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Photos taken during the 2014 Commonwealth Games

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Networking Seminar for Local Interfaith Groups

The Annual Networking Seminar for local interfaith groups took place at the Bield at Blackruthven on 17th June, a beautiful retreat centre in the Perthshire countryside. The seminar was very well attended with representatives from 14 interfaith groups from across Scotland. Participants had been asked in advance if they would like to give a presentation about interfaith activities taking place in their area and there was enthusiastic uptake on this. Fiona McAllister, a teacher at Lossiemouth High School, spoke about the Moray Interfaith Initiative between three secondary schools in the Moray area. Marian McElhinney and Samina Chishti spoke movingly about their recent pilgrimage to Iona with the North Lanarkshire Abrahamic Roots Group (see article on page 16). The Rev Peter Gill spoke about activities of the Renfrewshire Interfaith Forum and Linda Martin from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities spoke about her work as an online outreach worker and voluntary ambassador for the Highlands and Islands.

The Bield has its own farmland and participants enjoyed fresh produce from the farm as part of their vegetarian lunch. After lunch participants were given a tour of the beautiful grounds by the founder of the Bield. The Bield is a Christian retreat centre which is supportive of interfaith dialogue.

In the afternoon participants were divided into smaller groups to enjoy some ‘experiential’ dialogue. It was intended to give those present an experience of three different forms of interfaith dialogue which would hopefully provide fresh inspiration to use within their own local interfaith groups. These sessions were ‘Soul Space’, lead by Graham Morton from Central Scotland Interfaith Group, ‘Sacred Journeys’ lead by Frances Hume, Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland and ‘Scriptural Reasoning’ lead by Magdalen Lambkin, Project Officer at Interfaith Glasgow.

For the Sacred Journeys session, participants were asked to think about significant moments in their lives and share these with a partner. For the Soul Space session, participants had been asked in advance to bring along a piece of scripture, music, poetry or other writing on the theme of ‘Hospitality’ to share with the group. The Scriptural Reasoning session was on the same theme of hospitality but in a very different style. More can be read about Scriptural Reasoning on page 11.
Professionals Networking Seminar

Interfaith Scotland hosted a national seminar for people who are either employed as Interfaith Officers or who work as Equalities Officers supporting local interfaith groups in Scotland at the Bield at Blackruthven, Perthshire, on 20th May. Participants from Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association, and East Renfrewshire and Fife Councils enjoyed the day, sharing the joys and challenges of this line of work and thinking about the opportunity of collaborating in future.

Some of the areas looked at over the course of the seminar were training; managing others; local authority support for Interfaith; working with young people and supporting interfaith development. A large and diverse set of activities were identified as good practice and shared and then the key challenges were discussed in depth. Some of these challenges included: training and capacity building volunteers, marketing interfaith successfully, how to manage local and national government expectations, how to work with limited human resources, how to manage tight budgets and still achieve substantial work and how to work with the extensive red tape around children and young people. Everyone present agreed that this style of seminar for those working in interfaith was extremely helpful and it is planned to host a similar event in 2015.

Religious Equality Training News

Over the month of June, Interfaith Scotland’s training programme was particularly busy. Interfaith Scotland’s Training Officer, Jamie Spurway, delivered a very interactive session for a group of education professionals through the College Development Network. The Network supports the education sector to deliver best practice. College and university lecturers and staff attended the programme and engaged in a lively and informed debate about some of the challenging ways that religious belief can impact on the needs of staff and students. The course gave an overview of six major religions and described some of the ways that a college or university can help promote ‘good relations’ between faith groups, such as the provision of quiet spaces for prayer or reflection and the support of interfaith groups and events. A similar course was held for staff at South Lanarkshire College, with great feedback from both groups.

Successful training courses have also been held with over 90 staff from North Lanarkshire Council. The delegates were mostly managers and team leaders from housing and social care teams, so the sessions covered both information on the core beliefs of the main faiths and practical discussions around how to best respond to the needs of service users from the particular faith backgrounds. Again, feedback was very positive and Interfaith Scotland has been invited to deliver further training courses to frontline staff at North Lanarkshire Council.
Members Dialogue Meetings

Strengthening Local Democracy

Interfaith Scotland partnered with the ‘Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy’ to hold a dialogue event for Interfaith Scotland members. The event took place on 2nd April in Stirling and included members from diverse faiths from across Scotland. The Commission had been tasked with reporting to Government and triggering a wider debate in civic society about what is meant by local democracy and what is needed to achieve it. The evening was facilitated by Dr. Oliver Escobar of the Academy of Government, University of Edinburgh, and allowed participants to explore their vision for local democracy, the challenges to realizing that vision and the possible reforms and solutions needed to overcome the challenges and realize the vision.

Around 30 participants from the Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh traditions engaged with the dialogue and were delighted to be able to input to the Commission’s report to Government. The Trustees of Interfaith Scotland have served as a religion and belief advisory board to the Commission and the full report from the Commission has now been published. Rev. Ewan Aitken from the Commission said the following about the input of Interfaith Scotland:

‘Interfaith Scotland has enabled the voice of Scotland’s faith communities to be heard at the heart of what is a very significant conversation about what we mean by local democracy, participation and power in 21st Century Scotland. Their focus on the deep human relationships and the needs for a well-nourished spiritual life individually and as communities is a distinct and powerful contribution to this very important debate. As the Commission representing faith communities, the work of the Board has given my contributions an authenticity and a rootedness that they would not have otherwise had, for which I am very grateful’.

The Bus Party: Listening Lugs Tour

A member’s dialogue meeting took place at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge on 29th May. A special invitation had been given to ‘The Bus Party’, a touring group of artists who had been travelling across Scotland, leading sessions with local groups asking the question ‘What kind of Scotland do you want?’ in the light of the upcoming Referendum. Members of St Roch’s Secondary School had also been invited to join in the dialogue.
The evening was facilitated by Professor William Storrar. It began with a musical performance by world class piper Hamish Moore and this was followed by stories and poems from three Scottish writers: James Robertson, David Greig, Neal Ascherson and a Turkish writer, Defne Cizakca. Each of the artists shared their experiences of living in Scotland and interwove their performances with stories of Scotland as home. Professor Storrar then unveiled a special scroll and invited those gathered to write their hopes, dreams and visions for Scotland on it. The scroll had been used at all events that the Bus Party had been conducting across Scotland to capture the hopes and visions of the people of Scotland and it is planned that it will become a public resource after the event. Professor Storrar shared that it was remarkable that no-one had written that they had a vision of a ‘wealthier’ Scotland but all had a vision of a ‘fairer, more equitable and greener’ Scotland.

**Youth News**

Interfaith Scotland was invited to lead a workshop at Kear College in Blantyre, a school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and educational needs. The Development Officer, Frances Hume, and schools volunteer, Madhumita Roy, brought along a selection of colourful religious artefacts and spoke about six of the world’s faiths.

Director of Interfaith Scotland, Maureen Sier, and Frances Hume lead Primary 7 classes at Portree Primary School on Skye. Maureen spoke about the importance of sharing hospitality and friendship with others. She shared about what she had learnt from her time living in Samoa, and compared the ‘friendship cup’ in Samoa with the Scottish Quaich. Frances spoke about her time living in India and what had inspired her about the practises of people from different faiths, which ultimately lead to her getting involved in Interfaith Dialogue on her return. This included the generosity of Sikhs preparing free food (langar) for anyone visiting the Gurdwara, the joyfulness of Tibetan Buddhist monks and the benefits of meditation, the willingness of Muslims to pray in public, and the liveliness and inclusivity of Hindu festivals.

Frances Hume was asked to lead a workshop for Swedish young people who were returning from a pilgrimage to Iona. They shared about how difficult they found it to be a young person of faith in Sweden, as their peers found it ‘strange and unscientific’ to be religious. After discussion, they concluded that faith was a gift to be treasured, if not always understood by others. Harpreet Kaur, youth worker at Interfaith Glasgow, spoke about her life as a Sikh in Scotland and invited the young people to a spontaneous visit to the Gurdwara in Albert Drive, Glasgow, where everyone was warmed by the Sikh hospitality and langar!

Interfaith Scotland is very grateful to all its volunteers for taking time to assist at our events. Interfaith Scotland organised for volunteers to attend an away day on Holy Isle off the island of Arran on 23rd August as guests of the Centre for World Peace and Health.
Common Ground

The role of Scotland’s faith communities in the future of Scotland

On 14th and 15th July 2014, representatives of Scotland’s religious communities, including those from the Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh traditions, met at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge to discuss the role they believe faith has to play in a modern Scotland. The meeting took place at the invitation of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, with the support of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and Interfaith Scotland.

By providing Scotland’s faith communities with the opportunity to discuss shared principles and issues, the hosts of the meeting sought to outline the common ground shared between the faiths on these issues. Those gathered produced a statement, a distillation of their thoughts and, while not a policy document, it is nonetheless a contribution that those present deem to be important and which they hope will be included in discussions concerning the future of Scotland regardless of the outcome of the referendum. We believe that the statement paints a picture that is bigger than the binary “yes” or “no” of the referendum debate and that it will help navigate the relationship between the state and faith communities for now and for future generations. Irrespective of the result of the referendum, we feel Scotland’s religious communities have a valuable role to play in the public square of a future Scotland.

The full statement appears on the next page. This is only the beginning of a very important discussion and it is anticipated that over time this will be added to and perhaps even amended as other traditions engage in the discussion.
The role of religious communities in society

The faiths which people hold contribute to the formation of the human person and the communities in which they live. Properly understood they should contribute to the development of wisdom, good character, spirituality and virtue in the creation of a society rooted in compassion and justice. They contribute an understanding of being part of a beautiful, diverse, complex and mysterious world.

In Scotland we do not start from a blank slate. Historically Christianity has had a vital role in shaping the Scotland in which we now live, but, increasingly, other faiths have each come to contribute their own wisdom and perspectives to a society, which is at once a product of its heritage but also is increasingly diverse, interrelated, multicultural and multi-faith.

This is a development which we should honour but which also calls us to engage with each other and wider society as people of faith in dialogue and joint action which is both respectful and constructive. The mutual respect which this requires should be reflected in wider society and in particular where people disagree. Faith groups need to be contributors in the public square. They have much to offer to society in practical terms, including their contribution to education, provision of social care and the building of communities, in particular in care for and sharing with the most marginalised in society. Faith communities understand that what they do must be rooted in respect for the inalienable dignity of the human person, fostering communities where the wellbeing of all is paramount. Where social and economic structures do not recognise this dignity, faith communities challenge the unfair structures which lead to that loss of dignity. Through their rich traditions of social justice faith groups recognise the need for all to be involved, including those who find themselves on the margins, in the decisions that impact all of our lives.

Thus, we see religious freedom as a key principle in the ordering of society. A mere freedom of belief, without the freedom to act on those beliefs is empty. However, that freedom to act brings with it the obligation to act responsibly. Religious freedom does not exist in isolation and may require to be balanced against other rights inherent in humanity.

How that balancing exercise is performed may ultimately be the responsibility of judges, identifying as best they can the changing norms of society. Thus, faith has a critical role to play in the public discourse which shapes those norms. In exercising that freedom responsibly faith groups recognise that if they are to be listened to, it is not because of any privilege but because of the moral force of the outworking of compassion for all people which they express. In a free and democratic society all citizens have the right and responsibility to exercise freedom of speech, the right to criticize, the right, consistent with democratic principles and the rights of others, to take action to live out their beliefs. Those rights and responsibilities are not to be denied to people of faith and faith communities simply because they come from a faith perspective. On the contrary that authentic perspective, informed by practical experience and collective wisdom is a critical contribution to the public discourse. In the evolving Scotland in which we live and share, we all have to embrace our responsibility as shapers of society.

Scotland’s religious diversity is something to be celebrated and something to be engaged with. If Scotland is to continue to develop into a society in which all are valued, the unique contribution of people of faith must be respected and enabled to flourish.
Glasgow Interfaith News

Interfaith Networking in Glasgow

Interfaith Glasgow held two networking events in the late Spring this year - a chance for people to meet others who are interested in similar areas of interfaith engagement be that working with young people, interfaith dialogue on matters of belief and practice, friendship building and community events or working together on social action projects. Each event lasted three hours and although there was a chance to hear what Interfaith Glasgow have been up to over the last year, the majority of that time was spent networking. Folk got a chance to chat with people in their local area by pointing out the places they feel connected to on a big map of Glasgow before splitting up to attend “networking encounters” on the areas of interest they had selected.

Just a few of the suggestions that came from these encounters were:

**Young People**: Awards and competitions are a good way of engaging and motivating young people.

**Community events and activities**: Common areas such as supporting mental health and appreciating the environment are good focal points for events.

**Spirituality and religious dialogue**: It is important to make people aware that interfaith dialogue is not about having to agree or believe the same thing.

**Social Action**: There is a need for better promotion and awareness of the numerous anti-poverty projects in the city in order to increase co-operation.

The feedback was generally great - people valued the opportunity to connect with others in a focused way and appreciated being given the option of attending a morning or evening event. They also enjoyed the shared meal and the specially made, egg-free “Interfaith Glasgow” cake!

One suggestion for improving future events which we plan to take seriously was: “attract more young people, bigger presence, social media!” To help us do that and to keep updated about exciting events and interfaith news, check out Interfaith Glasgow on Facebook and follow us on twitter @interfaithGlasg.
Jewish Community Visits Glasgow Central Mosque

Visiting an unfamiliar place of worship is an interesting experience where a person can learn about another religious community and how it conducts its worship and community life. Take this a step further and think about if one faith community formally invited another to experience its place of worship and to have a constructive dialogue focused on building good relations - is this a good endeavour which can bring positive results? In Glasgow the answer is very much ‘Yes!’ In March the committee at Glasgow Central Mosque welcomed a delegation from the local Jewish community including the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council President, Paul Morron, to the Mosque. This visit was an opportunity to begin a positive dialogue between both communities and even included a kosher lunch. This first visit was followed by an invitation to a delegation of Glasgow Central Mosque including vice-president Mohammed Kausar to join the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council and members of the Jewish community at Giffnock and Newlands Synagogue in June. Positive reports have been provided for both visits with a particular focus on the importance of learning from each other’s experience and also the importance of maintaining good communication and dialogue channels between both communities.

Speaking with Simplicity

On Sunday 23rd March, Glasgow Quakers hosted an interfaith afternoon on the topic of Simplicity. The afternoon was organised by Zem Moffat, a Quaker, who spoke about her experiences working as a ‘declutterer’. Speakers from different faiths reflected upon their personal faith journeys with respect to simplicity. Kelsang Machig told her story of becoming a Buddhist nun and the tremendous joys and freedoms it brought. Julian Harrison, a Catholic Brother, shared how prayer is the simplest form of simplicity there is, and something that his days are continually enriched by. Shabir Banday, a Muslim, spoke on how simplicity is a relative concept. While he considers his lifestyle in Glasgow to be simple, when compared to his upbringing in Ladakh, northern India, it would be considered very rich.

After the speakers there was an opportunity for reflective listening and dialogue amongst participants in small groups. It was a very gentle and deep afternoon and a great way to make and extend the hand of friendship. Each of the speakers can be seen on a video at the following on-line link: Speaking with Simplicity (http://vimeo.com/album/2903279)
XX Commonwealth Games 2014

The Commonwealth Games are a significant occasion when the solidarity of the human race and the human striving for excellence can be clearly demonstrated. Interfaith Scotland is delighted to have been directly involved in the XX Commonwealth Games in a number of significant ways. A member of staff, Michael Wilson, from the Interfaith Glasgow Project represented Interfaith Scotland on the XX Commonwealth Games Religion and Belief Committee and was able to keep the interfaith dimension of the Games to the forefront of the Committee’s thinking.

Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow and Glasgow University organised an Interfaith Service of Welcome and Friendship for the Commonwealth Games. This service was held at the Memorial Chapel of Glasgow University and over 200 people from diverse faiths and none attended. The service included readings, songs, music and prayer, and diverse representatives of the religion and belief communities participated in the service: Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Humanist. The highlight was a 30 strong Sikh Children’s Choir who wore beautiful tartan outfits and sang with great joy.

In the spirit of volunteering and participation Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland’s Development Officer, volunteered as a ‘Clyde-sider’ throughout the Games and immensely enjoyed her role as a part of the Spectator Services team.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, a representative Member of Interfaith Scotland, was honoured to be a Baton bearer for the Games, together with her husband Dr Amarjit Singh Nijjar. Dr Nijjar is being recognized for services to medicine and Ravinder for her interfaith work worldwide. Ravinder said “It is a great honour for both of us to be chosen as Commonwealth Games Baton bearers in Glasgow. What are the chances that my husband would be passing the baton to me, probably one in a million”
Interfaith Scotland was also invited to create a special exhibition which was displayed at the Religion and Belief Centre in the Commonwealth Games Village. The Centre became a hive of activity with athletes, officials and workforce visiting the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist prayer and quiet rooms almost 24 hours a day. Jewish Chaplains were also on call. The chaplains organised services, prayers and meditations but also provided individual support. The Director General of the Sport Ministry of Sri Lanka, Mrs Ranjini Jayanti, said “The work you are doing is wonderful and it is an example to the whole world”. Swaleh Belala, Triathlete, Team Kenya said: “The religion and belief centre is an amazing idea to have up. I have benefitted a lot from the Chaplains who spoke to me with so much love and comfort, which made me reflect and perform better in my event.”

All in all it has been a busy ‘Games’ time for staff, members and volunteers and the pictures give a sense of the excitement the Interfaith dimension of the Games brought to Glasgow and to Scotland.

Reading Together – Interfaith Dialogue with a Difference

Members of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions gathered together on Sunday 11th May at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow to take part in an exciting method of interfaith dialogue being introduced known as Scriptural Reasoning. Hosted by Interfaith Glasgow a group of 19 people participated in this stimulating activity which focused on scriptural excerpts relating to Abraham’s Hospitality, a theme that is common across the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Sarah Snyder from the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, which has driven the successful spread of this method in the UK, introduced Scriptural Reasoning as a dialogue activity which brings people together in the close reading of their scriptures, sharing with one another how they “reason” with the text and applying it to modern life. This practice usually takes place between members of the Abrahamic faiths (although is now being extended to other faith and ideological groups) and it has proved extremely successful amongst ordinary believers as well as religious leaders and academics. The aim is not for participants to agree but to grow in their understanding of each other, often feeling challenged in a positive way by questions from their dialogue partners that cause them to think about their own tradition afresh.

There are Scriptural Reasoning groups across the UK and a regular Scriptural Reasoning group is getting started in Glasgow with its first meeting planned for 20th August. Anyone interested in finding out more can email info@interfaithglasgow.org or call the office on 0141 420 6982. For information and resources on Scriptural Reasoning see: http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/
Edinburgh Interfaith News

Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association Celebrates 25 Years  
Iain Stewart, General Secretary, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association

‘This year, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association celebrates its momentous landmark of 25 years since its inception. The Association has published a special edition of its magazine - Interfaith Matters – commemorating this milestone. The special edition looks back on our 25 years of history as Scotland’s longest running Inter-Faith Association and can be found on our website: www.eifa.org.uk

I want to pay particular tribute to the hard work and vision of many people - past and present - but particularly Professor Frank Whaling, Victor Spence and Reverend Donald Reid. EIFA’s education programmes in schools and with the Police have contributed to breaking down the barriers and myths that surround religions and their followers. Additionally, our programmes are working to foster greater respect and understanding of the relevance and positive contributions of the various World Faiths to contemporary Scottish society.

This year marked the death of Nelson Mandela who famously said that, “education is the most powerful weapon that you can use to change the world.” Bearing this in mind, here at EIFA we continue to view education as a key priority and are persevering with expanding our schools programme. At present, our Project Manager - Nur Sakina Kader - is putting the finishing touches to a documentary film that highlights the relevance of faith in the lives of three young women in contemporary Scotland. This documentary film will be used as an educational resource that will be made available to educational institutions and other relevant organizations across the country.

EIFA continues to build on its work with Police Scotland and with local and national government in developing innovative ways to bring different faith communities together. Further to the consultancy services that EIFA provides to the Police and to local and national governments, EIFA has organised some high profile visits to the UK from major religious figures such as the Dalai Lama. The popularity of these visits was highlighted in Dundee where we were informed that the Dalai Lama tickets sold out “faster than tickets for the Beatles!”

I often describe EIFA as One Big Family, and it has been a great honour being a part of this happy family’.

Picture taken following Interfaith Blessing for new Multi-Faith Prayer Room at St Columbus Hospice, June 2014.
Edinburgh Women’s Summer Outing to Glasgow

The Edinburgh Women’s Interfaith Group travelled to Glasgow for their annual summer outing on 5th July. They received a warm welcome at the Hindu Mandir at 1 La Belle Place and were given a talk on the essence of Hinduism by the priest, Acharijiaji Mishra. Madhu Jain, a board member of Interfaith Scotland and member of the mandir, served some delicious Indian sweets and tea to those gathered. The group then travelled by coach to the Sikh Gurdwara at Albert Drive. They enjoyed the ‘langar’, a free kitchen where a vegetarian lunch is served to people visiting the Gurdwara throughout the day, before being given a talk by Sharandeep Singh about the Sikh faith. The group ended off a very enjoyable day with a visit to the Hidden Gardens at the Tramway, an interfaith garden for peaceful reflection, before returning to Edinburgh. Many thanks is due to Nila Joshi from the Edinburgh Women’s Interfaith Group for organising such a successful and enjoyable day.

An Edinburgh Jewish Welcome

On a bright Sunday morning in June, a group of strangers arrived at the Jewish Community Centre on Salisbury Road not knowing what to expect. They were invited to share their personal experience of immigration as part of Scottish Refugee Week. Everyone was welcomed at the door with a plate full of strudel and ushered in to traditional Jewish music by a live band. Those who had never seen a synagogue before got the chance to tour it and ask questions about Judaism and the Edinburgh community. Tea was served, and the stories had already started flowing as the guests took their seats around the tables and got to know one another.

Three tutors led workshops throughout the day exploring three different approaches to storytelling: creative non-fiction, fiction and poetry. Ellen Galford, J David Simons and Tracey S. Rosenberg worked with the participants to draw out old family stories and memories of their own migrant experiences. The stories that emerged were fascinating and moving, inspiring conversations that spilled over into a delicious kosher lunch. The environment was welcoming and allowed the participants to easily open up to one another and share their own personal stories. An overwhelming respect for unique perspectives created an enthusiastic atmosphere throughout the day. Many thanks to the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and the Scottish Refugee Council for arranging and supporting this event.
Skye Faiths Together

Peace and Healing Wall Hanging

In 2006 Skye Faiths Together asked a number of local people to help create a wall hanging for the proposed chemotherapy unit at the local hospital in Broadford. Each person was given a 12 inch square and asked to make an embroidery or collage on the theme of Peace and Healing. When the chemotherapy unit was postponed indefinitely, the wall hanging remained unfinished. The building of the new Broadford Medical Centre offered an ideal alternative venue and the wall hanging was completed by Anne Sillar, a radiographer at the hospital, who combined the squares to make three inter-changeable hangings. These now hang outside the rooms of the practice nurses. Members of Skye Faiths Together met at the Broadford Medical Centre to view the Peace and Healing wall hanging with some of the people who created it.

‘Cathedrals and Cappuccinos’
Trish Rogers, Skye Faiths Together

‘They say life is a journey. Some of us would say it is a journey in search of God. I was brought up a Methodist. Before marrying, I spent a year teaching in Asmara, Eritrea, amongst Coptic Christians, Italian Roman Catholics, ex-pat Anglicans and Arab-trader Muslims. Later my work as a Probation Officer in the inner city brought me in contact with a diversity of faiths, notably Rastafarianism, Sikhism and Islam, an experience which confirmed my view that there are many ways to God. I retired to the Isle of Skye in 2001 with my husband Dave. I found I related to Celtic Christianity and I ultimately found my spiritual home with the Quakers. Dave and I were among the founder members of Skye Faiths Together which has continued to bring me in contact with people of other faiths and enriched my own belief.

Arriving at my 60th birthday seemed something of a milestone and the idea came to me to visit all the cathedrals in England. As a teenager I had particularly been entranced by the outstanding craftsmanship, inspired by that mystical and elusive Spirit, God. What ensued was an amazing series of journeys made with my husband, until his untimely death from cancer. These took us to all the corners of England. Throughout I took photos, kept a journal and made sketches. I was encouraged to write my book “Cathedrals and Cappuccinos” by a number of people, mainly because of the sketches. It is both a personal account of our journeys and a simple handbook describing something of all the Anglican cathedrals in England’.

I have been giving talks across the country about my experiences and if you would be interested in hearing a talk or learning more about the book, please contact me either by phone: 01471 822617 or email: rogers.trish@btinternet.com for further details.

Interfaith Scotland Visit to Skye

Interfaith Scotland’s Director and Development Officer visited Skye in June to run a workshop for women of all faiths and none in Portree. While on Skye they attended an interfaith service organised by Pat McNichol from Skye Faiths Together. They also ran two primary school classes which have been outlined in the ‘Youth News’ article on page 3 of the newsletter.
**Fife College Interfaith Fair**

Fife Interfaith Group was approached by the student representative of Fife College, Jade Connor, to organise an Interfaith Fair in the St Brycedale Campus of Fife College in Kirkcaldy. Jade was very keen to set up the fair due to her own interest in interfaith. Fife Interfaith Group was keen to rise to the challenge and members of the group were assisted by Colm Wilson, the group’s link officer with Fife Council, to approach as many faiths and organisations as possible.

The event took place on 26th March and proved to be a great success. There were 14 stalls at the fair representing the Episcopal Church, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic Church, Buddhism, Islam, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Spiritualist Church, the Baha’i Faith, Christian Aid, Gideon Society, Scottish Church Heritage Society, Auld Kirk Kirkcaldy, and Kirkcaldy Foodbank.

The students who engaged were very interested and had some great discussions with the faith leaders in attendance. All participants felt it a very worthwhile venture not least because of the networking opportunities with other faiths. Hopefully this can become an annual event in the interfaith calendar.

**Renfrewshire News**

Renfrewshire Interfaith Group organised interfaith Palm Sunday and Good Friday walks for the Christian celebration of Easter. These were followed by interfaith Indian and Scottish dance sessions which were held in the Hindu Mandir and Wallneuk North Church hall respectively.

After the walks, and Indian and Scottish dances, participants had an opportunity to get to know each other and to enjoy friendship and fellowship over a cup of tea and coffee. It was indeed a wonderful experience to have these interfaith social gatherings to promote unity and harmony among the members of different faith groups in Renfrewshire.
Muslim and Christian Women’s Iona Pilgrimage

Marian McIlhenney

On 14th March we gathered at Queen Street Station in Glasgow, 23 women on a weekend pilgrimage to Iona. A group of Muslims and Christian women from Lanarkshire, Stirling and Glasgow, spending three days in order to be together as friends and women of faith. This adventure started some time ago when neighbours, Bushra and Linda, wanted to explore the Scriptures of the other’s faith. Linda is a member of the Church of Scotland and Bushra is a Muslim. Their passionate interest drew in others and the Abrahamic Roots group in Coatbridge took shape where women of faith committed to their own traditions come together to learn from each other’s sacred texts. The scandals of 9/11 and the London bombings of July 2005 brought an urgency. Our sons and daughters were suffering verbal abuse and we had a duty to get to know each other better for their sakes.

The group meet once a month for an hour and a half in the Coatbridge community centre. We share food and look at topics of interest such as: how is Jesus understood in our respective traditions; what does Mary mean to us; the place of women; how is suffering understood; how are the prophets understood in our scriptures. Key moments of celebration have been when some of our Muslim sisters came back from the Hajj pilgrimage. Honouring and sharing the experience of the pilgrimage to Mecca has been a source of joy and learning. It was also the inspiration for the pilgrimage to Iona as the Christian women were keen to share their own experience of pilgrimage.

We arrived at Bishop’s House retreat centre on Iona. Instinctively it was recognised that we needed to have our own space, privacy to literally let our hair down, or at least the head scarf. Tobin and the welcome team at Bishop’s House could not have been more helpful and respectful. A flexible programme had been worked out which included prayer times both Christian and Muslim, a guided tour of the Abbey, reflective sessions with Frances Hume of Interfaith Scotland and time to walk and enjoy the beautiful island landscape.

What was so special about the weekend was having time just to be with each other. Some of the comments from our group might give a flavour of what the experience meant to us. Smina said it was very precious to be with Christians as they prayed in the chapel. ‘The silence is the same as the silence after Salah, our own prayers.’ It was good to not just talk about but to be with each other as we prayed. For me the best moment came when some of our Muslim sisters joined us in the chapel for the Bishop’s House evening prayer of Compline. Psalm 97:7 from the Jewish and Christian scriptures was read: ‘All who worship images are put to shame’. A Muslim member of the group asked why these verses were not being respected in the chapel and pointed to the statues and icons. An interesting discussion followed which enabled freer discussion all weekend. Discovering more about each other’s beliefs was not about being ‘nice’ but about risking the questions knowing they would be welcomed respectfully even if we did not know all the answers. For Bushra, the best moment was going for a beautiful walk on Iona, the view and the calmness, the sheep and the sea. ‘It is like we are in the presence of the prophets. They too were shepherds, who were surrounded by the silence and closeness to nature’.
For Frances, it was when the director of the centre asked for a volunteer to read Psalm 121 from the reading desk during the Compline service. A Muslim sister tentatively agreed, if she could read the scripture in advance and check that it did not conflict with her own faith. It was a very special moment when she stood before the congregation and shared the scriptures: ‘I look to the mountains; from where will my help come from? My help will come from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let you fall…..The sun will not hurt you by day or the moon by night. He will protect you as you come and go now and forever’. We returned to Queen Street to our busy full lives after these three days of grace, giving thanks for the gift of this time together.

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group  
Alison Boyes and Venus Carew

The Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group have organised two very successful and enjoyable events in the past few months with support from local agencies and our friends which have been held at Dumfries Multicultural Association. The first was on the theme of Peace and the guest speaker was Chris Lubbe, who had been bodyguard to Nelson Mandela and also a close friend of his. Chris spoke about his own life and experiences - his birth in a mud hut into a South Africa where apartheid was a cruel fact of everyday life, his membership of the ANC, his years working for the late President and how he witnessed the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the forgiveness shown by Nelson Mandela towards his former oppressors. We were then treated to singing by members of the Multicultural Youth Group and some tunes on the harmonica by Ruby Darbyshire. We were invited to write messages of peace on pieces of paper and stick them on a Peace board for all to view over lunch.

The second event was a celebration of faith and friendship. The programme included inspirational readings from many faiths and traditions on the subject of Friendship. The members of the children’s Peacemaker Club, which meets on Saturday mornings and encourages peacemaking skills and cooperation amongst children, sang a song about unity and played some lovely music. After the talks, we made friendship booklets and bracelets from raffia. We then tied these around the wrists of our friends as a mark of friendship.
Orkney Interfaith Group

Despite gale force winds and pounding rain the Orkney Interfaith Group warmly welcomed Dr. Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland to a dialogue held at the Baha’i Centre in Kirkwall, Orkney. The discussion focussed on facilitating effective dialogue between the religious and the non-religious and along with representatives from the faith communities it was heart-warming to have a humanist from the group fully participating in the discussions. Orkney Interfaith have been meeting regularly now for a number of years and find their dialogue meetings stimulating and enjoyable.

Shetland Interfaith Group

Shetland Interfaith Group’s summer event was a presentation by Tom Macintyre, chairperson of Shetland Interfaith Group, and his wife Marian. They described their recent visit to India to visit their daughter, Vaila, who had moved to Dharamsala in the foothills of the Himalayas.

A number of Tibetan refugees live in Dharamsala and Tom and Marian visited the projects where their daughter Vaila has been working, one of which is Dolls4Tibet, a social enterprise run on Fairtrade principles. Women at the project from India and Tibet create beautiful dolls in various Tibetan costumes, helping to preserve Tibetan culture and assist the women, many of whom are in financial need or are long-term unemployed. The dolls can be seen online at www.dolls4tibet.com

Tom and Marian also shared about their memorable visits to the Baha’i Lotus House of Worship in New Delhi and the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar. They found the diversity of the fellow visitors, and the inclusiveness of the religious experience, remarkable. Interfaith meetings in Shetland always involve music and food. The music was supplied in house this time with instrumental performances by Alan MacKay and Robert Bennet and songs from David Marsh. The food was Indian desserts made by Anil Gonsalves our Roman Catholic priest who comes from Goa, South India – his Mum’s recipe, he confessed!
Communications and Publications

Mairi Sutherland has been employed as a Communications and Publications Intern and has been working on designing and revising Interfaith Scotland’s Guidelines to Inclusive Civic Events document, which aims to assist local Councils in their interfaith planning work. She is also compiling a Directory of Faith, Belief and Community groups in Scotland to help groups to network together and communicate effectively.

Interfaith Scotland is also in the process of revising and republishing the booklet ‘A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland’.

The House of One

_Sister Isabel Smyth, from her blog at www.interfaithjourneys.net_

“On 22nd June the BBC had an article about three places of worship to be built under the same roof. It is to be built in the heart of Berlin and the winning architectural design has been chosen. It will be a brick building with space for a synagogue, a church and a mosque leading off a communal space for dialogue and social interaction. Each space is the same size but a different shape and appropriate to the particular faith, for example the mosque will have a space for washing and the church an organ. It’s to be called the ‘House of One’.

Rabbi Tovia Ben Chorin told the BBC, “From my Jewish point of view the city where Jewish suffering was planned is now the city where a centre is being built by the three monotheistic religions which shaped European culture”. Imam Kadir Sanci sees the House of One as “a sign, a signal to the world that the great majority of Muslims are peaceful and not violent”. It is also, he says, a place where different cultures can learn from each other. Christian Pastor Gregor Hohberg said, “Under one roof: one synagogue, one mosque, one church. We want to use these rooms for our own traditions and prayers. And together we want to use the room in the middle for dialogue and discussion and also for people without faith”.

The House of One throws up exciting possibilities for future interfaith developments. Interfaith centres are not uncommon but an interfaith place of worship is something out of the ordinary and could be a wonderful witness to respect for the integrity of each faith as it worships in its own space and its own way, to cooperation between faiths as they maintain and care for the building, to mutual understanding and friendship as they come to dialogue with one another and know one another as friends. This is religious history in the making and a sign of what relationships between the faiths could be. What a wonderful vision for the future”.
Upcoming Events

Women’s Interfaith Dialogue: A Dialogue event for women of all faiths and none will be hosted by Interfaith Scotland from 11am - 1pm at the Ramnee Hotel in Forres on 23rd September. Contact frances@interfaithscotland.org to register by 16th September.

Annual General Meeting: Interfaith Scotland’s Annual General Meeting will take place on 23rd October at Linlithgow Burgh Halls.

Scottish Interfaith Week 2014: Scottish Interfaith Week will take place from 23rd - 30th November. The theme for the week is ‘Journeys of Faith’. The launch of Scottish Interfaith Week will take place in the Palace Complex, Grand Hall, Kilmarnock on 23rd November from 2 – 4pm.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2015: Interfaith Scotland will host the Holocaust Memorial Day event in Ayr on 27th January 2015.

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 newspaper 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.