own faiths and identities.

The event was organised by SCoJeC (the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities), who shared with the group the findings of the 'Being Jewish in Scotland' Scottish Government funded enquiry, which found that although pockets of ignorance and anti-Semitic incidences still exist, Scotland was 'a great place to be a Jew'. The full findings of the report can be read on the SCoJeC website, at www.scojec.org.



Members of the group shared their experiences, including the ways in which Judaism was understood within Catholic and Protestant traditions in Scotland. One Jewish woman recounted her father's experience of being asked 'are you a Billy or a Dan?' when he went to school. He answered 'I'm Jewish' to which the response came back, 'yes, but are you a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew?' One Jewish lady spoke about how being Scottish and Jewish meant that she felt she was part of a very close family; when she travelled outside Scotland, she would often meet someone who would say 'I know someone Scottish and Jewish' – and it was often a friend, if not a relative! Another participant spoke about how, having been happily open about her Judaism in Scotland for many years, derogatory comments about Israel following events in the Middle East had recently made her feel 'quite fearful'. The Scottish Government has recently awarded SCoJeC funding to update the 'Being Jewish in Scotland' findings, in the light of recent events in the Middle East, and of similar comments heard from other Jewish people around Scotland.

Part of the effect of the 'Being Jewish in Scotland' inquiry was that the events and focus groups held around the country had brought Jewish people together who had not met before, and even at this event, it was found that the two Jewish attendees had not met before or realised that they lived so close to one another. One attendee said that he was very moved to hear about how many of the participants in the inquiry had been happy to discover that they were 'not alone' as Jewish people. Summing up the atmosphere of the evening, one lady described it as 'Enlightening. Another participant talked about the excitement of meeting people of different faiths, saying: "A garden is made up of flowers with different shapes – it would be so dull if it were all the same!" The group had arrived as strangers, but left as friends, exchanging contact details and planning future meetings.

Dundee Inter Faith Association

On Saturday 29th November, Dundee Inter Faith Association celebrated Scottish Interfaith Week with a Family Fun Day at the Bharatiya Ashram. There were activities for everyone, from face painting and games to storytelling. Joanna Stark entertained the group with traditional fiddle music, and members of the local Muslim community did beautiful henna hand paintings. A delicious meal was provided by the Nepalese community.



Shetland Inter Faith Group

Scottish Interfaith Week 2014 was marked in Shetland with an event on the theme of 'Journeys of Faith', held in St Columba's Church of Scotland, Lerwick. The evening started with some jazz music from local group 'Full Swing', who created a convivial and relaxed atmosphere. The group then heard the personal stories of three individuals, and their journeys of faith: Rev. Dr Caroline Lockerbie, Church of Scotland minister, recently arrived from Canada; Alan McKay of the Baha'i faith, who was born and brought up in Shetland; and Bill Crook, a Buddhist, who followed his brief introduction with an invitation to all to join him in a walking meditation within the church. Each person present was then provided with paper to make notes on their own spiritual journey. They then shared their stories with others in the group who they perhaps did not know so well, generating sympathetic conversation and new friendships. The event ended with more live music, home baking and refreshments.

Skye Faiths Together

On 29th November 2014, Skye Interfaith Group held a workshop on 'The role of Spiritual Values in shaping our communities', in St Columba's Church, Portree. The aim of the workshop was to share and consider important values in shaping communities, and began with discussion on the opportunity given by the Scottish Independence Referendum to envisage the kind of Scotland that we as a nation wanted to live in. Participants discussed the role played by faith in modern Scotland. Starting with the idea of 'a society rooted in compassion and justice', the group developed a list of their core spiritual values. These included love, empathy, respect, honesty and co-operation. Reflecting on how these values were related to their communities in practice, those present developed a series of ideas for their practical application. They considered the ways in which we as a society could care for the marginalised, balance inequality, encourage service, and educate children in spiritual values.

The workshop ended with songs from the Taize community (an ecumenical monastic community in France), and participants went away continuing to reflect on their ideas. In a follow-up workshop, attendees will write letters to the papers and to Scottish leaders, describing what they believe to be core spiritual values and how these could be practically applied within communities.

Stornoway

In Stornoway, a week of activities were organised to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week. Maureen Sier, the Director of Interfaith Scotland, visited Stornoway to take part in the programme of events. Maureen's visit was preceded by some excellent local publicity, which ensured a good turnout for the public talk scheduled in Stornoway on the 21st November. Despite bad weather, a diverse group of people came to the An Lanntair Arts Centre to enjoy a presentation and interactive discussion on the importance of good interfaith relations, locally, nationally and internationally.

During her visit, Maureen was also able to speak to young people at the secondary school in Stornoway, attend a meeting of the NHS Spiritual Care Team at the hospital, and engage with young people at an after school youth club. A special thank you goes to Mina Shepherd from Stornoway's Baha'i community, who organised such an engaging interfaith programme for the week.



Renfrewshire Interfaith Group

Representatives from various faith traditions in Renfrewshire attended the annual Renfrewshire Interfaith Group interfaith service, held on Sunday 16th November in Wallneuk North Church in Abercorn Street. The service was on the theme of Interfaith Week, 'Journeys of Faith', and emphasised the importance of people working together in communities to achieve good outcomes.

The service was led by the chair of Renfrewshire Interfaith Group, Reverend Peter Gill, with readings and prayers delivered by representatives from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Catholic, and Sikh traditions. John Caldwell, Deputy Provost, also attended in his capacity as a local councillor. Afterwards, over refreshments provided by the Sikh representatives, those gathered had a chance to share and discuss their own individual journeys of faith.



SCOTTISH RELIGIOUS LEADER'S FORUM

The Religious Leaders Forum met during Scottish Interfaith Week at Dunblane Cathedral. It was in Dunblane in 2002 that the first Religious Leaders Forum had taken place, and those present took the opportunity to reflect on the Forum's achievements over the course of those 12 years.

Those present noted that over the course of their engagement they had met in diverse places including a Gurdwara, Synagogue, Mosque, Baha'i Centre, and Church offices, and that they had visited the Buddhist Centre on Holy Isle together.



Alongside visits to religious centres, they had gone out into the community, meeting at diverse places including the STV studios, three schools, and the Scottish Parliament. On the occasions when the Religious Leaders Forum met in schools, they were joined by pupils and took part in a question and answer session, which Education Scotland relayed by video to schools nationwide.



Other significant activities have included;

- Visits to various places of worship together during Scottish Interfaith Week with Members of the Scottish Parliament
- Issuing a joint statement calling for the eradication of global poverty
- Taking part in a question and answer session at two Interfaith Scotland national youth conferences
- Organising and participating in a Conference for Religious Leaders at Edinburgh City Chambers during Scottish Interfaith Week
- Responding to the consultation on St Andrew's Day becoming a national holiday
- Sending letters of support for the Baha'i community in Iran
- Meeting with MSPs, and working together over a 2-day seminar to prepare and present a paper on 'The place of religion in Scotland today'

All those present agreed that the Religious Leaders Forum was significant for the deep and lasting friendships that it engendered, and that together, they helped to symbolise the inclusive and dynamic nature of Scottish society. It was also identified that the forum allowed for prompt responses when issues of national or international importance emerged. Finally, the meetings give a strong message to religious communities across Scotland that religious tolerance, understanding and friendship across the diverse faith communities is important.

INTERFAITH SCOTLAND NEWS

AGM and Public Talk

Interfaith Scotland's AGM was held on 28th October 2014, and attended by over 90 people. The topic for the public talk was 'Just Scotland – Tackling Poverty in a Wealthy Land'. The key note presenters were Iain Johnston, Operations Director, and Luke Devlin, Community Development Worker, both from Faith in Community Scotland. This topic allowed for table-top dialogue on a subject that is at the heart of every faith community; support for the poor and vulnerable in our midst.

The AGM was a perfect opportunity to launch Interfaith Scotland's Honorary Interfaith Fellowship Awards, and Interfaith Scotland was delighted to present its first three awards to Sister Isabel Smyth (retiring Chair of Interfaith Scotland), Dianna Wolfson from the Jewish Community, and Salah Beltagui from the Muslim Community. All three are recognised for their outstanding service in the field of interfaith dialogue and engagement. The awards were presented by Ian Glover from the Equality Unit of the Scottish Government. Larry Blance was inaugurated as the new Chair of Interfaith Scotland.



Common ground for the common good

For three days in December 2014, an exciting conference was held at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge. It was specifically designed to explore the 'common good' from the perspective of both religious and non-religious participants. Present were members of the Humanist Society Scotland, Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Muslims, Quakers, and members of the Baha'i faith. Over the course of the seminar, topics were explored in depth, including exploring the common good in post-referendum Scotland, and death and dying in the 21st Century.

The tone of the conference was set by presentations given by representatives from Interfaith Scotland, the Humanist Society Scotland, the Church of Scotland and the Conforti Institute (Catholic). Over the course of the conference, diverse topics were covered in workshops. One of the most challenging and interesting workshop topics was 'Death and dying in the 21st Century'. It was fascinating to explore together the ways in which diverse communities support people when members of their family have died, or when facing death themselves. This topic also allowed those present to explore social issues, such as funeral poverty. The final day of the conference included time for reflection from all those present, and a firm commitment to continue to host similar conferences on an annual basis. The Conforti Institute is a warm and welcoming environment, and can be strongly recommended as an ideal place for conferences, seminars and workshops.



Religious Equality Training

Interfaith Scotland's training programme in Religious Equality continues to develop. Jamie Spurway, Interfaith Scotland's Training Officer, recently delivered sessions to both North Lanarkshire Council and the equality working group of Glasgow City Council. Those who attended learned about beliefs and cultural practices of the six main faiths, and religious belief as a protected characteristic. Glasgow Council's equality working group discussed the requirement for public bodies to 'foster good relations' between faith groups. North Lanarkshire Council examined the different needs arising from religious belief, and the challenges that can present in the context of the Council's work - for instance, when providing intimate care to service users. Both groups were very engaged in discussions, and gave extremely positive feedback. Further training courses included a session for SCoJeC (The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities) and for Perth and Kinross Council.

A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland

Over the past year, Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, Frances Hume, has worked with faith communities across Scotland to create a new edition of 'A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland'. Originally published over 10 years ago, it needed to be reprinted to incorporate the latest census statistics for religion and belief. Frances took the opportunity to consult with the faith communities in Scotland about their individual sections within the Guide, to ascertain whether the beliefs and practices listed also needed to be updated. A major update was undertaken as a result of the consultation and it has been a fascinating and challenging process to create short summaries that reflect what can sometimes be a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices within each faith tradition.

Staff Updates

We welcomed back Dr Rose Drew, Project Manager of Interfaith Glasgow, who returned from her maternity leave in October 2014. We said farewell to Michael Wilson who covered her post for a year and wish him well in his new post as Fundraising Co-ordinator at St Andrews Hospice. Mel Grossman was employed to assist the director with a week of Holocaust Memorial Day activities in January. Hannah Rastall was employed as an intern to collate and edit the Interfaith Scotland newsletter and she has done an excellent job pulling together this bumper edition! Interfaith Glasgow also welcomed sessional worker Kemal Okan who has organised five community meals, bringing people of different faiths together in Glasgow's south side.



YOUTH NEWS

School Volunteer Programme

Interfaith Scotland brings volunteers to schools all over Scotland to work with primary and secondary school pupils. Volunteers speak about their faith and what it means to them in a way that relates to young people. The volunteers assist the Development Officer in delivering 'interfaith days', classes and school assemblies. Since December, they have led sessions for secondary school pupils at St Modan's High School in Stirling, Oban High School, St Mungo's High School in Falkirk, Dumfries High School, St Joseph's Academy in Kilmarnock and Beaconsfield School in Bridge of Allan. They have also worked with primary school pupils delivering a whole school assembly followed by classes at Muirhead Primary School in Troon and Lincluden Primary School in Dumfries.



New Volunteers Requested for Schools Programme

The word is spreading about the excellent work of our volunteers in schools as there has been a marked increase in requests for school visits this year. Due to the high demand, Interfaith Scotland sent out an invitation for people to apply to be schools volunteers and to attend a training programme at Interfaith Scotland's office. The response was overwhelming with over 40 people of all ages applying to volunteer. New volunteers have come from Christian, Muslim, Baha'i and Pagan backgrounds. Interfaith Scotland is also keen to hear from anyone who might be interested in volunteering from the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh faiths. An initial training session was held in February for 12 volunteers.



Catholic Youth Conference

A schools conference was held at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge in November for teachers and pupils from Catholic Schools across Scotland. Schools had elected pupils from each school that had an interest in hosting an event for Scottish Interfaith Week within their school. Frances Hume and Sister Isabel Smyth shared their personal 'interfaith journeys' with the pupils. With the assistance of Interfaith Scotland, the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) had created a comprehensive pack of materials for Catholic Schools with ways in which a school might like to mark Scottish Interfaith Week. Teachers were presented with the pack and pupils divided into groups and worked on some of the activities together. The pupils then presented ideas that they might take forward in their schools to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week.



Conference for Interfaith Youth Workers

In November, young volunteers Sophie Hall and Meg Wallace represented Interfaith Scotland at a conference in London for interfaith youth workers. The conference was hosted by the Inter Faith Network for the UK and Interfaith Scotland had been asked to send two of its young volunteers to speak about Interfaith Scotland's youth work, as it was thought to be a 'model' for the UK by utilizing young people as 'peer educators' by giving talks about their faith in schools. Sophie shares her experiences with us below:



'In November 2014, we were lucky enough to attend the Interfaith Network Conference 'Young Voices, Young Agents for Change' in London. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet other people doing similar work, and inspired and impressed us in equal measure. A variety of groups were represented, each leading on different projects including sports, arts and education. Through discussion groups, we explored common themes within interfaith activities. We discussed the importance of interfaith events not only as a way to talk about faiths, but as a means to bring together different communities across cultural and language barriers; the importance of interfaith as a way to embrace and understand both similarities and difference, gaining a deeper understanding of ourselves and others in the process; and the positive learning possibilities of sharing personal experiences in classroom settings, as a way to learn about the day-to-day experiences of different faiths. The day's activities highlighted the vital role played by young people involved in interfaith events across the UK, who act as role models, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. The day was a valuable experience, and provided a chance to share ideas and learn from others.'

Primary School Teachers Conference

The Development Officer, Frances Hume, lead an interfaith workshop at a Primary School teachers conference in November. The conference was on the theme of good practice in RME (Religious and Moral Education). The teachers who participated were very enthusiastic about the interfaith workshop and the idea of having people from different faiths speak to their pupils. As a result a visit was organised to Lincluden Primary School in Dumfries where the pupils learnt about the Muslim and Buddhist religions.



WOMEN'S NEWS

Interfaith Scotland Women's Dialogue Events

Interfaith Scotland organised two women's interfaith dialogue events on the theme of 'Health and Wellbeing for Body and Soul in Scotland'. The first took place in Forres on 23rd September. The event was a great success, with over 30 women in attendance. The second took place in Dumfries on 8th March, which is also International Women's Day, again with 25 women in attendance. The dialogue events provided an opportunity for women of all faiths and none to meet together and explore the values that are shared across faiths and the wisdom from our respective faith traditions.



Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group

On 19th November 2014, the Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group celebrated Scottish Interfaith Week at the Methodist Church, in Edinburgh. Over 20 ladies from various faith traditions gathered to share stories and refreshments, and to hear inspiring talks on the theme of 'Journeys of Faith'.

Rebekah Gronowski spoke on 'Journeys in Judaism: crossing and intersecting paths in festivals', reflecting on her personal experience of her faith. The group then heard from Dr. Frances Mutapi from Zimbabwe, who gave a fascinating talk on journeying in different faiths and traditions. The evening ended with a question and answer session, where those present had a chance to find out more about each speaker's experience. The event was a great success, and the Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group is very grateful to Interfaith Scotland for their support in making it possible. Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group usually meets on the third Wednesday of the month from 7pm to 9pm in Edinburgh. Meetings are hosted by the various faith communities involved. Find out about upcoming events on their website: www.edinwig.org.uk

Abrahamic Roots Group

Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, assisted the North Lanarkshire Abrahamic Roots Group (a dialogue group for Muslim and Christian women in Coatbridge) in organising an outreach event for women of faith across Glasgow and Lanarkshire, looking at the role of women in Christian and Muslim scriptures. The event was a great success, with 40 women in attendance.



HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL EVENTS 2015

Interfaith Scotland was honoured to be commissioned once again to facilitate national level events in Scotland, to befittingly remember the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. 2015 is a significant year for Holocaust Remembrance, as it is the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps and the 20th Anniversary of the Bosnian genocide at Srebrenica. The theme for 2015 is 'Keeping the Memory Alive', and as survivors of the Holocaust become fewer in number every year, the challenge for society is to find ways to remember the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, to ensure that such atrocities never happen again.

Interfaith Scotland was privileged to bring to Scotland two survivors, Ela Weissberger, a Jewish survivor of the Terezin Concentration Camp, and Hasan Hasanović, a Muslim survivor of the Srebrenica genocide. Ela and Hasan shared their moving stories with thousands across Scotland and were key note speakers at the national event held in Ayr. The deep friendship that developed between Ela, an elderly Jewish survivor, and Hasan, a young Muslim survivor, was very special.



Holocaust Memorial National Commemorative Event 2015

The National Holocaust Memorial for Scotland took place on 27th January in Ayr Town Hall. The evening commenced with a civic reception for guests including Scottish Jewish refugees. The reception included a viewing of 'Gathering the Voices', an exhibition of stories and photographs of Jewish refugees who settled in Scotland. Other guests arrived and by 6.30pm the hall and balcony were full, with over 600 guests in attendance.

Provost Helen Moonie welcomed everyone to the evening and reminded all those attending of the importance of the event. This was followed by a heartfelt speech from Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.



Continued on next page.

International guest speaker and concentration camp survivor, Ela Weissberger, then spoke about her time in Terezin Concentration Camp and the importance of the arts in keeping spirits alive during such a difficult period. Ela herself sang (55 times) in the camp's children's opera, Brundibar, during her three year incarceration in Terezin. This opera was performed in front of the Nazis and the Red Cross, and was part of a Nazi propaganda programme to convince the outside world that the Jews were not suffering under their regime. After Ela's moving talk,



The Ayrshire School Children's Choir sang excerpts from Brundibar's Opera and Ela joined in with them – an incredibly moving part of the programme. After the school choir performance, school pupils from Kyle Academy who had visited Auschwitz shared their experience of visiting the camp.

The audience was then shown a specially commissioned video of the Nazi persecution of gay men, introduced by Ben Freeman of 'From Yesterday for Tomorrow', an organisation tackling prejudice through education. After the video, Hasan Hasanović shared his harrowing story of escaping from Srebrenica, on what has become known as 'the death march'. Only a fraction of the men who escaped survived the six-day walk. Sadly, Hasan's twin brother and father were killed during the escape.



At the national event in Ayr, Scotland was privileged to have one of 70 specially commissioned memorial candles designed by award winning artist Sir Anish Kapoor to mark the 70 years since the liberation of Auschwitz - Birkenau. This special memorial candle was placed with another five candles and after a beautiful rendition of Ingemisco from Verde's Requiem Mass by Thomas Kinch and Marija Struckova of The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, all six candles were lit, one by one, in memory of those who died in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. The audience sat in silence for a minute before Rabbi Rubin chanted a Jewish prayer for the dead.



Member's Dialogue Meeting: Keeping the Memory Alive

It was with great pleasure that Interfaith Scotland welcomed Holocaust Memorial Day special guests, Ela Weissberger and Hasan Hasanović, to join its members for an afternoon tea and dialogue event held on 25th January 2015 in Glasgow. This event was an opportunity for members and friends to meet the international visitors, who are survivors of the Holocaust and the Bosnian genocide.

Thirty-five members and friends attended the event, which included presentations from Ela and Hasan on the theme of 'keeping the memory alive', and dialogue around three key questions. Members were treated to a musical performance from Maureen Hunter from Edinburgh, who sang Robert Burns' famous song 'A man's a man for a' that'. Wide-ranging discussions were held on how Scotland could learn from the tragedies of the past. All those present made commitments regarding how they would keep the memory of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides alive.



Personal Reflection from Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland

Four years ago when first asked to facilitate the national Holocaust Memorial events for Scotland, I could hardly have imagined the significance such commemorations would have for our family. I had always known that my husband's grandparents were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau and that his mother escaped to the UK as a young girl, but sadly as Nick's mother, Sonja, died young, I never had the chance to meet her, and Nick grew up without a mum.

With every Holocaust story shared over the last four years, both Nick and I have felt the memory of his grandparents and mother become more alive and our family become more connected to learning from the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. By keeping the memory alive, healing is taking place: and this year, as we were given the privilege of holding the lit 70th anniversary commemorative candle, we thought of all Nick's murdered relatives and thanked God that Scotland was a country committed to never forgetting, and committed to building a society where bigotry, prejudice, extremism and hatred is constantly challenged.



Scottish Parliamentary Reception

On the 29th January, Interfaith Scotland held a lunchtime reception at the Scottish Parliament to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. The event was held solely for the Scottish Holocaust survivors and their families, as well as members of the Scottish Parliament, and was full to capacity: as many as 25 MSPs attended from across Scotland, including George Adam, Stuart McMillan, Jackson Carlaw, Margaret Michell, Cameron Buchanan, Cara Hilton and Siobhan McMahon.

The event was chaired by Interfaith Scotland Director, Dr Maureen Sier, and the first speaker was Olivia Marks-Woldman, Chief Executive of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. Bob Doris, the MSP who kindly sponsored the event, and Humza Yousaf, the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, made heartfelt speeches of welcome. Hasan Hasanović and Ela Weissberger, both survivors of European genocides, then shared their stories of survival with the audience, and spoke of the importance of keeping the memory of genocide alive. Finally, Henry Wuga, who arrived in Scotland in the Kindertransport (a rescue mission, bringing Jewish children to safety in the UK prior to the Second World War), told his emotional story. He ended the commemorations by lighting another of the 70 specially commissioned candles designed by Turner prize winner Sir Anish Kapoor. After a minute's silence, everyone was invited to have lunch, share stories, and meet Ela and Hasan.



Shabbat Dinner

On Friday evening, Giffnock Synagogue held a Shabbat dinner in honour of Ela Weissberger, with over 90 attendees from Glasgow's Jewish Community. Both Ela and Hasan spoke of their personal experiences of genocide, sharing stories and hopes for the future. Those present enjoyed a traditional meal and songs, and both the Lord Lieutenant of East Renfrewshire and Rabbi Rubin spoke to welcome Ela and Hasan, reiterating the importance of Holocaust memorial.

"I would like to thank you on behalf of The Association of Jewish Refugees for giving us the opportunity to bring our 1st and 2nd Generation members from Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, Montrose and Dundee to this very important event. Among us were survivors of Auschwitz, Theresienstadt, several Kinder transportees, and others with individual stories of heroic survival. As a member of the 2nd Generation myself, I know the importance of keeping the events of this dark period in our history alive, so that future generations can learn from it, avoid the errors which led to the Holocaust, and live in peace."

Association of Jewish Refugees

Holocaust Memorial Events in Glasgow, Moray and Lossiemouth

Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, accompanied Hasan Hasanović to Bellahouston Academy in Glasgow, where he spoke to the S3 year group about his experience of escaping persecution in Srebrenica. Hasan's talk was followed by questions from the pupils. Hasan was delighted to also meet the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who was visiting the school to speak with S4 pupils. On Holocaust Memorial Day, Frances attended a meeting of the Interfaith Moray group in Elgin. During the meeting she gave a reflection about the Holocaust and spoke about the importance of keeping the memory alive. She lit a central candle and the 20 participants lit small candles from the central candle to commemorate the different groups of people who had died in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. She also gave two talks about the Holocaust and subsequent genocides to pupils from S2 and S4 at Lossiemouth High School.

Holocaust Memorial Events in Edinburgh

2015 was a significant year: it commemorated the 100 year anniversary of the Armenian genocide, 70 years of the Jewish liberation from Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, 20 years since the Bosnian genocide, and followed closely on from the 20 years of commemoration of the Rwandan genocide. To mark these momentous events, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association (EIFA) welcomed survivors who shared their stories from all four tragedies. EIFA were honoured to receive Irina Winfield (Armenia), Hasan Hasanović (Bosnia), Patrick Ndanga (Rwanda) and Ela Wiessberger (the Holocaust). The event was full to capacity, and the crowd was moved to tears by the similarly tragic and harrowing stories each speaker had to tell. They were also left with the hope that the younger generation has the ability to stop such atrocities reoccurring.

The event was also very memorable for two other reasons. Firstly, a presentation by the S5 pupil Clara Warshaw, who had researched her family's history to learn the story of her relatives' escape from the concentration camps, which she put down to three acts of kindness; and secondly, a moving performance by the Rwandan survivor and musician Patrik Ndanga, who sang his song for peace for Rwanda, 'Field of Dreams.'

"As the privileged witnesses of the survivors' stories here today we are all charged with the extra responsibility of sharing the accounts we have heard in order to help prevent such atrocities from reoccurring. EIFA would like to thank Interfaith Scotland for its invaluable contribution in bringing Ela and Hasan to Edinburgh, and to the Scottish Government and Edinburgh Council for its continuing support with such important events".

Iain Stewart, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association



LOCAL INTERFAITH GROUP NEWS

Interfaith Moray

There is a new interfaith group in the north of Scotland. 'Interfaith Moray' started in September 2014, with the help of Interfaith Scotland. Following a Women's Dialogue event in Forres, which was attended by over 30 people, there was strong support for the idea of creating an interfaith group. At a second meeting in October, attended by Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland's Development Officer, the group decided to spend the first few meetings getting to know one another and each other's faith traditions. It was decided that an hour at each meeting would be devoted to one faith group, to introduce its traditions, beliefs, and other key aspects. The meeting also explored how people were interested in engaging. Three themes emerged – learning from each other, interfaith prayer and meditation, and the environment/social justice.



The group organised an event for Interfaith Week called 'Meet Interfaith Moray' in Elgin, attended by 27 people. It gave people a chance to hear about the history of interfaith in Scotland from Interfaith Scotland Director Maureen Sier, to discuss ideas, and to give input as to what they would like to see Interfaith Moray get involved in. Some terrific ideas emerged for local engagement and activities; sharing of faiths, interfaith retreats, education, and working with schools, even a local interfaith music festival. The group looks forward to exploring these ideas in due course.



There are now about 20 people on the group's list, representing some 13 traditions. The group is off to a strong start, and is very grateful indeed to Reverend Vince McQuaid and St Sylvester's Church in Elgin for providing a meeting place. Please 'like' the Moray Interfaith Facebook page and find out more! www.facebook.com/morayinterfaith

Inverness Interfaith Group

The Inverness Interfaith Group began the year with a celebratory meal, followed by a discussion on 'Mindfulness', led by Hamish Wood. He explained some of the philosophy behind the practice of mindfulness in Buddhism, and guided the group in a short taster session. Other members shared thoughts on the subject from their respective faith traditions. Inverness Interfaith Group has decided to include several of these 'faith sharing' sessions throughout the year, as a way of deepening the group's fellowship by developing an appreciation of the religious experiences of its members. The proposed topic for the next 'faith sharing' session is 'Pilgrimage'.



Advancing Interfaith Fellowship in Fife

Like many volunteers, members of the Fife Interfaith Group and The Jewels of Islam work hard to advance interfaith fellowship in the multi-cultural society of Fife. The two groups came together as a result of efforts by women in St Marie's Church, Kirkcaldy, who wanted to meet with Muslim women and try to understand them better. A meeting through the Fife Interfaith Group was a resounding success: both groups realised just how much they had in common, and this led to a series of successful meetings between the Jewels of Islam group, which had been holding meetings to let people know about Islam, and Fife Interfaith Group. These meetings have led to many successful joint projects, the most recent of which was a joint Jumble Sale in the Hayfield Community Centre.

2014 was a busy year for both groups, and included a wonderful opportunity for the Jewels of Islam to meet Malala Yousafzai, the inspirational young girl from Pakistan whose activism for female education has made her a symbol for hope and reconciliation in the Muslim world.

The Fife Voluntary Action Awards took place in St Andrews, and were a wonderful tribute from Fife Council to all the hardworking volunteers in the area. Fife Interfaith Group and the Jewels of Islam were delighted to be awarded a runners-up certificate for the Equality and Diversity Award, which went to worthy winners the Fife Migrant's Forum, and are looking forward to working together on more interesting events and projects in the future.



Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group Celebrates World Religion Day

On Sunday 18th January, Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group celebrated World Religion day. The aim of the World Religion Day, held on the third Sunday in January every year, is to foster greater interfaith understanding and harmony by emphasising the common denominators underlying all religions, creating space for dialogue and for friendship. Through a variety of events held around the globe, followers of every religion are encouraged to acknowledge the similarities between different faiths.

In Dumfries, individuals from several faiths and beliefs shared readings, speaking of the importance of having time to reflect on our actions, and on the fundamental oneness of all faiths. Sharing in food, music, discussion and friendship, those involved commented on how positive it was to mingle with people from different faiths, and discussed how to build on this for next year.



West Lothian Faith Group

The West Lothian Faith Group was set up in 2011, as one of the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP's) equality forums. The group was set up as an informal network to promote interfaith working in West Lothian and to provide a mechanism for the council and partners to engage with faith communities on equality issues related to religion and belief. Membership of the group has grown steadily, and is currently made up of volunteer representatives from places of worship in West Lothian and individuals from six religions.

The Faith Group meets on a quarterly basis, and provides members of the faith communities with a chance to meet with, and have a say in, the work of community planning partners on issues that affect them, to meet and exchange ideas and experiences with members of other faiths, and to work together on issues of common concern. Members of the Faith Group are also invited to take part in six-monthly 'Let's Talk Equalities' events, held to bring together members of each of the CPP's equality forums.

Faith Group members have recently developed a Faith Handbook to bring together their shared understanding of how faith influences the lives of believers of different faith traditions. The document highlights aspects of which to be aware around food, fasting and customs around death. It is aimed at local employers, members of the community and those delivering services locally, in order create a deeper sense of understanding, and to enhance engagement with faith groups within West Lothian.

The Handbook was launched in January 2015, and plans are in place to ensure that it is widely circulated and used across West Lothian. It can be found on the Community Planning website at www.westlothian.gov.uk and at www.interfaithscotland.org/interfaith-groups/west-lothian.

If you live in the West Lothian area and are interested in joining the Faith Group, or if you would like more information on the group, please contact Joanna Anderson via email at joanna.anderson1@westlothian.gov.uk, by phone on **01506 281086**, or visit www.westlothian.gov.uk/communityplanning.



PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

My unexpected Church encounter

By Zaf Ziza

The day before the Scottish Referendum, I strolled through Edinburgh to see the hue and cry. There were no cries, and the only hue was the grey of the Edinburgh sky. Press and the public milled around with cameras. As I passed an old church on the Royal Mile, I decided to go in and take some photographs. I am a second generation Muslim from a Pakistani background, and often visit churches, not just for the beauty of their architecture, but to absorb their peaceful, spiritual atmosphere. I was welcomed politely by an elderly lady and gentleman, who on first impressions seemed rather conservative. The church was beautiful, but I felt slightly uncomfortable under the old union jacks, saltires and crowns - like a colonial subject - and decided to leave.

As I was leaving, I thanked the couple, and we got chatting. They asked where I was from, and we began to discuss Edinburgh and the Referendum. Then the gentleman ushered out the last tourists, leaving the three of us locked in an 11th Century church - unexpected company in an unexpected place.

If we had been discussing religion, or architecture, I expect it would have been very formal; but as we talked about the Referendum I felt a real sense of shared emotion. We all felt the gravity of our place in Scottish society, on the eve of such a huge decision. I assumed that as an elderly couple in a church embroidered with union jacks they would be 'No' supporters. As it turned out, the couple were 'Yes' supporters, and spoke passionately about their history, their political choices, and their belief in a fairer and more equal society. It didn't matter whether or not we shared political views; my assumptions about the couple were swept away, and I was touched by their warmth and grace, and the way in which they had welcomed me into their place of worship, which they had opened for visitors. I left with my heart warmed by the sense of human connection in contrast to the political furore around us.

On my way back to the station I noticed another church with a placard outside saying 'Open from 10am to 6pm for quiet thoughts and contemplation' - how wonderful. I decided that after casting my vote the next day, I would return for a good moment of 'quiet contemplation'.

It is a shame to think that any person of faith would not visit churches, mosques or other religious establishments on the basis of their religion - they don't know what they are missing!



From Rabbi to Minister in seven generations

By Andrew Sarle, Central Scotland Interfaith Group

This is a revised version of an article submitted to Second Generation Voices, the journal for the children of victims or survivors of the Holocaust.



My father came to London from Fürth (Bavaria) in 1934, with only a few pounds in his pocket. He anglicised his name from Sahlmann to Sarle, and in 1946, met my mother. I was brought up according to her family's Christian faith, as my father's side had for many years been only very limited in the practice of Judaism. Indeed, my grandfather was adamant that his identity was German, rather than Jewish. He fought in WWI, and was decorated with the Iron Cross First Class, which he wore proudly when he was out. His status as a veteran was one of the ways in which his family were insulated from some of the persecution of Jews as the 1930s progressed. He was friendly with many of the city fathers, including the local police chief – who warned him not to look out of the front windows of the family home in Friedrichstrasse on the night of 9 November 1938 - Kristallnacht. (Kristallnacht was a series of violent anti-Jewish pogroms in which Jewish homes, synagogues and businesses were attacked, and preceded the removal of 30,000 Jews to concentration camps.) My family survived the night unscathed, but it had shaken my grandfather to the core, and soon after that he took his own life.



I grew up knowing that I was half Jewish – but half German, the recent former enemy. My mother was a regular churchgoer, and I went through the normal gamut of Sunday School and Bible Class. I was interested in my Jewish roots, but talking about them was not encouraged. In 1960, we took a family holiday touring Germany, and among other places visited the Hof (Back courtyard) of the family home, and the graves of family members in the New Jewish cemetery in Fürth.

After I left school in 1969, I came to Scotland, where I worked as a teacher for 27 years. On leaving teaching, I worked as a reader (a part-time minister's assistant). Part of my training for this role included studying for a BD at Edinburgh University where two courses in particular appealed to my sense of enquiry about my roots: Christianity and World Religions, which touched on Judaism, and Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

As part of the latter course, I investigated the issues surrounding being a member of the Second Generation. I discovered that many of the issues I faced were shared by others, including the reluctance of survivors to share their experiences. My father had died a year prior to my taking the course, and much of the information about his experiences were garnered from conversations with my aunt rather than him in person.

Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) advertised for a part-time Inter Faith Education Officer around the time I graduated, and I was appointed in 2004, working there for three and a half years. In this role I became involved with members of other faith groupings, and facilitated visits to their places of worship by groups of Christians. I thus attended services at the Glasgow Reformed Synagogue and the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, and met up with their Rabbis.

In 2013 I became an Ordained Local Minister for the Church of Scotland. To my knowledge I am the first member of either side of my family to take on this sort of role since Jakob Dessauer (1740-1791), my four times great grandfather, who was Rabbi in a small village near Bamberg.

I have visited Germany many times over the years, and have been involved in leading youth exchanges to bring young Scots and Germans together. These visits have strengthened my identification as being partly German Jewish in my origins, if not in my religious practice. There are two occasions in each year when I find this identification difficult: Remembrance Sunday, and Holocaust Memorial Day. When I conduct Remembrance Services, I speak about my grandfather. Displaying his Iron Cross can make those present think about the sacrifices made by people on both sides of any war.

My life experience and my faith journey are inextricably linked. As we prepared for the Scottish Independence Referendum, I reflected on my feelings of being something of a mischling or mongrel in my ethnicity. Am I a Scot through over forty years of residency, or English through birth, or even German through the majority of my bloodline? I have been eligible to hold, as I do now, a British passport, but I understand that I could also have claimed German or even Israeli citizenship, although I never did! On my faith journey I have travelled from Anglican to Methodist, and Reformed, where the Church of Scotland is located.

Though I have now found a place where I feel I belong, I am also deeply aware of the many strands in my family background that have shaped me and brought me to this place.

Interfaith Weddings

The law in Scotland allows flexibility and choice about where and when to be married, as well as a choice about the type of wedding ceremony. Marriage ceremonies can be held anywhere in Scotland, inside or outside, as long as it is appropriate and safe. There are two types of legal marriage or civil partnership ceremony in Scotland – a Civil Ceremony or a Religious or Belief Ceremony. A Civil Ceremony is conducted by a Registrar employed by the local authority. Most Registrars will offer some choice in the format of the ceremony, but a civil ceremony is usually secular. A Religious or Belief Ceremony includes ceremonies of all belief systems. It does not need to include religious language or symbolism as long as it is held by an appropriately authorised Celebrant. Celebrants include ministers from many denominations and churches, and from other religions and belief systems, for example Interfaith Celebrants, Humanist Celebrants, Pagan Celebrants and Baha'i Celebrants.

Interfaith Celebrants can offer ceremonies to people of any faith or of none. Their training includes a study of the major world religions, ancient traditions and secular beliefs. Although they are called 'interfaith', ceremonies do not have to include a religion or belief element. They can be tailor-made to suit the individual and to include whatever is personal and meaningful to them, whether the ceremony is religious, non-religious, or something in-between. Interfaith celebrants work with couples, reflecting on what love and marriage means to them, creating a ceremony that reflects the couple's personal beliefs and traditions. Together with the celebrant individuals can discuss what they wish to be acknowledged and included in the ceremony. Vows, readings, music and any other ritual can be religious, spiritual or secular.

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One of Interfaith Scotland's previous newsletter interns, Katy Alexander, had an interfaith wedding ceremony at New Lanark, which the director and development officer of Interfaith Scotland were delighted to attend. Katy shares her reflections of the experience below:

'The wedding ceremony is the central part of the wedding day and it was really important to us that it reflected not only our relationship but the sacredness of the union of marriage. My husband would describe himself as atheist, and I would consider myself as spiritual with faith in God. An interfaith wedding ceremony gave us the freedom to really capture the essence of our love and reflect upon what marriage meant to us. We were able to incorporate elements from various faith traditions, which was especially important to me, to really capture the spirit of love as reflected in all faiths. We had readings from the Baha'i faith, the Christian tradition, a Cherokee marriage blessing, and also included readings from the Celtic spiritual tradition, a handfasting (a ritual used in Pagan weddings) and a candle lighting ceremony.

Our ceremony felt truly unique to us, reflective of our love and relationship. Creating the ceremony, considering the different readings and what the central emphasis was going to be was, I feel, an important part of my spiritual preparation for entering marriage. Our interfaith celebrant was so helpful, with lots of suggestions and advice to get us started, and even welcomed us into her home to discuss our marriage vision and to get to know us better as a couple. I am delighted that she was able to share in our most special day with us'.



University of St Andrews Interfaith Newsletter

University of St Andrews students have created an online interfaith newsletter called Convocamus. Interfaith Scotland was contacted by the students to request contributions from members or friends who would like to share their personal stories, describing their faith journey and/or faith community. A number of members and friends of Interfaith Scotland have contributed to the online publication. There has not been room to include these stories in our own publication, but they will be available to view online in the second and third editions of the Convocamus interfaith newsletter on the University of St Andrews website.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April

Members Dialogue Event, 20th April, Highland Hotel, Stirling, 6.15 - 8.15 pm
School Volunteers Training Day, 22nd April at Interfaith Scotland's office

May

Religious Leaders Forum, 14th May
Interfaith Professionals Networking Event, 13th May at the Bield, Perthshire
Interfaith Scotland International Retreat, Island of Iona, 30th May – 5th June

June

Women's Dialogue for Scottish Refugee Week: 17th June, 11.30am - 2.00pm,
 St Francis Centre, Glasgow

August

Members Dialogue Event, 9th August, 2.30 – 6 pm, Highland Hotel, Inverness

September

Women's Interfaith Dialogue: Sikh Sanjog Café, Edinburgh

October

AGM and Public Talk, 28th October, 5.30 – 8pm, Linlithgow Burgh Halls
Networking Seminar for Local Interfaith groups: 7 October, The Bield, Perthshire

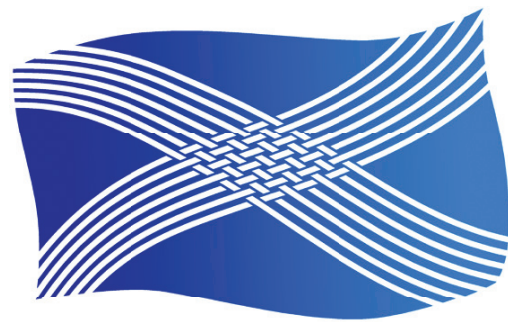
November

Scottish Interfaith Week 2015: 22nd - 30th November 2015
Launch of Interfaith Week: 22nd November, 2 – 4.30pm, Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh
Women's Interfaith Dialogue for Scottish Interfaith Week, Perth
Numerous Interfaith events across Scotland for Scottish Interfaith Week:
 check Interfaith Scotland website for updates
Conforti Institute Seminar for engagement between the religious and the non-religious,
 27th – 29th November

Check our website's News and Events page for further updates...

Get in touch!

Interfaith Scotland publishes an annual newsletter to let people know about a variety of interfaith initiatives happening in Scotland. We welcome short articles for inclusion in future newsletters.



*Interfaith
Scotland*



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