

# faith handbook

Updated October 2017



# Introduction

**This Faith Handbook has been produced by the West Lothian Faith Group, the multi-faith network supported by the West Lothian Community Planning Partnership (CPP), in consultation with representatives of the various faiths referred to. The Handbook is aimed at those delivering services locally as well as wider members of the community and intends to increase understanding of the needs of faith communities.**

In an increasingly secularised society it is possible to be unaware of how faith influences the lives and culture of believers in different faith traditions. The aim of this document is to alert each other to some of the differences and points of sensitivity. We wish to avoid inadvertently putting another person in an awkward situation through ignorance of what is important to them.

Whether we are delivering services in health or the wider public sector, or simply living alongside neighbours, it is a matter of courtesy, professionalism and effective working to be alert and listening to what matters to the other person. Religious and spiritual practice can be significant for the wellbeing of individuals and families; they form part of the identity of the concerned. Isolation from important practices and inattention to spiritual needs can impact health and wellbeing – if we are unaware of customs and act in ways that seem inappropriate to the person concerned, this may impede any conversation or action we engage in.

Traditionally we speak of faith communities. Within such a community, faith or religion may involve various

customs and acts of observance. These may be a matter of conscience, identity, or personal discipline. Some of this is interwoven with culture, so that, for example, Christians or Muslims coming from different parts of the world may have some quite different ways of expressing their faith. Some of these will be more a matter of culture than core to the faith. It should not be presumed that all members of a faith community will have the same requirements.

The document does not seek to give a detailed overview of the beliefs and practices of all world faiths but to highlight some particular aspects of which to be aware around food, fasting and customs around death, particularly for those faith communities that we know are present in West Lothian. The document also provides some thoughts on spiritual needs and discusses the inter-faith activity within West Lothian. Links to further information on world faiths are provided at the back of the document.

The handbook will be kept under review to ensure information remains relevant and accurate – please see the CPP website for the latest version.

## West Lothian's Faith Population

Within West Lothian, we have places of worship for the Christian and Muslim communities. The 2011 Census told us that 31.8% of the population responded that they belong to the Church of Scotland (55,663 people), 16.1% as (Roman) Catholic (28,140), 4.3% are Other Christian (7,477), 1% are Muslim (1,746), 0.05% are Sikh (86), 0.13% are Buddhist (232), 0.21% are Hindu (366), 0.04% are Jewish (66), 0.2% are 'Other' Religion (429) and 40.2% have No Religion (70,338). 6% of respondents (10,575) did not answer. Further analysis on West Lothian's faith population from the 2011 Census is available from West Lothian Council's Community Planning team: [community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk)

It is important to note that the census question was voluntary, and that it asked about "belonging" rather than identity or affiliation, so these figures may be underestimates. In addition, it needs to be borne in mind that many local services have to cater for people who do not live in West Lothian, such as travellers on the Edinburgh-Glasgow main line and the M8 and M9; and also residents of adjacent local authorities whose main services may be in Bathgate or Livingston.

Local knowledge tells us that within the 'Other Christian' and 'Other Religion' categories we have local Assembly of God, Bahá'í, Baptist Union of Scotland, Church of God, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Ecumenical Church, Gospel Church, Independent Evangelical Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodist Church in Scotland, Open Episcopal Church in Scotland, Salvation Army, Scottish Episcopal Church, Scottish Spiritual Church, United Free Church and the United Reformed Church communities.

West Lothian does not have a large community of some of the world faiths. This may mean that people who belong to those faiths are relatively isolated and travel out of the area to a place of worship. Just as some people who respond that they are Christian would not attend a church on Sunday very often, so there will be a variation in whether people actually connect to the other faith communities. Some may be relatively isolated, by choice or by circumstance. At times of transition or crisis people may want to turn to their faith for support, even when it is not a regular feature in their life pattern.

# Food and Fasting

## Baha'i

Baha'is have no specific dietary requirements. The use of alcohol and habit-forming drugs is strictly prohibited except when prescribed by a physician.

The Baha'i fast takes place every year from 2-20 March and during this time Baha'is may not take food or drink from sunrise to sunset. This is a period of meditation, prayer and spiritual recuperation.

## Brahma Kumaris

Brahma Kumaris are encouraged to eat a lacto-vegetarian diet (dairy products except eggs permitted) and are discouraged from using alcohol, tobacco and other recreational drugs. Most Brahma Kumaris do not use onions or garlic in cooking and prefer to have their food cooked and blessed by fellow Brahma Kumaris. There is no religious obligation for Brahma Kumaris to fast.

## Buddhism

Many Buddhists are vegetarian or vegan, due to the first precept and respect for other sentient beings. Some may follow a precept that involves eating only one main meal a day and this is usually eaten before midday. One of the five basic precepts of Buddhism is to refrain from taking intoxicating drink or drugs which cloud the mind.

Some Buddhists fast on a new moon and full moon days and on specific festival days such as Buddha's birthday, his death day, his enlightenment, his first sermon and others.

## Christianity

There are no universal Christian dietary or fasting regulations. Some Christians fast on particular days and at particular times of the year. Some Christians give up certain foods during Lent (40 day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter). Other Christians observe Friday as a no-meat day or may fast before receiving Holy Communion.

Within Christian denominations there may be more specific dietary or fasting requirements, for example the Seventh Day Adventists, who are prohibited animal flesh of pork, beef and lamb. Many Adventists are ovo-lacto vegetarians, which means that they do not

consume animal flesh of any kind but will consume dairy and egg products. Some Adventists avoid food and drinks which contain caffeine, therefore do not consume tea and coffee. They also avoid alcohol.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) live by a health code known as the Word of Wisdom and will avoid caffeine, alcohol and tobacco. Mormons will usually fast for 24 hours on (usually) the first Sunday of each month, normally lasting from after the evening meal on Saturday until a meal on Sunday late afternoon. Jehovah's Witnesses reject foods containing blood but have no other special dietary or fasting requirements.

The central ritual of much Christian worship is Holy Communion or the Eucharist which is a sharing of bread and wine in memory of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and symbolic of his death and resurrection. It should be noted that not all Christian faiths use fermented wine – some use fruit juice because they believe that alcohol should not be ingested. However; Jehovah's Witnesses will tend to use plain red wine rather than grape juice or wine that has been sweetened, fortified or spiced. Some Christian traditions celebrate Holy Communion every week (or sometimes daily), whereas for others it is monthly or even annually.

The Catholic Churches tradition celebrate Holy Communion every day but on a Sunday it is considered an obligation for Roman Catholics to attend Mass and fast for one hour beforehand. Employers must be aware that Roman Catholics are required to attend Mass every Sunday.

## Hinduism

Most Hindus are vegetarian. The cow is viewed as a sacred animal so even meat-eating Hindus may not eat beef. Some Hindus will eat eggs, some will not, and some will also refuse onion and garlic. Dairy produce is acceptable so long as it is free of animal rennet.

Some devout Hindus observe fasting on special occasions as a mark of respect to personal Gods or as part of their penance. Fasting is commonly practiced on new moon days and during festivals such as Shivaratri, Saraswati Puja and Durga Puja. Some fasts may only require abstinence from certain foods.

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## Islam

Followers of Islam are prohibited from eating pork. The Qur'an (Islamic holy book) outlines the foods which can be eaten (halal) and those forbidden (haram). Beef, lamb and chicken can only be eaten if the animal has been processed by the halal method. Some Muslims are willing to eat kosher meat (that processed according to Jewish rites) if halal meat is not available, or meat that has been processed by the halal method by a Christian. Haram are foods which are forbidden and examples include pork, blood, alcohol and meat sacrificed to idols.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims need to refrain from eating, drinking and smoking from sunrise to sunset. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which consists of twelve months and lasts for about 354 days. The word "Ramadan" is derived from an Arabic word for intense heat, scorched ground and shortness of food and drink. It is considered as the holiest season and commemorates the time when the Qur'an is said to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. This occurred on Laylat Al-Qadr, one of the last ten nights of the month.

The month of Ramadan traditionally begins with a new moon sighting, marking the start of the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. Many Muslims (except children, the sick and the elderly) abstain from food, drink and certain other activities during the daylight hours in Ramadan. Ramadan ends when the first crescent of the new moon is sighted again, marking the new lunar month's start. Eid-al-Fitr is the Islamic holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

As the Islamic Calendar varies from the standard 365 days, Ramadan occurs in different months over time. In Scotland in some years the hours of daylight during Ramadan are very long and so to be aware that a person may be fasting is important. This can affect employees, customers, patients and some students. The exact day of Ramadan ending will depend on local observations of the new moon.

## Judaism

Jewish food regulations (known as kashrut) are complex. Observant Jewish believers will only eat food (called kosher) that has been prepared in accordance with these rules. Kosher animals have a completely split hoof and chew cud, for example cows, goat and sheep. Pigs and rabbits are not kosher animals. There are no standard criteria for birds to be kosher but domestic fowl such as chicken and turkey are permitted and birds of prey are not. In addition, the animal must be killed and prepared by religiously-trained personnel, to ensure that the animal does not suffer and as much blood as possible is drained from the meat.

Kosher fish must have fins and scales, therefore all shellfish, eels and shark are excluded. Animal products (such as milk and eggs) must come from a kosher animal. Note that many products may contain additives that are derived from non-kosher species (such as gelatine

that is made from pork, colourings derived from insects, or animal rennet used in making cheese). Product labelling is not reliable evidence, since it is common for many different products to be produced using the same equipment, so many religious Jewish people will only use food that is certified by a rabbi, who is working under the authority of a formal authority, to comply with these regulations. All plant foods are kosher, but must be checked to ensure there are no insects.

Jewish believers who keep kosher will not mix milk and meat dishes or eat them in the same meal, and will wait some hours between these kinds of foods (in the UK generally 3 hours). A kosher household will keep meat and milk utensils, crockery and cutlery rigidly separate.

Observant Jewish believers will not prepare food on the Sabbath, which begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday, so they will either eat cold food or food that has already been cooked and has been kept warm. The Sabbath (Shabbat) is observed as a day of rest and observant Jews will also not write, travel or cook. There are a number of fast days in the Jewish calendar. Yom Kippur is the most important holy day of the year for most Jewish believers and many will observe a 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before and ending at nightfall. During the Pesach (Passover), which occurs in the spring, there are additional dietary stringencies, for example no leavened bread or cakes are permitted and instead unleavened bread called matzah is eaten.



## Rastafarianism

Rastafarians are prohibited from eating all animal flesh. Most Rastafarians are vegetarians or vegans. Foods approved for Rastafarians are called Ital, which should be natural or pure, without the addition of artificial colours, flavourings or preservatives. Rastafarians avoid alcohol and some also avoid tea, coffee and other caffeinated drinks because they are considered to confuse the soul.



## Sikhism

Some Sikhs will not eat pork, beef or any animal flesh that is halal or kosher, as they will only eat meat that has been processed according to their own rites (jhatka). Sikhs who have taken Amrit (initiated-baptised) are vegetarian or vegan. Some Sikhs will also exclude eggs, fish and any ingredients with animal derivatives or cooked in animal fat from their diet. Some Sikhs will only eat food prepared by their own families. Sikhs may also refrain from food and drinks which may harm their body, e.g. alcohol and tobacco. However it is important to say that many Sikhs will drink alcohol and will eat meat. Meat, alcohol and tobacco cannot be taken within the grounds of the Gurdwara (the Sikh place of congregational worship).

Some older Sikhs may fast during full moon or specific holidays but most are discouraged from fasting and going on pilgrimages.

# Customs around birth



## Baha'i

The birth of a child is a time for joy and Baha'is may wish to express their gratitude to God with prayer; but they have no rituals associated with birth.

## Brahma Kumaris

Dedicated Brahma Kumaris live a celibate life so it would be unusual for someone from this tradition to be giving birth.

## Buddhism

Generally, there are no guidelines, although some Buddhists in some South East Asian countries traditionally prepare a basket containing some tools for a baby boy and a cradle containing needles and thread for a girl. Some may ask for the umbilical cord to be salted and placed in an earthenware pot. Monks or priests may participate in some way, by chanting from the scriptures (sutras), giving blessings, delivering a sermon, etc.

## Christianity

There are no specific or universal Christian customs relating to birth itself, although many Christians practice infant baptism. Baptism is the point at which children (or adults) become members of the Church.

## Hinduism

Once the child enters the world, *Jatakarma* is performed to welcome the child into the family, by putting some honey in the child's mouth and whispering the name of God in the child's ear. Some Hindus consider it crucial to record the time of birth (to the minute) so that a Hindu priest can cast the child's horoscope accurately. Other rituals include a naming ceremony (*Namakarana*), the *Nishkramana* (the child's first trip out) and the *Annaprāsana* (the child's first taste of solid food). The ear-piercing ceremony (*Karnavedha*) and the first haircut (*Mundan*) ceremonies are also considered highly significant. These sacraments are performed on both the sexes.

Relatives will want to make sure that the mother has complete rest for 40 days after birth and they will be worried if she has to get up for a bath within the first few days. This attitude is based on the belief that a woman is at her weakest at this time and is very susceptible to chills,

backache, etc. If there is a need to separate mother and baby for any reason this should be done tactfully as she may prefer to keep the baby with her at all times.

## Islam

Some Muslim women will refuse to be examined internally before giving birth and may be reluctant to be attended by a male obstetrician unless in an emergency. When a Muslim child is born, as soon as possible a member of the family must recite in the ears of the baby a call of prayer that normally lasts a minute or two (*Azaan*). The baby's first taste should be something sweet, so parents may chew a piece of date and rub the juice along the baby's gums.

There are a number of events that take place on or after the seventh day. On day seven the baby's head is shaved to show that the child is the servant of Allah. Muslims may weigh the hair and give the equivalent weight in silver to charity. Ideally, Muslim baby boys are circumcised when they are seven days old although it can take place any time before puberty. It is also tradition to choose the name of the baby on the seventh day. The *aqeeqah* is also traditionally carried out on the seventh day – this is a celebration which involves the slaughter of sheep (one sheep for a girl and two sheep for a boy). Sheep are sacrificed (in Britain the meat is ordered at the butchers) and the meat is distributed to relatives and neighbours and also given to the poor.

## Judaism

Traditionally any child born to a Jewish mother is considered a Jew, while the majority of Progressive communities nowadays accept as Jewish a child whose father or mother is Jewish. The *Brit Milah* (circumcision ceremony) is an important initiation rite for young Jewish boys. A Jewish girl does not have to go through the same initiation ceremony as the baby boy.

Circumcision is seen as a religious obligation on Jews recalling the covenant that God made with Abraham. A healthy male boy is ordinarily circumcised on the eighth day after birth, although this must be delayed for a premature or unhealthy baby. The ritual is performed by a trained and medically certified religious functionary (*Mohel*). The *Brit Milah* is usually attended by men. The child is placed on the lap of a male friend or relative who has the honour of being the *Sandek*. He has the responsibility of holding the child still whilst the circumcision is performed.

Baby boys are also given their names at the circumcisions. It is customary to keep the name a secret before the ceremony. It is traditional for girls to be named in the synagogue, often on the Sabbath following the birth.

## Sikhism

As soon as is possible after the birth, Amrit is to be prepared in the following way. An Ardas (prayer of supplication) is performed before the start of the ceremony. An Amritdharee (initiated Sikh) Singh should get a Sarab Loh (pure iron) bowl and half fill it with water. Five patase (sweets made of sugar and glucose) should be added to the water. The mixture is to be continuously stirred with a Kirpan (blessed sword). During the stirring, the Singh is to recite Japjee Sahib (Sikh prayer) from memory and is to sit in the Bir-Asan position (a Warrior stance). Once the Japjee Sahib recital is complete the Amrit is ready. An Ardas is to be performed and then the Amrit can be administered.

Five drops from the tip of the Kirpan are to be given to the child and the mother is to drink the rest of the Amrit. This is the first ceremony of the initiation of a child into the Khalsa Panth (Sikh Nation). The mother is then to breast-feed the child. From this the child should become virtuous, a warrior, saintly, charitable and a vibrant Gursikh. Enacting any other sort of birth rites/ceremony is not allowed in Gurmat; for example lucky charms or strings tied on the child's wrist. To break all superstitions a Sarab Loh Kara (iron bangle) is to be placed on the child's right hand wrist. Drinking alcohol and eating meat whilst celebrating the birth of a child is often frowned upon.

After the above ceremony, Karah Parshad (a sweet dish made from butter, flour (chapati), sugar and water) is to be prepared and an Ardas recited in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee (the Sikh Scriptures). The child's name is based on the first letter of the Hukamnama (Command of the Guru) taken from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee. If possible, on the same day a Sehaj Paath (a complete recital of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, which is completed at intervals) should be started. The child and his/her mother should listen to the whole Paath. At the Bhog (completion of recital) Guru ka Langar (Blessed Free food – this is served at Gurdwaras throughout the world in all services and ceremonies) is to be served to the Sadh Sangat (Holy Congregation). A Sikh is likely to be given a forename and the surname Singh for a boy and Kaur for a girl.



## Rastafarianism

When a child is born into Rastafari tradition he or she is blessed by elders in the community, during a *Nyabingi* session of drumming, chanting and prayer.



# Customs around death



## Baha'i

Baha'is treat the body of a deceased person with great respect. Baha'i law prescribes that burial should take place at a distance of no more than one hour's journey from the place of death. The body should not be cremated or embalmed. Baha'is may donate their bodies to medical science but provisions must be made to treat the remains with dignity. Some Baha'is from Middle East backgrounds observe more detailed requirements, such as the body being washed carefully and wrapped in a shroud of white silk or cotton, a Baha'i burial ring placed on the finger, the body placed in a coffin of hard fine wood and being buried with feet pointed towards the Holy Land. Some prefer that the burial occur within 24 hours from the time of death but this is a matter of personal preference, not a requirement of Baha'i law.



## Brahma Kumaris

Brahma Kumaris favour cremation over burial. Dedicated Brahma Kumaris would prefer the body to be in special white clothes although there is some flexibility in this.



## Buddhism

Buddhists believe the spirit leaves the body immediately but may linger in an in-between state near the body. In this case it is important the body is treated with respect so that the spirit can continue its journey to a happy state. Because there are so many different types of Buddhist, funeral traditions vary. Funerals will usually consist of a simple service held at the crematorium chapel. The coffin may be surrounded by objects significant to the person who has died. Monks may come with the family to the funeral and scriptures may be chanted. The person may either be cremated or buried depending on their tradition.



## Christianity

Dying patients of all Christian denominations may wish the services of the appropriate faith representative. It is important that wherever possible Roman Catholic patients be offered the sacrament known as the sacrament of the sick. It is normal that in the event of a Roman Catholic death the corpse of the deceased would be received into the Church the evening before the Requiem Mass or just prior to the Mass taking place. In the past it was normative to seek Christian burial but nowadays the option of cremation is available to the next of kin. In the event of a newborn baby/infant being in danger of death it is permitted for the

parents/guardians who are Roman Catholic themselves to carry out an emergency baptism.

Mormons have no special rituals, however an 'endowed' Mormon should be buried wearing special undergarments.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that it is normal to grieve over the death of a loved one; thus they do not treat funerals as a time for revelry but a time to show empathy. They will avoid customs or practices based on the belief that the dead are conscious and can influence the living, e.g. wake keeping, lavish funeral celebrations.



## Hinduism

After death the body should always be left covered. The body will be prepared by family members. Cremation is required.



## Islam

Muslims must be buried within 24 hours. The eyes of the deceased will be closed, the lower jaw gently bound with a strip of cloth to the top of the head to prevent it from opening; the body is laid out with their arms placed straight down the side of the body. The body will be washed by the deceased's family, friends or members of community (same sex only). It will be wrapped in a white shroud and prayers will be said. At the time of burial, the head of the deceased will be gently turned towards Makkah. In Islam, the body must be buried as quickly as possible. Cremation is not permitted. Some Muslims hold the belief that women should not go to the graveyard.



## Judaism

The body of the deceased is prepared by members of the faith community. The body should be straightened out, laid flat with the feet together and eyes closed, and arms by the side, and covered with a plain white sheet. In most Jewish communities, there is no cremation, only burial, which should take place as soon as possible, usually within a day or two of death within the UK.



## Sikhism

After passing away, the deceased will be washed and dressed in clean clothes by members of the family of the same sex. If the deceased has fulfilled the Sikh baptismal ritual then the five symbols of Sikh membership will also be placed in the coffin. Friends and family drive in procession to the crematorium. Death is not seen as a sad occasion but an act of God.

# Other customs/practices of which to be aware



## Christianity

Jehovah's Witnesses will accept medicine and medical treatment (depending on personal choice) but will not accept blood transfusions. They will also not use the cross in worship, as it is believed that the Bible indicates that Jesus did not die on a cross but rather on a simple stake and it also warns to 'flee from idolatry'. Some Jehovah's Witnesses will also not celebrate birthdays, Christmas or Easter.

## Islam

There is a strong sense of decorum amongst Muslim women, and men do not normally shake hands with unrelated women and vice versa. Some Muslim women may not feel comfortable being alone in a house with a male who is not family and communications may have to take place in the presence of another family member. It may be appropriate to arrange visits in advance so that this can be organised. Muslims – like other families – often remove their shoes on entering the house and you may feel it appropriate to do the same or to ask if you should. Shoes will never be worn in a mosque. Some Muslims may consider direct eye contact to be rude and therefore may avoid it – this should not be misinterpreted as being evasive.

When visiting Muslims, prayer times should be avoided if possible, as people may not respond. Employers may need to allow for observance of daily prayer (during normal work hours) and for adequate facilities for ritual washing beforehand. Muslims perform five prayers a day as a duty towards Allah. The exact times change throughout the year depending upon the times of sunrise and sunset. Muslims welcome privacy or a quiet space during prayer times and must face towards Makkah. Each prayer only takes a few minutes to perform and is a direct link between the worshipper and God. They are seen to purify the heart and prevent temptation towards wrongdoing and evil.

**Prayers** are one of the five pillars of Islam. The other pillars are the **declaration of faith** (to bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His messenger to all human beings until the Day of Judgement); **Zakah** ('to purify' – wealth is purified by paying Zakah, a specified percentage of ones wealth to people in need); **Fasting** (see 'Food and Fasting' section); and **Hajj** (a pilgrimage to Makkah which takes place at a fixed time of the calendar and is a requirement at least once in a lifetime for those who can afford it – it is important for employers, doctors, etc., to be aware of this as a Hajj visit usually requires almost two weeks. After performing Hajj, Muslims may visit Prophet Muhammad's

grave in Madina and some historical places). Eid ul Adha coincides with the time of performing the pilgrimage in Makkah. At this time Muslims offer sacrifices of animals to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham's son. The meat from the sacrifice is distributed to family, friends and people in need. In the UK this would be represented by a special order of meat.

## Judaism

Observant Jewish people will pray facing towards Jerusalem and need a quorum of 10 (a minyan) for communal prayer, however can pray alone in any clean place. Progressive communities do not require a minyan for communal prayer, and men and women sit together at services. There are three daily prayers (morning, afternoon and evening), with longer services on Saturday and festival mornings. Any room or area provided for prayer should be clean and contain no religious items on display which may offend or distract in the act of worship.

## Sikhism

After being initiated, a Sikh is never to remove any of the five **Kakkaars** (five K's) from his/her body. These five K's are the mark of **Sikhi**. These are: **Kesh** (uncut hair), **Kangha** (a small wooden comb), **Kara** (a pure iron bangle), **Kirpan** (a short sword) and **Kachera** (special shorts). The community of baptised Sikhs are known as Khalsa Panth. Although not mentioned in the five articles of faith, the **dastar** (turban) is worn to maintain the sanctity of **Kesh** (hair) and is treated with the utmost respect by those Sikhs who wear it. Although the five K's cannot be removed, Sikhs have often faced restrictions in wearing them at schools, universities and at work despite policies being put into place by various governmental sectors. Not all Sikhs are baptised and thus not all wear the five K's.

There are also four H's which must be avoided; **Hukka** (taking tobacco and any other intoxicant), **Hajamat** (removing/cutting/dying of hair, piercing or tattooing), **Halalo** (eating meat, fish and eggs) and **Haram** (adultery).

## Holy Days and Festivals

It is important to take into account the holy days and festivals that may be observed by people of different faiths when arranging events, meetings, visits to homes, etc. Employers should also recognise that time off may be required for major festivals. There are a number of useful interfaith calendars available online, such as [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org)

# What my faith means to me



**The information in this handbook may not apply to everyone who identifies with a particular faith, for example not all Sikhs will refrain from alcohol and not all Christians will attend church every Sunday. This section seeks to highlight some of the differences and explores what faith means to some of our local Faith Group members.**



## Buddhism in Scotland Today

Most Buddhists in Scotland are local people who have converted to Buddhism. The word Buddha simply means awake;- Siddhartha Gotama, became the Buddha when he reached a deep intuitive understanding of how our world operates which we call Enlightenment. His first teaching is known across the Buddhist world as the Four Noble Truths. It explained that craving (or aversion) for the ephemeral things of this world is the cause of much suffering, therefore stopping craving will lead to a much happier state (and ultimately to Enlightenment). This is extremely difficult to do so over the years a plethora of practices have developed to help Buddhists achieve at least some reduction in their tendency to crave.

Buddhism places a very strong emphasis on each individual trying to put the Buddha's teaching into practice. Different schools of Buddhism have their own preferred practices but all lead ultimately to the cessation of craving. Meditation is central to this because a still mind "sees" things more clearly.

Meditation is supported by living a life motivated by kindness and clarity. Therefore Buddhists live by 5 precepts which are guidelines to help them live lives that will bring them nearer to Enlightenment. These are:

- Abstention from harming yourself or other sensate beings (Try to act from a state loving kindness. Buddhists are vegetarian or vegan).
- Abstention from taking the property, time or energy of others (Try to act generously).
- Abstention from sexual misconduct (Try to bring stillness, simplicity and contentment into your life. The key principle in deciding what is misconduct is; Are you harming yourself or others?).
- Abstention from false speech (Try to be truthful).
- Abstention from substances which cloud the mind; Alcohol or recreational drugs (Try to keep the mind clear at all times Some Buddhists do not drink alcohol at all, others will take small amounts ie a glass of wine with a meal).

Tolerance of the views of others is a prominent feature of Buddhism. They are generally concerned about environmental issues.

Buddhists have a shrine in their houses Its form varies depending on the school of Buddhism and personal taste, common features are;

- A Buddha image (a reminder of what we can become)
- Flowers (a reminder that we too will fade like the flowers)
- Candles ( a reminder of enlightenment)
- Incense (a reminder that leading a life based on compassion and wisdom spreads its influence out around us like the smell of the incense).

The main Buddhist festival is Wesak, celebrating the Buddha's enlightenment on the day of the full moon in May.

*Input provided by Danabhadri Fergusson, Glasgow Buddhist Centre.*



## Judaism

"I can talk about 'what my faith means to me' in general terms and also at a much more personal level that is possibly not so easy to summarize in a few words!

The general view encapsulates an outlook on Jewish faith that I have had the privilege of sharing, in the past year, in diverse locations with diverse audiences; the most recent being only last week when my husband and I spoke of our experiences of being Jewish in Scotland with a Catholic Ladies' Guild outside Glasgow.

I have had opportunities to participate in a storytelling project with Interfaith Glasgow where I talked about my journey to Judaism as a convert through my siddur (prayer book), to participate in a 'Diversity Day' where pupils of all faiths and none from a number of primary schools met for a day of cultural activities and learning about others within their own communities, and I have visited several secondary schools in the Central Lowlands with my box of artefacts to educate young people about Judaism and to demonstrate how it is possible these days to be a person of faith and to actively engage with the

community at large.

To be able to share with people of different religions and none, to listen to others and to respect others' points of view is incredibly important to me; I grew up in a small village in West Lothian where Catholic and Protestant children did not mix and it was only as an adult that I realised that barriers need to be broken at all levels but only now has my faith given me the confidence to help break these barriers.

On the personal level, as a practising Orthodox Jew, my faith sustains me in everything I do; Judaism is a practical way of life as well as one of belief. For every question I find an answer to there is something else to find out about. I liken this progression in learning to opening up a Russian egg; my grandmother had one and how I loved to open it up and find yet another inside!

As far as I can, I follow the basic tenet of Judaism; do nothing to another that you would not have done to you (i.e. love your neighbour - the same tenet of so many other faiths) then this is what my faith means to me."

*Margalit Borowski, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities*

"It's funny, until I agreed to write this short note, I'd never really thought about 'what my Judaism means to me'. To be honest, Judaism isn't something I think about a lot during the day, rather I think that Judaism helps define who I am. Judaism is very much about actions as much as words, so it's things like acting with integrity and treating people as you would want to be treated, and I hope that's what I try to do. I don't think "I'm being Jewish" if I try to do such things, rather my Judaism means that that's just what you do.

Having said that, I do spend quite a bit of time going to services and generally being involved with our community, the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community. But I wouldn't say I was particularly religious, rather the duty in Judaism to 'do things' is why I believe it's important to be involved in the community and to help it to thrive. For sure there are times when I go to a service and I come away thinking I really enjoyed it, but there are other times when I'm less enthusiastic. But that's fine.

Another aspect of Judaism that I really appreciate is that it doesn't pretend to know all the answers. Questioning things, and only accepting an answer that I'm happy with, is something I do with Judaism as much as other areas of my life. And if Judaism encourages me to do that, that's one of the main reasons why I'm proud to be Jewish."

*Nick Silk, Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community*

## Some thoughts on Spiritual Needs

**In a society where many people have little personal experience of faith communities, we are inclined to talk about spiritual needs, rather than religion. It may be helpful to consider some of what is meant by or included in a spiritual dimension, so that we have a common language.**

Some of the elements of spiritual "health" are a sense of belonging through regular contact with others; acceptance of 'self' by self and others; being peaceful within self and in relationships; being able to appreciate the nonmaterial; 'practising' religious faith as appropriate; and having a sense of meaning in life.

The converse of these, spiritual dis-ease, can include isolation and insecurity; bitterness, resentment and guilt; fears, agitation, incongruence and lack of forgiveness; absorption in physical and material; anger with God or "church" or loss of faith; depression, hopelessness and sense that life is meaningless.

Although difficult to define, spiritual needs are a universal phenomenon. They may or may not find overt expression, and may or may not be expressed in usual 'religious' terms. They have a close link with the emotions but are not encompassed by them. They are legitimate to be considered by secular professionals. Because some of these issues touch deep into the identity and well-being of individuals, staff may need to be aware of them in dealing with clients/users/ customers/patients. Religious communities may at times be a resource in attending to spiritual needs, and of course for this to happen there has to be the building of trust in relationships.

# Inter-faith Working in West Lothian

The West Lothian Faith Group was set up to promote inter-faith working in West Lothian, providing a forum for faith communities to get together to share ideas and experiences, helping to encourage a dialogue between those of different faiths.

The network is also one of the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP's) equality forums and provides a mechanism for partners to engage with faith communities. The equality forums provide a platform to meet the legal obligations of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, in order to engage on each of the protected characteristics. There is also the Community Race Forum, Women's Equality Forum, Disability Forum, Youth Congress, LGBT Young People and the Employee Equality Network. The equality forums allow the CPP to gain an understanding of equality-based issues and of the social and personal needs of the diverse groups and individuals in West Lothian, to inform our priorities and drive service delivery.

Membership of the Faith Group is open to faith leaders from all places of worship in West Lothian as well as

community representatives who can represent their faith tradition. The Faith Group meets quarterly in different places of worship in West Lothian. Information of interest is also regularly circulated to the large mailing list. Faith Group members also take part in the CPP's six-monthly Let's Talk Equalities events, which provide an opportunity for members of the equality forums to meet informally, share practice and learn from each other, as well as identify issues and challenges of common interest across the protected characteristic groups.

***If you are interested in joining the West Lothian Faith Group, or would like further information on any of the equality forums, please email [community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk), call 01506 281086 or visit [www.westlothian.gov.uk/communityplanning](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/communityplanning)***

## Acknowledgements

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# Useful Links and Further Reading

Interfaith Scotland: [www.interfaithscotland.org](http://www.interfaithscotland.org)

Edinburgh Interfaith Association: [www.eifa.org.uk](http://www.eifa.org.uk)

Interfaith Glasgow: [www.interfaithglasgow.org](http://www.interfaithglasgow.org)

A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland (Interfaith Scotland): [www.interfaithscotland.org/resources/publications](http://www.interfaithscotland.org/resources/publications)

A Multi-Faith Resource for Healthcare Staff (NHS Education for Scotland): [www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3720/march07finalversions.pdf.pdf](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3720/march07finalversions.pdf.pdf)

Spiritual Care Matters (NHS Education for Scotland): [www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3723/spiritualcaremattersfinal.pdf](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3723/spiritualcaremattersfinal.pdf)

Religion and Belief Matter (NHS Education for Scotland): [www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3722/religionandbelief.pdf](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3722/religionandbelief.pdf)

Embracing Cultural Diversity (B&Q): [www.multifaiths.com/pdf/culturaldiversityBQ.pdf](http://www.multifaiths.com/pdf/culturaldiversityBQ.pdf)

Interfaith Calendar: [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org)

Engaging Muslim Communities: [www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Engaging%20Muslim%20Communities.pdf](http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Engaging%20Muslim%20Communities.pdf)

Damdami Taksaal (Sikh educational organisation): [www.damdमितaksaal.org/code-of-conduct](http://www.damdमितaksaal.org/code-of-conduct)

**Nil by Mouth** exists solely to achieve a society free from sectarianism where cultural and religious diversity is respected and celebrated by everyone. Nil By Mouth believes Scotland can succeed in this goal if we unite together to tackle the problem as a nation. <http://nilbymouth.org>

## National Organisations

Archdiocese of Glasgow (Catholic): [www.rcag.org.uk](http://www.rcag.org.uk)

Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh (Catholic): [www.archdiocese-edinburgh.com](http://www.archdiocese-edinburgh.com)

Assemblies of God: [www.aog.org.uk](http://www.aog.org.uk)

Baha'i Scotland: [www.scottishbahais.org](http://www.scottishbahais.org)

Baptist Union of Scotland: [www.scottishbaptist.org.uk](http://www.scottishbaptist.org.uk)

Brahma Kumaris: [www.brahmakumaris.org/uk](http://www.brahmakumaris.org/uk)

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: [www.lds.org.uk](http://www.lds.org.uk)

Church of Scotland: [www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)

Edinburgh Buddhist Centre (Triratna Buddhism): [www.edinburghbuddhistcentre.org.uk](http://www.edinburghbuddhistcentre.org.uk)

Glasgow Buddhist Centre (Triratna Buddhism): [www.glasgowbuddhistcentre.com](http://www.glasgowbuddhistcentre.com)

Elim Pentecostal Church: [www.elim.org.uk](http://www.elim.org.uk)

Jehovah's Witnesses: [www.jw.org/en](http://www.jw.org/en)

Hindu Temple of Scotland: [www.hindutempleofscotland.com](http://www.hindutempleofscotland.com)

Humanist Society Scotland: [www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk)

Tibetan Buddhists: [www.samyeling.org](http://www.samyeling.org)

Methodist Church in Scotland: [www.methodistchurchinScotland.net](http://www.methodistchurchinScotland.net)

Muslim Council of Scotland: [www.mcscotland.org](http://www.mcscotland.org)

Pagan Federation: [www.scottishpf.org](http://www.scottishpf.org)

Salvation Army (East Scotland): [www.salvationarmy.org.uk/east-scotland](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/east-scotland)

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities: [www.scojec.org](http://www.scojec.org)

Scottish Episcopal Church: [www.scotland.anglican.org](http://www.scotland.anglican.org)

Sikh Council of Scotland: [www.sikh-council-of-scotland.co.uk](http://www.sikh-council-of-scotland.co.uk)

United Free Church of Scotland: [www.ufcos.org.uk](http://www.ufcos.org.uk)

United Reformed Church: [www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)