

Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Spring 2019: Issue 31

20th Anniversary Edition



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Exploring local group activities past and present and their hopes and dreams for the future

Paying tribute to visionaries!

It was in October 1999 that Interfaith Scotland (then The Scottish Interfaith Council) came into being – ably birthed by faith communities and supported by the Scottish Government. So, this year is our 20th Anniversary and in October we will be holding celebrations to mark that anniversary. I would like to use this editorial to pay special tribute to all those who had the vision and the determination to bring to birth a National Interfaith organisation in Scotland.



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

There were many visionaries and in October we will be sharing their personal stories and the story of the journey of Interfaith Scotland and interfaith engagement generally across Scotland. But for now it is really a privilege and an honour to be part of that story and this newsletter captures just how far we have come.

2018/19 have so far been a time of great opportunity but also great challenges. The Jewish Community was devastated to hear of the massacre of Jews in Pittsburgh but was also deeply moved by the response of the people of Scotland to the massacre. Rabbi Rubin held a service in the Giffnock Synagogue and was so grateful to have in attendance members of the Muslim Council of Scotland, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Ms Aileen Campbell, and many friends from the diverse faith communities. In so many ways this is a testimony to the years of interfaith engagement that has strengthened bonds of friendship in Scotland.

As Director of Interfaith Scotland it is always a great privilege to work with the hardworking staff team and with our supportive Board. In June 2018 Simon Wiegand, our international intern returned to Germany and he is sadly missed, but we also happily welcomed new members to our staff team, Fariha Saeed (Communications Officer) and Aparna Ramesh (trainee Development Officer).

One of the most exciting developments for us in 2018/19 was receiving funding for the Year of Young People to develop a network of young interfaith enthusiasts and our work in this area was ably supported by Michael Hail and the Dare2lead team. I hope you enjoy reading all about the great interfaith youth engagement that has taken place recently.

In times of uncertainty it is heartening to know that interfaith dialogue and engagement in Scotland is on solid ground.

Dr Maureen Sier, Director

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Interfaith Summit with the First Minister of Scotland

For the past five years it has been a privilege and honour for the Religious Leaders Forum, Interfaith Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow and invited guests to meet with the First Minister of Scotland and during Scottish Interfaith Week 2018 once again the Interfaith Summit with the First Minister of Scotland was held.

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell, and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon warmly welcomed everyone and then Rabbi Rubin shared the contents of a letter he had written to a school in East Renfrewshire after he had been spat upon by a school pupil. Rather than a letter reprimanding the pupil the Rabbi spoke of the impact that this act of hate and disrespect had upon him.

Further contributions came from Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow

and the First Minister sought direct input from four of the young people in attendance, members of Interfaith Scotland's Youth Forum. 2018 had been the Year of Young People and so the contribution and insights from the young people were highly valued by the First Minister. Tackling hate speech and hate crimes, ensuring good relations, working together for the common good and the importance of hearing the voice of young people were all covered by the comprehensive agenda.



Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief

Interfaith Scotland acts as Secretariat for the Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief and the group is chaired by John Mason MSP.

In 2018 three meetings were held in the Scottish Parliament and invited guests included Ephraim Borowski, the Director of SCoJeC (The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities), who spoke of the rise in Antisemitism; Dr Kishan Manocha (Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), who spoke of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Europe; and Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, from Tibet Watch who spoke of the lack of religious freedom for Buddhists in Tibet. All the Cross Party Group meetings are open to the public and meetings are generally very well attended. There is a rise in religion and belief intolerance globally and this Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief is an excellent way of keeping abreast of developments.

Religious Leaders of Scotland



Since 2002 the religious leaders of Scotland have been meeting faithfully twice a year. They have met in venues across Scotland, most often in faith community buildings. In the 17 years since they first came together, in Dunblane, they have discussed wide ranging topics; have supported each other in times of crisis; have encouraged their respective communities to support interfaith dialogue and engagement; have stood together as symbols of solidarity and most importantly have built lasting and meaningful friendships.

In 2018 the Religious Leaders met in the Synagogue in Giffnock and in the Baha'i Centre in Edinburgh. In Giffnock they were able to meet with the head teacher from the joint campus Catholic-Jewish School, (St. Clare's and Calderwood Lodge), and explore what it means to share

a school with an interfaith ethos; in Edinburgh they were able to meet with members of the emerging Scottish Interfaith Youth Forum and they also had an opportunity to consult with Aileen Campbell, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government.



Training



It has been another busy year for Interfaith Scotland's training programme, with Training Officer Jamie Spurway working with a wide range of organisations. In May he travelled to Aberdeen to deliver a half day course to staff of Grampian Regional Equality Council and many of their local partner organisations.

The course focused on ensuring that services provided to the public are sensitive to the needs arising from different religions. Many of the delegates worked in the context of tackling violence against women, and this brought an important focus to the discussions.

We have also continued to provide training to Interfaith Scotland's neighbours at Experiential Play, an organisation that provides training for people to become early years workers. The focus of these courses has been

really intriguing – the spiritual needs of young children. Jamie Spurway and Frances Hume, Senior Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland, encouraged the delegates to consider how religion and belief might affect work with very young children and their families, including how to respond to the trickier questions young children might ask such as 'Where do you go when you die?'.

We were happy to be invited back by Action Together for Churches Scotland to contribute to an event for the

chaplains of colleges and universities. Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland and Jamie Spurway co-facilitated an engaging discussion around similarities and differences between the main faiths. Input centred around the popular metaphor of the world's faith traditions as being 'one tree with many branches'.

We also ran our first public courses, delivered from our office and available (at a small fee!) to individuals and organisations.

Four Nations Meeting

Every year the national interfaith organisations of the UK, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland meet to explore how they can most effectively collaborate on interfaith matters across the whole of the UK.

In 2018 Interfaith Scotland was delighted to host the Four Nations Meeting in the Interfaith Scotland Dialogue Centre. This collaboration is further enhanced by the Director of Interfaith Scotland sitting as a Trustee on the Board of the UK Inter Faith Network and in 2018 a number of meetings were held and staff of Interfaith Scotland were able to speak



at the AGM of the UK Network on the topic of 'engaging young people'. A very significant piece of work was also undertaken by Interfaith Scotland, via Simon Wiegand our international intern, who sat on the Committee responsible for creating the 'Connect Guide' for young people published by the UK Network (see page 14).

Untold Stories of Women of Faith in the Suffragette & Peace Movement

Over sixty participants from diverse faiths attended the "Untold Stories of Women of Faith in the Suffragette movement" at the Edinburgh Storytelling centre.

Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network in partnership with Interfaith Scotland hosted the event during Scottish Interfaith Week to highlight the stories of women not commonly known who were involved in the struggle for women to have the right to vote.

Ms Aileen Campbell, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, spoke of the importance of hearing the stories of the remarkable women who supported the movement in Scotland. Katherine Gilmour, Gender Justice officer at the Church of Scotland, related the first story of Dr Dorothea Chalmers Smith, a pioneer doctor and a militant Scottish suffragette. She was imprisoned for her activities and divorced from her husband, who did not support her activities, after the First World War taking her three daughters but not allowed to see her three sons again.

Ravinder Kaur spoke of a Royal Sikh suffragette Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, daughter of Maharaja Duleep



Singh heir to the Kingdom of the Sikhs and the goddaughter of Queen Victoria. On 18th November 1910, she played an important role in the first deputation (march) to Parliament alongside Emmeline Pankhurst, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and other prominent female figures. She was extremely active in publicity campaigns, an enthusiastic fund-raiser, and a regular seller of The Suffragette, the WSPU newspaper.

May Pollok Grant's story was told by Mirella Yandoli the Interfaith programme officer for the Church of Scotland. After returning from India in 1911, May worked for women's rights in Dundee as a member of the militant Women's Social and Political Union. She caused disruption in many

Members Dialogue: Tackling Loneliness and Isolation

Working in partnership with Faith in Older People, Interfaith Scotland hosted a dialogue for our members and friends on 'tackling loneliness and isolation'. The Scottish Government sees loneliness and isolation as a key issue and in 2018 they launched a strategy document entitled '**a connected society; a strategy for tackling loneliness**'.

The dialogue event in Linlithgow was an opportunity for faith communities not only to meet together in dialogue but also to engage with the Scottish Government Strategy. Guest speakers included Maureen O'Neill from Faith in Older People, Lynnda Wardle from the Weekend Club, Nicola Hanssen from Roar and Pall Singh from the Edinburgh Interfaith Befriending Programme. Evaluations from our members suggested that this was one of the most meaningful and challenging topics that they had explored together to date.



political meetings for which she was imprisoned. The participants were then given an opportunity to dialogue discussing questions of what they found inspiring and challenging in the three stories, and their thoughts on the importance of voting today.

A further two events took place in February during World Interfaith Harmony Week and in March during International Women's Week. These further events explored women of faith from the Jewish, Baha'i, Muslim and Hindu traditions. A useful resource capturing the learning from the stories and dialogue was also launched in March and can be obtained from the offices of Interfaith Scotland.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day is a day of remembrance for the millions of people murdered in the Holocaust, under Nazi Persecution, and in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur.

The theme this year was 'Torn from Home'. Torn from home encouraged people to reflect on how the enforced loss of a safe place to call 'home' is part of the trauma faced by anyone experiencing persecution and genocide. 'Home' usually means a place of safety, comfort and security but tragically millions of people around the world continue to be displaced and are facing many difficulties trying to find and build new homes in strange countries, separated from their families, or in hostile and dangerous environments. Scotland has welcomed many refugees from all over the world, most recently over 2500 from Syria. It has also been 25 years since the genocide in Rwanda began and the impact of this is still being felt within the Rwandan community who are now settled in Scotland.

To mark HMD 2019, Interfaith Scotland created a week-long programme of events for Holocaust Memorial Day around this theme and worked in partnership with East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire Councils who jointly hosted Scotland's National Holocaust Memorial Day event on Monday 28th



January. The event, held at Eastwood Park Theatre, was an evening of music, poetry and survivor stories which highlighted the true horror of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides.

Telling his story was Martin Stern, who in spring 1944, aged five, was arrested with his one year old sister by the Nazis in the Netherlands because their father was a Jew. The vast majority of such children were gassed in the Auschwitz or Sobibor killing centres, but thanks to a chain of remarkable events, both were among the tiny number of children who escaped and survived. Last May he was honoured with the MBE by the Queen for his invaluable work. Delkhwaz Hacı also spoke that evening. She is part of the Yazidi community and board Member of Yazda, an organisation that works tirelessly to assist the Yazidis in their recovery from the 2014 Genocide, as well as prevent any future genocides against the Yazidi people and other minorities. Delkhwaz highlighted to us that the atrocities of the past are still present today and shared the story

of her friend Farida Abbas Khalaf, who is one of more than 6,500 Yazidi survivors of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) enslavement and genocide. Farida was born in Kocho-Sinjar, Northern Iraq, and was a high school student

when ISIS attacked her village, killing men and taking women and children hostages. She was then taken into captivity where she was subjected to unimaginable suffering including physical and mental abuse. Since her escape, Farida has been an effective part of Yazda global advocacy campaign to bring ISIS militants to justice and has published her book 'The Girls who Beat ISIS'. Delkhwaz was joined on stage by British artist Hannah Rose Thomas, who had spent time with Yazidi survivors in Iraq using her powerful art to advocate on their behalf. The audience heard about her experiences in the refugee camps with Yazidi women and were able to view her amazing work at the end of the event and during that week.

The 2019 memorial was held in partnership with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Scottish Government, who were represented by Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell. As well as the speakers, there were music performances by pupils from Paisley Grammar and East Renfrewshire schools and a powerful poem recited by two young Rwandan children of a survivor who now lives in Edinburgh, marking the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda.

To close the event, Rabbi Moshe Rubin chanted a Jewish prayer, memorial candles were lit and the audience was asked to take a minute to reflect



on the evening's powerful message. Finally, guests were able to view the Yazidi artwork as well as the Gathering the voices exhibition, which brings to life the experiences of the people who came to Scotland to escape the Holocaust.

Additional HMD events across the week

Ahead of the national memorial, over 250 pupils from six local authorities

across the West of Scotland were brought together at Eastwood Park Theatre during the day on Monday 28th January to pay their respects and listen to the key speakers. The children came from schools in East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire, East Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde and South Lanarkshire. In addition to this, a schools conference was held at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, the main event for Glasgow schools was held in the City Chambers and Martin Stern visited

Paisley Abbey to talk to Renfrewshire school children who were also taken round the 'Gathering the Voices' exhibition which was on display for a further week in this beautiful location. Cathcart Parish Church held an incredibly moving service which our guest speakers attended, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland organised a lunch time concert and Giffnock synagogue closed the week's events by hosting a Shabbat dinner, with Martin Stern being the guest of honour.



Networking Seminar for Local Interfaith Groups

The annual national networking seminar for local interfaith groups took place on 15th August 2018. There were presentations from local groups about their activities of the past year including Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group, the Abrahamic Roots Group, Inverness Interfaith Group, Fife Interfaith Group, East Renfrewshire Faith Forum and Aberdeen Interfaith Group.

Senior Development Officer, Frances Hume, shared about the survey that she had conducted with all the local interfaith groups in Scotland in 2017 and 2018 alongside international intern Simon Wiegand (see next article). She then led a dialogue with those present, asking members of the different interfaith groups to share examples of good practice, their hopes and dreams for the future of their group and any challenges they might have faced over the years.

Ashley Beck from the UK Inter Faith Network presented their useful Local Inter Faith Guide at the meeting. Hard copies are available and it can also be downloaded from their website. In the afternoon, time was given to reflect

upon the theme of Scottish Interfaith Week 2018, 'Connecting Generations'. Presentations were given on the theme by very enthusiastic speakers from different faiths and organisations. Charandeep Singh (Scottish Chambers of Commerce Head of External Relations) from the Sikh faith, Brittany Ritell (UJIA youth worker) from the Jewish faith and Samina Ansari (CEO of Amina MWRC) from the Muslim faith shared their thoughts on including all generations within faith communities with a particular focus on ways to make young people feel welcome and included. Maureen O'Neill, director of the organisation 'Faith in Older People' shared about the needs of older people in faith communities. Hannah Lindsay, who was training to be an

early years worker at Experiential Play shared about ways that she had put the course run by staff of Interfaith Scotland into practice, running interfaith activities with 3 - 4 year olds. Not an easy task!

After the speeches and a Q & A with the speakers, there was a further opportunity for dialogue in groups around the theme of 'Connecting Generations', looking at activities groups might want to plan around the theme during Scottish Interfaith Week. Finally, the director of Interfaith Scotland, Dr Maureen Sier, was celebrating a very special birthday and was surprised with a birthday cake and flowers.

Local Interfaith Groups Survey

During 2017 and 2018, Interfaith Scotland's international intern, Simon Wiegand and Senior Development Officer, Frances Hume, visited 17 interfaith groups across Scotland. They asked the groups to reflect on their role and purpose, on their activities past and present, their hopes and dreams for the future and any challenges they might be facing.

A summary of the findings are below, with a full report on each local group available from Interfaith Scotland.

What is striking is that the structure and organisation of every local interfaith group is unique but they appear to be united in vision and purpose. There are interfaith organisations with paid staff in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Some interfaith groups are registered as a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) which gives the advantage of being able to apply for funding for events. Some are set up by the local Council, with local faith representatives attending Council-led meetings, while others are more 'organic' with informal group meetings for dialogue and activities.

The local groups eloquently expressed what they saw as their vision and purpose:

- Fostering understanding, cooperation and friendship between faith communities
- Increasing understanding of the positive role that faith communities play in society
- Promoting religious and racial equality
- Being of service to the local community
- Being a positive influence on public, private and community sector agencies
- Sharing what values we have in common and exploring our differences
- Dispelling the myths surrounding different religions

Activities of local groups

Local interfaith groups shared with Simon and Frances about the wide variety of activities that they have been engaged in over the years. These include talks and panel discussion on a topic; faith sharing and dialogue; interfaith services; stalls at college equality and diversity days; visiting places of worship; education and training; Scriptural Reasoning; pilgrimages (e.g. Iona); away days to sacred sites; shared meals; meditation; Family Fun Days; 'Fun in the Forest'; environmental clean-ups; interfaith picnics; Festival of faiths; school assembly talks, classes and inter-schools diversity days; monthly women's dialogue; Festival of Colour; Interfaith Peace Walk; creating a Peace Garden; erecting a Peace Pole; planting a Growing Grove of trees; an interfaith choir; hate crime seminars; social events with food and music; ceilidhs; celebrating festivals; fasting for Ramadan; Interfaith Food Justice Network; Pakora masterclasses, Weekend Club for refugees; Faith Handbook; and not to forget - planning meetings!

Another useful tool has been to plan events around special days or weeks throughout the year. These include **World Religion Day** (20th January), **Holocaust Memorial Day** (27th January), **World Interfaith Harmony Week** (February), **International Women's Day** (8th March), **Refugee Festival** (June), **Peace One Day**

(21st September), **One World Week** (October) and **Scottish Interfaith Week** (November).

Hopes, dreams and challenges of local interfaith groups

Local interfaith groups shared about their hopes and dreams for the future and what challenges they have faced over the years. Their hopes and dreams include attracting young people to meetings and events and having more activities with young people in the community; having more contact with faith communities and leaders; a greater religious diversity amongst members; a greater public profile and more recognition from schools, public and private bodies; an increase in the membership; having more people active in planning events; increasing educational and training programmes; wider advertising and having promotional materials available to share with the public. Funding can be an issue as it may be needed for putting on events and some groups have to pay for meeting rooms. Having a constitution can be an advantage in terms of being able to apply for funding but can bring its own challenges. Several groups cited a positive relationship with external organisations including multi-faith forums and multi-cultural associations but also the need to have a 'unique' aspect for their raison d'être such as spiritual sharing as a group.

Local Interfaith Groups express their thanks to Interfaith Scotland

West Lothian Faith Forum

Joanna Anderson and Rev John Povey (chair of the group)

"Interfaith dialogue involves the meeting of those who pray and worship in different ways from each other, in order to discover how to coexist in harmony, to promote among our own congregations the dignity of all religious faiths, and to learn from one another so that we may understand and respect one another's beliefs and customs. Interfaith Scotland has been a great help to the West Lothian Faith Group over the years, by providing opportunities to share and learn from other local interfaith groups through their seminars and by providing helpful advice in relation to our activities and pieces of work."

Faiths Together in Skye and Lochalsch

Patricia McNicol

"On behalf of our local interfaith group I would like to thank Interfaith Scotland for the valuable and much appreciated services you continue to provide for us. Over the years we have benefited greatly from a range of visitors, some of whom have given public talks locally while others have made visits to local primary schools, each respectively highlighting the importance of ongoing dialogue and the education of young people in the diverse faith traditions that co-exist in our multi-cultural nation. We find the newsletter an excellent tool for learning what is happening elsewhere at both the local and national level. It is a great resource for planning our own events. Since the inception of Scottish Interfaith Week and thanks to the help and information made available from Interfaith Scotland we have managed to hold an annual event here in Skye and have greatly appreciated feeling part of a national campaign to promote better understanding and dialogue among different faith traditions".

Inverness Interfaith Group

"Interfaith Scotland has been an essential tool for us when we started up, to not only interlink with other people in the community, but also organisations. With the support of Interfaith Scotland it helped us with ideas of how to direct our group, things to consider and topics of discussion. It is an essential organisation to bring people together at a time when unity is essential. We see our task as a local group to be one of nurturing and promoting good relations amongst the diverse faith groups in Inverness. We are supported in our celebration and promotion of diversity by the many services offered by Interfaith Scotland. We rely on the organisation to facilitate larger events here in the north and feel really included in the organisation even though we are far from the Central Belt".

Interfaith Glasgow

Dr Rose Drew, Director

"Scotland's international reputation as a beacon of good interfaith practice is due in no small part to Interfaith Scotland's dedication to promoting interfaith dialogue and to building a more just and inclusive Scotland for all. At a time when we are witnessing a number of deeply worrying societal trends, including rising hate crime, growing anti-immigrant sentiment, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of prejudice, the work of promoting mutual-understanding, tolerance, and respect and of strengthening interfaith bonds could not be more urgent. Interfaith Scotland is at the forefront of this work at the national level but also plays a vital role in supporting this work locally. Indeed, Interfaith Glasgow (IG) would not exist, were it not for Interfaith Scotland's recognition of the need to support the development of a locally-governed and strategic approach to interfaith engagement in Scotland's most religiously diverse city. Originally established as a project of Interfaith Scotland's in 2012, IG quickly earned a reputation for high quality interfaith work, becoming an independent charity in 2016, as had been hoped. Since then, Interfaith Glasgow has gone from strength to strength, in 2018 winning bronze in the prestigious World Interfaith Harmony Week competition which receives entries from all around the world. We simply could not have achieved all this in such a short space of time without the committed support of Interfaith Scotland".

Dumfries and Galloway

Venus Carew

"In terms of support from Interfaith Scotland, well how much time and space do you have? Although our group existed a few years before IFS, since the formation of the national organisation, we seem to have moved up several rungs/steps in terms of recognition by the local Council and other public services; we are now invited to contribute to local Diversity debates and provide Interfaith support and dialogue in various regional events, such as seminars on youth, poverty, employment and health.

The network meetings, training and other events organised by IFS have also been invaluable in allowing us to become more aware of the bigger picture and how interfaith is contributing to national and global debates. Scottish Interfaith Week (SIFW) continues to provide an opportunity to focus on a specific aspect of life and then link that to the underpinning faith element. SIFW has been a key opportunity for our group making links with others (individuals and groups) and widening the circle of friendship and dialogue. The women's only events (e.g. the arts and crafts day during Refugee Festival) are very helpful as we have managed to replicate these in our own area. For these we are thankful to IFS and its hardworking and creative staff. We wish continued growth and success for Interfaith Scotland and hope you will continue your amazing work in the coming months and years".

SAFE (Scotland Abroad Faith Exchange)

Interfaith Scotland is committed to sharing good practice globally and in 2018 the Director of Interfaith Scotland, Dr Maureen Sier, was able to visit New Zealand at the invitation of the Religious Diversity Trust to share the Interfaith experience of Scotland with local and national interfaith organisations and also with Members of the New Zealand Parliament in Wellington.



During Maureen's time in New Zealand she was able to visit the local interfaith groups of Kerikeri, Whangarei, Christchurch, Wellington, Dunedin and Auckland. In Christchurch, Dunedin and Auckland the Director was the key note speaker at Public Meetings held in the respective cities. In Kerikeri and Whangarei Maureen met with members of the local groups and shared stories of local interfaith engagement in Scotland along with some appropriate resources.

Maureen also met with the full Council of the Religious Diversity Centre to strategically plan for the engagement with the NZ Government. The final meeting in NZ was at the NZ Parliament in Wellington where 100 people gathered for the presentation. This included members of Parliament, representatives of the Human Rights Commission, Religious Leaders and representatives of Wellington Interfaith Group. Additionally Maureen was interviewed by public radio NZ. There will be on-going collaboration with

New Zealand and it is hoped that the engagement will prove fruitful to both nations. For example in March 2019 Michael Hail, who has been working with Interfaith Scotland as a freelance youth worker, was able to speak at a public meeting in Auckland on how to involve young people in interfaith engagement. Michael was able to share his experiences of working for Interfaith Scotland to support a network of young people of faith across Scotland.

ERASMUS+ Projects

OutsideIn Project

This innovative project tackling hate speech in youth work settings is due to be completed in May 2019. Interfaith Scotland has worked in partnership with four European countries to train young people who have one or more protected characteristic to become international trainers, able to train youth workers on how to identify, manage and transform hate speech in youth work settings. Training material has been developed and in Scotland over 100 youth workers have been trained on how to use the material in their particular contexts; additionally a further 400 youth workers have been trained in the partnership countries. All the materials will be available in a toolkit and also on an interactive website.

Inclusive Youth Work Project

The **inclusive youth work** project included youth workers and staff from diverse organisations learning about cultural inclusivity in Finland; LGBTQI+ inclusivity in Slovenia; disability inclusivity in Portugal and Roma inclusivity in Romania. Additional to the training experiences Interfaith Scotland has worked in partnership with the countries involved in the project to produce a website and materials to assist youth workers to be inclusive in their practice. In 2017 Interfaith Scotland held the training on being inclusive of Religion and Belief. The following articles from Interfaith Scotland staff and volunteers capture their experiences in Portugal and Romania.

Social Inclusion and accessibility in Portugal

In September 2018, Interfaith Scotland sent a small team on an Erasmus+ training visit to Lousã, Portugal. The visit was entitled "Social Inclusion and (dis) Ability" and it focused on accessibility in the third sector. Lousã prides itself on being an accessible town, making it an ideal host town for an Erasmus+ project which had a special focus on functional diversity (mixed abilities/disabilities.) The teams worked closely with a local company called ARCIL whose mission is to promote care and rehabilitation services, and to create opportunities for professional integration for those with functional diversity. Teams from four different nations were hosted by Portugal: Scotland, Romania, Slovenia,

and Finland, and each brought a variety of equalities expertise to share 'good practice' with the other participants.

The trip lasted from Monday to Friday and featured a wide variety of learning methods, from seminars and lectures, to practical experiences and tours of local businesses. During the week, we spent our lunch break at a social café; each day we were served by a team of chefs and waiters with mixed abilities. This was one of many establishments run by ARCIL which offer inclusive job opportunities, and we spent Tuesday afternoon touring three others: a day centre for people with moderate to severe functional diversity, a cork factory, and a ceramics factory, the latter two serving as protected employment.

ARCIL provided us with a range of speakers and visits, for example, on the Wednesday afternoon we enjoyed a music

“
We were introduced to innovative equipment which allows people with mixed abilities to easily play instruments and perform.”

performance by “Blue Man Group” and we were introduced to innovative equipment which allows people with mixed abilities to easily play instruments and perform. We also had a disability specialist from ARCIL visit and explain the accessible tourism in Lousã. The group also had an important seminar run by intersectionality specialists, which gave people the opportunity to look at their circumstances and privileges, while thinking about the root of these privileges and how to challenge them.

During one session, participants were given an opportunity to share good practices from our different organisations. Several people stood up and shared projects they were particularly



proud of, and our team members happily promoted the diverse and inclusive work of Interfaith Scotland.

The visit was well attended, and Interfaith Scotland was able to strengthen its friendships with other European charity organisations. The team returned brimming with ideas for future events and strengthened accessibility practices!

Katie Sproull,
Interfaith Scotland volunteer

Inclusive Youth Work in Romania

In November 2018, I embarked on a week-long study visit to learn more about inclusive youth work in Romania, as a representative of Interfaith Scotland. I was joined by three young women from Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre, Capability Scotland and FOSIS Scotland as Scottish representatives and the group was funded by Erasmus Plus.

I arrived in Romania intrigued, excited and energetic for the week ahead. We met the rest of the group the following morning and the represented countries were Portugal, Finland, Slovenia, Romania and of course Scotland. The group were lovely and I enjoyed learning more about them as the week progressed – I have fond memories of exchanging stories from our respective countries.

Day one consisted of enjoyable icebreakers encouraging us to familiarise ourselves with the group, allowed us to learn more about the programme and about Romania itself. As the week progressed, we learnt more about some of the unique challenges facing youth work in Romania. We then visited Romania's 'social housing' structure, designed for orphans which are an alternative method for housing orphans, better replicating the family environment; what made them so effective was that each home had only 6 children and maternal assistants who worked in shifts and were in place to build strong bonds with them.

As the week progressed, we visited the only independent youth centre in Romania which could only be

described as... cool. The smell of coffee hit you like a brick wall as you walked through the door into



what I can only describe as an adult Disney Land. This was one of my favourite experiences of the entire trip – we had lively discussions where I witnessed probably the only occasion where every member of the group participated to share good practice and challenges facing youth work in their countries. We spoke a lot about religious influences and the how the role of the Church affected youth services in Romania. Due to the Church's conservative attitudes towards sex, this was a taboo subject that the youth workers were not permitted to discuss with the young people, unless the young people brought it up. The Church played a key role in providing youth centres and spaces for young people throughout the country and were one of the only institutions doing so.

During the week, we also drove to the outskirts of Bucharest to meet

with some of the Roma community where we discussed key issues they faced. They told us about the intense discrimination for the Roma community in the job market and how this perpetuated the cycle of poverty in their community. They also told us that the areas they lived in the city were commonly regarded as 'unsafe' and that they wanted better opportunities for their young people. We then visited a school to meet with young people, and while the long drive had us miss most of the class, we got to speak to the young volunteer teachers and learn about their experience. After a few minutes of speaking to them (and reflecting on the stories of all the volunteers we met throughout the week in an array of roles), it became clear just how impactful the voluntary sector operated in Romania, particularly given the fact that they had attracted volunteer teachers from across Europe.

We were quick to tell them how impressed we were by the voluntary culture in Romania, which far exceeded ours.

As the week drew to a close, we enjoyed free time to explore some of the beautiful parks and museums in Bucharest and gathered for one final time as a group for a farewell dinner of entirely Romanian cuisine at a traditional restaurant in the city-centre. I learnt a lot about some of the challenges Romania faces as a country, how different and similarly each country approaches youth work, how fortunate I was to grow up in Glasgow where I had access to multiple youth clubs, opportunities and could express myself freely, how as a country we could make better use of volunteers, and just how lovely Romanian people (and children) are. It was a wonderful experience, Bucharest is a wonderful city, and I'd love to be involved again in the future.

Fariha Saeed,
Communications Officer,
Interfaith Scotland

“
The Church played a key role in providing youth centres and spaces for young people throughout the country and were one of the only institutions doing so.
”

US State Department Ministerial on Freedom of Religion and Belief

In July 2018 the Director of Interfaith Scotland was invited to attend the first ever US State Department Ministerial on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Washington DC. The Ministerial was hosted by Mike Pompeo (US Secretary of State) and along with Ministerial presentations the stories of people from across the globe who had suffered for their faith punctuated the event.

The shocking statistics on the rise of persecution because of religious identity meant that the Ministerial was very timely. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Baha'is shared their powerful testimonies and gave the event a real sense of urgency. There was commitment from the US State Department to make this Ministerial on Freedom of Religion and Belief an annual event.

On July 25th, members of civil society groups, including religious leaders

and survivors of religious persecution, convened to tell their stories, share their expertise, and ultimately unite on a path to greater religious freedom in our societies. More than 175 civil society representatives and more than 100 religious leaders representing every corner of the world participated. The program included breakout sessions on the intersections between religious freedom and women's rights; religious freedom and countering violent extremism; religious freedom and economic prosperity; confronting

legal challenges to religious freedom; advocating for equal rights for all; preserving cultural heritage; and providing support and care to victims of religious violence or persecution. On returning from Washington DC the Director of Interfaith Scotland was able to share her experiences at the Cross Party Group meeting held in the Scottish Parliament. It is hoped that Scotland can continue to be involved in the future.



Youth Conference

Interfaith Scotland's national youth conference was held at the University of St Andrews on 21st April 2018. The conference was planned by a team of young people from different faiths from the University of St Andrews student-led Coexistence Initiative.

The young people chose the theme 'Radicalisation and Reconciliation' and met regularly to plan the event with the support of Interfaith Scotland staff. Young people from a wide variety of faiths, beliefs and non-religious beliefs came together from across Scotland to attend the conference. There were presentations from expert speakers and an opportunity to engage in dialogue on the theme.

Rev Dr Leah Robinson, lecturer in Practical and Pastoral Theology at the University of Edinburgh, opened the proceedings with a thought provoking presentation. Imam Sheikh Dr Usama Hasan told his personal story that as a teenager he became a radical salafi activist but following the 7/7 bombings began campaigning against extremism. Mahrukh Shaukat and Gigha Lennix shared about their experience as participants in an interfaith exchange to Rwanda to learn about the role faith played in peace building after the genocide.

After lunch there was an enlivening interactive musical session led by Dr Jane Bentley, community musician. This was followed by a presentation from Mike Jervis from Active Change Foundation who designed community initiatives to reduce gang violence

amongst young people in London. Ameer Versace, a Shia Muslim and Strategic Engagements Director of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, shared about the role of faith in overcoming conflict and promoting reconciliation. Andrew Marin, PhD student in divinity at the University of St Andrews spoke about his research which focuses on the theology and praxis of social reconciliation between victims and their perpetrators. Rev Stewart Weaver, Church of Scotland minister and trustee of 'Place for Hope' spoke about the charity's work with faith groups experiencing conflict. All agreed that it was a very interesting and enlightening day with plenty of food for thought and that the students did an excellent job of running the conference with the assistance of Interfaith Scotland staff.



School Activities

Interfaith Scotland continues with its 'Face to Faith' programme in schools which gives young people from across Scotland the opportunity to meet members of Scotland's diverse faith communities.

The programme aims to break down barriers and stereotypes of people from different faiths and promote greater respect and understanding in local communities.

February 2019 was a busy month. The development officer brought volunteers from the Muslim, Christian, Buddhist

and Baha'i faiths to St Modan's High School in Stirling for their annual 'interfaith day' with S6 pupils. She also brought volunteers for an interfaith day in Oban High School with S6 pupils and to Graeme High School in Falkirk for a faith fair. Volunteers also paid a special visit to Cardinal Winning Secondary School, a Roman



Catholic co-educational secondary school in Glasgow. The school caters for secondary aged children with Additional Learning Needs and volunteers led interactive sessions with every year group in the school, which was very well received by staff and pupils alike.



Connect: a youth interfaith action guide

An action guide for young people, including information on different kinds of interfaith activity, ways to get involved, planning tips and practicalities, and links to further information was launched at the 2018 National Meeting of IFN (the Inter Faith Network for the UK), which had a special youth focus.

The guide was developed with the help of an Advisory Group, which included young people, IFN Trustees, and people drawn from organisations running interfaith programmes with young people. Its development was informed by a range of consultations, including a questionnaire sent to organisations working on interfaith initiatives with young people; focus group sessions in different parts of the UK for young people aged 16-25, including a focus group in Glasgow organised by Interfaith Scotland;



meetings of IFN member bodies; visits to secondary schools in England and Wales; and some social media polls. Hard copies of this guide are available

from the IFN office or are available online at www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/connect

National Interfaith Youth Network

Interfaith Scotland received special funding as part of the Scottish Government's Year of Young People in 2018 to establish a network of young people of faith throughout Scotland.

Michael Hail was employed as a freelance youth worker to help establish the network, starting with a youth residential in September which brought together 16 young people aged 16 - 26 to learn about interfaith dialogue and leadership skills which they could take back to their faith communities. The residential was held at Newbold House in Moray, a beautiful building with lovely gardens.

Participants shared their thoughts about what would make interfaith dialogue attractive for young people, the kind of activities they would like to be engaged in, and what structure the youth network should take. They were also asked to think about social issues that concerned them and ways in which they could encourage their faith communities to get involved. The group identified mental health issues

as a major concern, not just for young people but for society in general, with one in four people in Scotland experiencing poor mental health. The group also had an opportunity to reflect upon their own faith and life journeys and the weekend concluded with a guided meditation reflecting on 'light' and how we can all be beacons of light in our communities.



Youth Network Activities

We are delighted that many of the young people who attended the residential have gone on to assist with or run national and local interfaith events. These have included speaking at the religious leaders of Scotland meeting and at the interfaith summit with the First Minister. During Scottish Interfaith Week they were involved in a variety of events. St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Glasgow hosted a talk on 'Caring for the Earth and its People' and two young participants, Sreevas Sahasranamam from the Hindu community and Hayder Bathawab from the Muslim community, gave presentations on what their faiths had to say on this topic. After the talks both speakers were engaged with the audience in a Q&A session and received varied and interesting questions about religious calendars, agricultural festivals, the effect of the industrial revolution in religious practices, Darwinism and religion, and the use of nature in



everyday life practices.

Sreevas Sahasranamam and Aparna Ramesh assisted in organising and running the 'lighting of 1000 lamps for peace' event at the Hindu Temple of Scotland in Rutherglen.

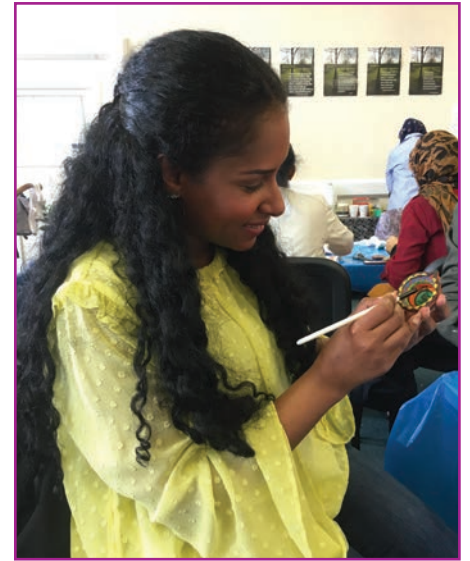
Smriti Subedi and Aadhya Regni assisted at the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week in Aberdeen. They were excited to hear that as a result of the success of the launch with several talks on the theme of 'young people and faith', members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group have been inspired to set up an interfaith youth group in Aberdeen which they are keen to be a part of.

Members of the youth network were given a tour of the Sikh Gurdwara at Berkeley Street in Glasgow in January 2019. They were welcomed to lunch in the langar hall and utilised one



of the classrooms at the Gurdwara for a planning meeting for upcoming events in 2019, including an event looking at 'mental health and faith' during Mental Health Awareness Week in May.





Women's Interfaith Get Together

Interfaith Scotland teamed up with Interfaith Glasgow to organise a Women's Interfaith Get Together on 22nd June 2018 at the dialogue centre.

The event was arranged for local and refugee women and their children. It was part of the celebration of Refugee Festival Scotland and was also held in memory of Jo Cox as part of the 'Great Get Together'. Over 60 women

and children attended and engaged in a number of arts and craft activities including Hindu 'diya' lamp painting, glass painting, card making, Sikh Kalgi badge making, stone painting and making decorative wall hangings.

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group



The Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group is a safe, organic, open and informal group, welcoming women of all faiths and none.

The group consists of women who are committed to fostering friendship and understanding between themselves and their local communities by

providing a safe space for women from a variety of cultures.

The group enjoyed a summer day trip to Coldingham Priory on Saturday

7th July 2018 where 42 women and children from diverse faiths had a very memorable day. The group was warmly welcomed by members of

“ We are very appreciative of Nila’s efforts in organising a most enjoyable day in a beautiful place and also for the kind help from those who worship there. We are also very grateful to Interfaith Scotland for funding the trip. ”

the church who gave a history of the Priory and its 800 year old architecture which made the experience more meaningful. The church was attached

to a ‘Millennium Garden’ where most of the ruins are displayed with interpretation in pleasant surroundings. Members enjoyed walking around the Priory and gardens and shared a picnic lunch together, before heading to Coldingham Bay. The journey home was enlivened by some singing and participants expressed

that the outing was enjoyable and provided an opportunity to meet with women of other faiths in a relaxed and informal way.



Women’s Interfaith Dialogue in Dunfermline

Interfaith Scotland organised a women’s interfaith dialogue afternoon in Dunfermline on the theme of ‘Health and Wellbeing for Body and Soul’. Participants came from across Scotland including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Fife.

Interfaith Scotland’s Senior Development Officer, Frances Hume, introduced the theme. She shared the important work that Interfaith Scotland had been involved in under the guidance of Geoffrey Lachlan, former Health Development Officer. Geoff worked in partnership with the NHS to create a resource guide for healthcare staff that outlines the religious and spiritual needs of people of faith who access the NHS. This includes practical arrangements such as dietary requirements, and also the benefits of spiritual practice and being involved in a spiritual community for overall health and wellbeing. The Guide is available on Interfaith Scotland’s website.

The women were then given a short taste of ‘metta’ meditation, a Buddhist practice where the practitioner

sends positive thoughts to others for their happiness and wellbeing. It starts with wishing a friend you like happiness, then moves to a neutral person and then someone you don’t like, not so easy! Finally feelings of magnanimity should develop for the whole world, not just the people close to us whom we like and relate to.

Participants were put into pairs where they had to interview one another, naming someone they admire and the qualities that person possesses, and then, somewhat harder for the self-effacing folk living in Scotland, identifying three of their OWN personal



qualities that they possess! The aim of the exercise is to nurture both kindness to oneself and appreciation of others. This was followed by small group dialogue looking at the theme of health and wellbeing in the Scriptures of four different faiths.

A member of Fife Interfaith Group gave a very interesting presentation on essential oils that are mentioned in the Scriptures, and the qualities that each oil is said to possess to encourage health and wellbeing. Finally, participants were asked to write postcards to themselves, answering the question, “How am I going to contribute to my own health and wellbeing and that of others”. These postcards were posted out to participants a few weeks after the event to remind them of the day.



Scottish Interfaith Week 2018

Connecting Generations - Dr Maureen Sier

Every year, as Director of Interfaith Scotland, I look for a theme for Scottish Interfaith Week (SIFW) that really speaks to people. I want a theme that challenges or inspires or at least gets people talking.

The Scottish Government promoted 2018 as the 'Year of Young People' and I was really excited when I noticed that one of the key objectives, identified by young people from across Scotland, was to 'develop better understanding, co-operation and respect between generations'. This inspired me to come up with our SIFW theme for 2018 'Connecting Generations'. SIFW is a great opportunity for everyone to come together and celebrate diversity, not just diversity of belief, but the rich diversity of thinking that comes from inter-generational engagement.

I have been privileged to witness over many years the intergenerational work that takes place naturally in diverse places of worship and faith

community spaces across Scotland; from all ages sharing food in the Sikh Langar (community kitchen) to community worship, celebration and engagement in mosques, synagogues, churches, temples and centres. Community building is at the heart of religion and so the theme resonated with all of us at Interfaith Scotland who see community at the heart of all that we do.

However it is not just faith communities who see the importance of connecting generations, many individuals and

organisations without any religious adherence also recognise the

importance of inter-generational engagement. Generations Working Together is a national Scottish charity which works to encourage the growth of intergenerational projects and

provides help and support to anyone thinking of starting one through local networks. The quote above echoes strongly the importance of this theme and we look forward to sharing the story of Scottish Interfaith Week in the following pages of our newsletter.

“
All generations at heart want the same things – security, safety, and happiness. When you devalue someone, they shut down. When you value them, you inspire them.”

(Tim Marshall Foundation)

Scottish Interfaith Week Art Competition

As part of Scottish Interfaith Week, Interfaith Scotland held a competition asking people of all ages to create a piece of artwork, music or writing on the theme of 'Connecting Generations'.

As usual we were impressed by all the wonderful entries. Prize winners were divided into three categories: Primary School, Secondary School and a Community Prize open to individuals or groups of all ages.



The first prize in the primary school section went to Howford Primary School in Glasgow. The entry was made up a paper chain of people that was decorated by every single child in the school. The entry has an accompanying transcript of the memories and songs collected from pupils, their families and staff. These are written along the paperchain people. The school also made up a playlist of most of these songs on YouTube. The playlist is called 'Interfaith18' and is on the school's YouTube channel called 'Howford family'.



The first prize in the secondary school section went to pupils at Glasgow Gaelic School. The painting depicts a young girl receiving a hug from her grandmother with a toys in the background. Written on the picture is the following story: 'When I was younger my Gran used to tell me stories about the Cindy doll she got for her tenth birthday. It was her favourite

toy. When her family moved from South America to Scotland, she brought the doll with her. She then gave it to her own daughter, my mum, for her 10th birthday nearly 20 years later. My mum then gifted me with the doll after I was born. The doll was a symbol of everything my Gran went through to get where she is now. It is a bond that connects us all’.

The first prize in the community section went to Elaine Pomeransky from the Jewish Community. Elaine describes the painting as follows:

“This painting shows an elderly patriarch, whose face portrays a variety of colours, illustrating that

he represents all the races and religions of mankind. All humanity is interrelated even though our bodies visually appear in different forms, colours and races. The patriarch is protecting with his shawl a child of another race and generation, yet loving him as his own; tied by their headwear, almost like an umbilical cord, as age, race or religion is no



barrier to love. The two figures in the painting are connecting generations throughout history and beyond time.”

Launch of Scottish Interfaith Week

The launch of Scottish Interfaith Week took place on 12th November at the Town House in Aberdeen and was a great success. 100 people attended from across Scotland.

After kick-starting the event with a welcome from Alan Kay, Chair of Interfaith Scotland and an introduction to the theme by Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, Lord Provost Barney Crockett addressed the gathering. In keeping with the theme of Connecting Generations, Interfaith Scotland’s development officer chose young people to speak from different faiths. Charandeep Singh from the Sikh community, Brittany Ritell from the Jewish community and Sanna Aziz from Muslim community shared ways in which generations could be connected together effectively within faith communities and in particular ways in which young people could feel more included in faith community activities. Rev Isaac Poobalan, Provost of St Andrew’s Cathedral spoke about the importance of love of neighbour. Marion Wahle from Generations Working Together spoke about local community projects that bring people together from different generations. There were moving performances from the Melting Pot Collective, ACE Voices choir, Dr Soumya Palliyil who performed a Hindu classical dance and two young Hindu brothers, Ananth and Anish Ramakrishnan (see page 25) who sang a beautiful duet. There was also an opportunity for dialogue around tables, sharing ideas and exchanging approaches on the theme.



Tree of Dialogue – What is your vision of interfaith in the future?

As part of the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week, members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group brought a beautiful luminous tree on which those attending the launch could write their 'vision of interfaith in the future' on paper leaves and place these on the branches. Some of their hopes and dreams are below.

A gigantic ecosystem in which each part is vital in the celebration of diversity

I want to know more about other faiths, feeling safe to question and explore

That we can all grow in mutual respect and understanding and learn to disagree well

I think it is coming in peace together and accepting each other – we are all human

More young people involved and encouraged in schools

To provide more events which are visible to the general public to witness faiths working together

Love is the power that holds every atom in the universe together

Respect and a warm welcome for all of every faith

To make society fairer and more empathetic

To provide more events which are visible to the general public to witness faiths working together

Activities that are showing help to the community, e.g. environmental, homeless and other voluntary causes

Where peace is not the absence of interfaith conflict but the ability to deal with such conflict



Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

The first of two events in Dumfries organised to mark Scottish Interfaith Week was an arts and crafts morning. Members of the Women's Group at the Dumfries & Galloway Multicultural Association (DGMA) gathered to make cards, which they would then give to someone of a different generation from themselves. The ladies hailed from a variety of countries including Poland, China, Malaysia, and Iran, as well as the UK. It was a relaxed morning of friendship and sharing food and more than one lady touchingly remarked that they had never made a card before.



The second Interfaith Week event took place at the new Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary in their Sanctuary space. The evening event brought together members of different faith and non-faith groups for dialogue around the theme, 'Connecting Generations', which was not an overtly religious one. For the first time ever, attendance exceeded our expectations! The mixture of traditions included Church of Scotland, Episcopalian, Methodist, Bethany (Independent Christian), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, World Peace Prayer Society, Baha'i, Jewish, Quaker and others with no religious affiliation.

After a welcome and introduction to the Sanctuary by one of the Spiritual Care Volunteers, small groups discussed aspects of inter-generational relationships,



such as skill-sharing, respect, and ways of encouraging contact and co-operation between the generations. It proved difficult to bring the discussions to a close, which must be a good sign! Thoughts and comments were then pinned up to be shared. Respect featured prominently in the comments as being essential for harmonious relationships. Practical ways to encourage the generations to mix included sharing of food and skills, learning from each other, giving time to listen well and communicate meaningfully, sharing of music, and projects to introduce young people into residential care homes for older people, where they can be a breath of fresh air.

Aberdeen Inter Faith Group

Scottish Interfaith Week was launched in Aberdeen on 12th November. Interfaith Scotland and Aberdeen Inter Faith Group worked together to organise a wonderful event at the Town House with the Lord Provost in attendance. Before the launch in the afternoon, Aberdeen Interfaith Group had arranged a visit to three local places of worship: Aberdeen Synagogue, the Crown Terrace Mosque and the Quaker Meeting House.

At the synagogue those gathered were shown the 250 column Hebrew scroll containing the five books of Moses. The rolled out scroll is the size of a football pitch and is read out over the period of a year. At the mosque what was striking was the close communal harmony with the adjacent St John's Scottish Episcopal Church. In a time where there is so much hate crime

around the world, a physical extension linking the church and mosque came across as a pioneering example of interfaith harmony. At the Quaker Meeting House those gathered learnt about Quaker meetings and community decision making.

On Sunday 18th November Aberdeen Unitarians again held an annual Interfaith Service. A local community choir Ace Voices sang three songs. One of the songs was written by Rebecca Dunn who helps run the choir. Her song praised the generosity of Reverend Isaac Poobalan who welcomed Muslims from the local mosque to share his church space when he found them praying outside in the winter as they had run out of space to pray at their mosque. This is the same mosque that was visited as a part of the tour mentioned above and



the song spoke of the positivity and friendship that can come from faiths joining together and finding common ground.

At the Interfaith Service those gathered also heard inspiring words from different faith groups and denominations about how they strive to honour all age groups and learn from each other. There was more musical input from newly formed Unitarian duo, Arthur and Louise on violin - their age gap is very wide but together they produce a lovely, harmonious sound.

Fife Interfaith Group

Fife Interfaith Group's first event for SIFW was in Auchmuty School, Glenrothes, where members of the group and other faiths sat on a panel to be questioned by the year 3, 4 & 5 pupils. After a lively session with the pupils asking questions to all members of the panel, the panel were able to go round the tables and speak to pupils individually, which again spurred more debate and questions. The pupils were genuinely interested in finding out about different faiths and it is very much hoped that this type of event can recur in future Scottish Interfaith Weeks.

Later that day, members of the Fife Interfaith Group went to the St Brycedale Campus of Fife College for the unveiling of a Peace Sculpture which had been inspired by Fife Interfaith Group who visited the school in 2016 and spoke about the Interfaith Peace Garden in Beveridge Park, Kirkcaldy. The sculpture sits in the Foyer of the College Campus and was designed by the students themselves. The designers and constructors of the

Sculpture were introduced and delightfully the number of flags of the world fixed on the sculpture represented all the 50 different nationalities of students who attended the College in 2016.

On Tuesday night in New Volunteer House, Kirkcaldy, a talk was given by Sid Akbar of Tell MAMA; a group formed to keep records of attacks against Muslims in the UK concerning Islamophobia. It was a very interesting talk; most terrorist incidents are caused by right-wing groups, but it is the Islamic attacks that attract the most attention and subsequent anti-Muslim feelings are stirred up. These can lead to attacks on the street with people of South Asian appearance being targeted, whether or not they are from a Muslim faith.

On Friday night Fife Interfaith Group presented their 7th Annual Interfaith Lecture which was given by Lesley



Laird MP who is Deputy Leader of the Scottish Labour Party and Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. The lecture was presented in the Old Kirk, Kirkcaldy. Lesley gave a very interesting talk concerning the decline in religious observance. Although a third of people no longer have faith within a formal religious context, the majority still believe in a God and instead of attending a place of worship, prefer to believe in their own way. People with faith in a cause have been known to move mountains and the power of faith must never be underestimated. Lesley encouraged those gathered to keep the faith and share their values across the world.

Renfrewshire Interfaith Group

Renfrewshire Interfaith Group organised a Peace Event during Scottish Interfaith Week with the support of East Renfrewshire Faith Forum and the Friends of Barshaw Park. 45 people set off together to walk the 400 yards to the walled Peace Garden in Barshaw Park. As the participants walked they sang and carried lights. Upon reaching the garden they surrounded the fire pit, and with a backdrop of twinkling lights strung along the greenery of the wall, the group began with

their traditional silent prayer. After the prayer, faith representatives shared what peace meant to them in their faith tradition. These included reps from Scottish Pagan Federation (and Druids), Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Baha'i, Quaker, Muslim and the Peace Federation.



light refreshments and walked there together singing songs and enjoyed another 45 minutes of fellowship, food and singing.



The fire flickered and burned steadily throughout in the midst of the company which created a lovely atmosphere. Interspersed with the short remarks were a couple of poetry readings and the event in the garden was closed with a song. Those gathered were invited to the Rowantree Cafe for hot soup, bread and other

Those present at the event included two recording artistes, members of the CND, Friends of Barshaw Park, the Green Party, plus two Renfrewshire Councillors (one SNP and the other Independent). There was good representation from both Renfrewshire Interfaith Group and East Renfrewshire Faith Forum. Everyone said how much they had enjoyed the event.

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group

On Wednesday 18th November 2018, The Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group celebrated Scottish Interfaith Week at the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh on the theme of 'Connecting Generations'. Twenty women of different faiths and ages gathered to hear a talk from Anjam Sheikh and her granddaughter about their Shia Muslim faith. Anjam's family moved from Kenya to England in 1964 when she was a young child. Her faith and cultural knowledge came mainly from what her grandmother taught her which included stories from the Qur'an illustrating the way in which one should live one's life. In 1979, Anjam and her family moved to Scotland, and she talked about how in England and Scotland at that time there were no



other sources of teaching or training in Shia Islam which is very different to now. They slowly found the funds to set up a Mosque in Leith, eventually a second one in Edinburgh and now a third very vibrant one in Dalkeith that is mainly run and organised by young people.

There was a lovely discussion about learning from grandparents. Anjam's

granddaughter confirmed she has been taught by her grandmother and the faith remains strong in the family. After the discussion the group enjoyed a delicious vegetarian finger buffet with traditional home-made Indian sweets. EWIG are very grateful to Interfaith Scotland and the Quaker Meeting House for their support for this event.

West Lothian Faith Group

The West Lothian Faith Group held an event called 'Pathways to Peace' as part of Scottish Interfaith Week, attended by thirty people from different faith groups. The event brought people together to discuss ideas around peace. Different members of the group contributed in the form of talks, readings and music, followed by an opportunity to network and chat about the common themes discussed.

This is what two of the members said about why they chose their particular inputs:



“While conflict in the Middle East seems to be a time of unending darkness, the music of Yair Dalal represents a small ray of light. Born in 1955 in Israel to Iraqi parents who were recent immigrants, he has worked tirelessly both as a musician and activist to promote peace between Arabs and Jews. His music reflects the traditions of both cultures as well as many others of the Middle East and beyond.”

(Margalit Borowski)

“I took part in the Pathways to Peace event because as I feel it is important to show something of why and how my faith drives me in my work, as a Christian Councillor. A large part of that role is creating a peaceful, safe and just area for our residents to live in, working on behalf of people of all faiths and none - whether that be in schooling, how people are cared for or simply how we prioritise filling potholes. The topic I spoke on showed something of where faith and belief shows in actions and words.”

(Councillor Chris Horne)

Scottish Interfaith Week Ambassador Blogs

During Scottish Interfaith Week a team of volunteers attended events all over Scotland, to write blogs for the Scottish Interfaith Week website 'News' section, sharing their thoughts and feelings on the events. A snapshot of these is below.

From Dancing to Dominoes - #SIFW18 in the Shetland Islands

On 17th November 2018 Shetland Interfaith Group hosted an event for Scottish Interfaith Week on the theme of 'Connecting Generations' at the Islesburgh Community Centre in Lerwick. Nick Sier visited the group and takes up the story.

Bring on the dancing girls... and there they were, from the Philippines to Shetland - participants from a variety of ages putting on a colourful spectacle. This was followed by three songs about diversity. Then we had the AGM of Shetland Interfaith Group. A presentation of the group's activities



was given, from tackling 'hate speech' to taking interfaith into schools. This was followed by interfaith dominoes, a game created by the Church of

Scotland. Interfaith dominoes is a great tool for facilitating dialogue and educating us in various faith traditions and it demonstrated to me that we are not all that different.

We divided into teams of five to play the game. In our group we had one young person. I think engaging young people is one of the challenges of interfaith (also of many faith traditions) particularly in our secular society. Having young people engaged in interfaith brings fresh ideas for moving forward, and of course they're full of energy and vitality. So the question is - how do we learn from each other? Well one way is through dialogue. The older folk have experience - and maybe even wisdom - while the younger folk have ways of looking



at things with new approaches to older ways of doing stuff. Both have to exercise patience, consideration, and all those virtues which bring out the nobility in us. Most folk want to connect and share a commonality, whether through the arts, or just purely based on the fact we are human beings. Those moments of connection, of oneness between head and heart; knocking down walls, building bridges, engaging in a 'spirit of friendliness' more than just tolerance, being mindful of not causing offence and creating these conditions are conducive, and as a dear friend recently said 'elevate' humanity.

Breathe and Meditate: Art of Living

As a part of Scottish Interfaith Week, I attended an interfaith meditation event. Meditating properly for the first time was an interesting experience for me.

I have tried on my own a few times but never managed to sit through it; I found it quite different doing it as part of a group. Before and after the meditation we had an opportunity to share what we thought about it. It was nice to listen to what everyone had to say because everyone's experience was quite different. The group was made up of a variety of different ages and it was really nice to see after

the meditation that everyone had something positive to say about it. What I observed during the meditation was fascinating; we were all doing the same thing but the person sitting next to me experienced something totally different to me and that's what I found the most exciting when others shared their experience.

The best part of the meditation is that anyone can do it and can enjoy

and learn something from meditating regardless of their age, personality, background or religion. It was also a perfect example of connecting people from different generations, because meditating is not designed for a specific group - it is possible for everyone and a lovely way of people from different generations to come together, meditate then reflect on life.

Jessica John

‘Moving Stories’ Event

Anish Subramaniam, a young Hindu who sang at the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week with his brother Ananth (pictured) shares the story that he gave at Aberdeen Interfaith Group’s ‘Moving Stories’ event.

Being who you are and being proud of that can be very hard in a society where it seems like people are constantly watching and judging your every move. It can be hard to be yourself, when it is easier to fit in and be like others. However, standing up for what you believe in is very important. I am a practising Hindu and religion is extremely important to me as it helps me connect to a cultural and spiritual background that I am proud of and that I apply in my daily routine. For example, every morning, after praying, I apply a sacred ash on my forehead called vibhuthi. It is a religious mark that symbolises that we all come from the earth and go back to the earth, and is said to protect the individual.

After moving to a new school and finding it hard to fit in, I felt like wearing it only made matters worse. I was hesitant to apply it while going to school, as I was afraid that people would judge me, tease me or ask questions. However, I started to realise how important it was to me. It is a reflection of who I am, and by not wearing it - I hide myself. Many of my friends and teachers have asked about what my Vibhuthi stands for, and after explaining the significance and meaning to the best of my ability, they understood better and didn’t make rude comments.

Another important tradition I follow, as part of my faith, is that we are meant to shave our hair as an offering to God when visiting a specific temple. Every time I would go to India, when I was younger, I would always have my hair shaved off though I would always refuse initially because I was afraid what people would think of me. On the first day back at school, my friends and classmates would have numerous questions on why I was bald

and some hurtful comments about it as well. However, on my most recent visit to India, my mother gave me the choice on whether to shave my hair or not. I was initially so happy that I didn’t have to do it, but reading about the significance of this symbolic act made me realise that I shouldn’t be letting my fear of other people’s thoughts and comments influence a decision that was part of my religion. In the end, I shaved my hair anyway as an offering to God.

Nowadays, many people I know are very accepting of my culture and my faith. It shows that by understanding the significance and meaning behind some actions, people get interested in different faiths and cultures and ask more questions. This has helped me, in particular, make good friends. Earlier in my life, I often allowed what people thought of me to influence decisions that concerned my identity and my background. Over time, I have realised that I should be proud of who I am and what I stand for. If you don’t respect yourself, how can you expect others to respect you? Looking at me and my determination to practise my values, whatever the circumstances, many of my friends have also begun to practice theirs. For example, one of my friends has a sacred thread which he now wears proudly even at the swimming pool rather than taking it off. He is able to answer questions about its significance. It heartens me that I have been able to inspire my friends in practising their values and standing up for them.

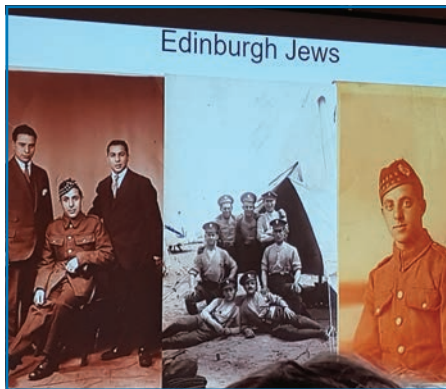
It is also important to instil a sense of tolerance and acceptance in all people, no matter who they are. Tolerance is the ability or willingness to understand the opinions or behaviour of others even though one is unfamiliar with them. I believe that familiarity and education is the key. By creating awareness about different faiths and their many traditions, we can help to develop a better person who is able to treat everyone equally. With more people like this, spreading their values, a more peaceful society can be formed. An exemplary role model for all societies to look upon! We can’t let ourselves be held back by our own ignorance. There are so many bridges to build, but also so many walls to break. By helping promote awareness about various faiths as well as their traditions and rituals, we can help break these walls and allow acceptance and tolerance to flourish.



World War One Connecting Generations

Sunday 11th November 2018 was the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice that marked the end of World War One. Interfaith Glasgow and St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art hosted an event at Garnethill Synagogue in Glasgow on the Anniversary of that same day, on the theme of 'World War One Connecting Generations'.

Garnethill Synagogue is Glasgow's oldest synagogue built in 1879 and Scotland's oldest Jewish Community. I trudged up the sharp incline of the hill to the Synagogue with a heavy heart at the thought that this tragedy of war had also affected Jewish and Sikh soldiers and thereby their communities, family and friends. Garnethill Synagogue was in a location on a hill chosen because it could be a light and beacon to the people in Glasgow. There is something quite awesome about entering someone else's place of worship and feeling a joy at that privilege. Having visited before I was familiar with their warm welcome and was delighted to be greeted that day by Fiona Brodie who conducts tours of the Synagogue.



The Garnethill Archive Centre provided personal contributors from the Jewish community who were soldiers in WW1. The presenter Harvey spoke of individuals like Benjamin Eppel, Julius Diamond and Jack White whose heroism was featured in the "Victor Magazine" and who also won the Victoria Cross for his gallantry. Hatzkell Tchureczynsky, the Kaplan Brothers, also Louis Blint and Max Mendelssohn, Lazarus Wellins and Sam Wolfson were mentioned while a slide show of their photos were displayed. It was touching to engage with the individuals whose lives had been affected in a personal way and bring their stories

closer. The Jewish soldiers from Ayr and the contribution of the Jewish women in the war effort was also talked about. Harvey discussed the Edinburgh Jewish soldiers who had laid down their lives and the contribution of the Jewish soldiers in the Boer War. I thought of my own grandfather, a Londoner who would have fought alongside these men in WW1. I remembered how he would show me his medals, including a Military Cross, and talk about the Battle of the Somme and the great camaraderie of the men who fought together with him there.

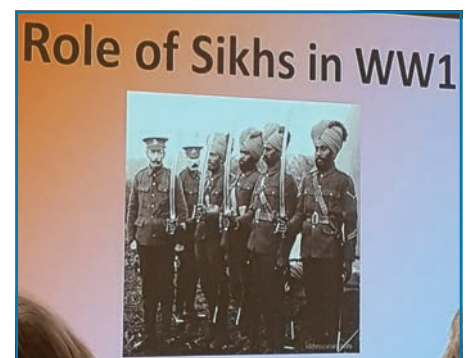
Then it was the turn of the Sikh Community. The Sikhs are described as a martial race and have a tradition of the "Saint Soldier" or "Sant Sipahi". Sikh principles of honesty, dignity and a disciplined military ethos are combined with an ever present compassion for others in need. According to the Commonwealth war and grave commission the total number of Sikh soldiers who died in World War One was 80,482 and a similar number again were injured. Many of these soldiers still lay in unmarked graves and have received little acknowledgment compared to their British counterparts. However the British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill did state, in recognition, that, *"British people are highly indebted and obliged to Sikhs for a long time. I know within this century we needed their help twice and they did help us very well. As a result of their timely help today we are able to live with honour, dignity and independence... they fought and died for us wearing their turbans."* On this basis British



Law has had enormous respect for the Turban.

Sadly it was time to leave and go down the steep hill at Garnethill, to go home to my own steep hill in our village in time to see my sons lighting the Armistice Anniversary beacon. I thought it likely that my grandfather might have been quite pleased and proud to see his great grandsons doing that, which came with a renewed poignancy after my visit to the synagogue. It had been a most interesting event and I had learnt so much about what truly was a 'world' war and the costs to so many communities. Most of all I felt the fellowship of peoples and religious communities working together against oppression and having the strength and commitment and the 'greatest of loves' that meant that they had even been prepared to lay down their lives for one another.

Shanny Newall



Interfaith Talk at the Greenock and Paisley Presbytery

During Scottish Interfaith Week the Greenock and Paisley Presbytery of the Church of Scotland met at Cornerstone in Bishopton. Their guest speaker for the evening was Frances Hume, Senior Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland and I was delighted to be invited along as a Scottish Interfaith Week ambassador. The Presbyteries consist of all the ministers in the district and some elders, diaconate (a form of ordained ministry) and committee representatives.

The Presbytery meeting is like a court where all voices have a right to be heard and have to be respected and each voice should be equally weighted. The Clerk to the Presbytery of Greenock and Paisley is Rev Dr Peter McEnhill, a former Professor of theology from Cambridge University. Steering the Presbytery justly through all its issues and all its opinions must be an enormously challenging task. Armed with a great sense of humour and mission Rev Dr McEnhill skilfully steered the meeting and I was impressed by the impassioned debate and sense of justice.

Frances Hume spoke on the theme of 'Interfaith Encounter'. Frances summarised this as people of different faiths and beliefs meeting together with an opportunity to learn about each others' doctrines and/or personal stories. It is about forming friendships and working together for the common good. It is also a means of enriching and strengthening our faiths through encounter with others. She spoke of the greater understanding, trust and respect learning about other faiths brings, how it can challenge negative stereotypes about religions, help tackle social issues, and help with conflict resolution. She talked about the fun and fulfilment in sharing faith journeys, visiting each others' places of worship, informal chats, scriptural reasoning and social action projects. She also talked about what interfaith encounter is NOT – it is not a means to convert others to your faith, or diluting your faith or creating a new syncretistic 'interfaith religion'.

Frances addressed the Christian scriptural imperative for interfaith dialogue looking at various Bible verses like Hebrews 13:2 "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" and Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Jesus was born into a Jewish family so from the start we have a strong interfaith element. She also talked about the Bible story in which Jesus praises the great faith of the Centurion, although he was Roman and not Jewish, in Luke 7:1-10.

After Frances' talk, Dr McEnhill talked of an occasion at Cambridge when a meeting was arranged between interfaith religious leaders and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The organisers were very pleased with themselves at this 'coup' of getting the religious leaders together around the table. This was cut short when they realised the leaders were already good friends who had met often! The former Archbishop of Canterbury



Rowan Williams knows how important this is. He has said, *"A growing awareness that peace throughout the world is deeply entwined with the ability of all people of faith everywhere to live in peace, justice, mutual respect and love."* These same fundamentals that are vital for interfaith exchanges, are vital also for Presbytery business (peace, justice, mutual respect and love) and were also the same challenges to our saints of long ago.

Shanny Newall



Aberdeen Interfaith Group Celebrates 25 years

Aberdeen Interfaith Group assisted in planning and hosting a special event to mark the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week in November 2018 which coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Aberdeen Interfaith Group. Lord Barney Crockett cut a special 25th Anniversary cake and gave a moving talk. It was exciting to hear him declare that interfaith work was his 'Golden Thread'.

As part of the anniversary celebration, tribute was paid to the initiative of those individuals who set up the Aberdeen Interfaith group 25 years ago, particularly to members of Brahma Kumaris and those who were so keen to meet and learn from each other. Sadly, some who were so committed in those early days and for many years after have passed, such as the Kinnersleys who led Interfaith Meditation Sessions, and Kathleen Dall, RME teacher and Episcopal Priest with links with Pakistan. Kathryn Hendry who was so instrumental at the start was delightfully present at the event.



The group's aim has remained the same over the years: to develop mutual understanding and respect; to engage in deeper dialogue and conversation; to be aware of the beliefs and practices of others; to present the opportunity to talk and listen to one another; and to identify and respect the differences between people. At the moment, every faith and belief position is not yet represented, but there is hope for some newer and younger faces. Due to the launch, the group gained three new Steering Group members and some young people too. The group are appreciative of the support of Aberdeen University Multi-faith chaplaincy as the venue for their public meetings and they appreciate the peacefulness of the

Brahma Kumaris centre for steering group meetings.

The group has grown a lot in the last few years and done so much. Here is a flavour: discussions on topics such as rites of passage, chaplaincy, and the festivals of Diwali and Channukah; a bi-annual Holocaust memorial walk across the bridges of Dee to remember the genocides which have happened across the world; media training and a 'Human Library' event at Central library. Group members have been invited to speak at schools and one of the local colleges and presbyteries on interfaith. The group has established links with NESCOL and RGU, Aberdeen Multi-faith Forum and Dundee and Moray local interfaith



groups. Another highlight for the group is their annual meditative walk.

The chair of Aberdeen Interfaith Group, Patricia Findlay, has organised many visits for people of faith to speak to pupils in schools. One of these visits was by a member of Aberdeen Interfaith Group, Venerable Sujano, a Nepalese Buddhist monk who was inspired to write a book based on the

excellent questions of the pupils at Albyn School, called 'Your Questions, My Answers'. Free copies are available from Interfaith Scotland.

At the end of her speech at the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week, Patricia concluded with the following words of Pope Francis, and she made a wish that this would be true of all our Interfaith connections in Scotland.

“**For inter-religious dialogue and encounter to be effective, it must be grounded in a full and forthright presentation of our respective convictions. Certainly, such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common. New avenues will be opened for mutual esteem, cooperation and indeed friendship.**”



Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group began operating formally in 1998, although there were interfaith meetings in the area long before then. It consists of a small and diverse group of people with an interest in interfaith dialogue and keen to learn about other faiths. Members are mostly from Christian, Quaker and Bahá'í backgrounds.

The group celebrates Scottish Interfaith Week in November, World Religion Day in January, World Peace Day in September, is part of the NHS Spiritual care group, contributes to local diversity groups, supports the resettlement of Syrian refugee families, gives presentations to schools and brings together family, friends, faith and communities.

They believe it is important to learn about other faiths and cultures in Dumfries and Galloway and support the idea that interfaith dialogue contributes to a more welcoming and friendly community! They want to work together to solve common problems and enjoy creative activities such as singing, music and dance. They also share prayers, inspiring readings and sacred spaces together.

Their future aims consist of continuing to hold regular public events to build friendship, respect and understanding; to encourage dialogue around faith and belief; to gain greater knowledge and understanding of other faiths in the local community; to share devotional gatherings exploring the common core of religion, faith and belief; and to focus more on the Golden Rule to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'.

Dundee Interfaith Association

Dundee Interfaith Association has re-activated in Dundee with the support of Interfaith Scotland who have been instrumental in stimulating enough interest for a new committee. Over recent months they had engaged in consultative discussions with interested people to assist in establishing

Dundee Interfaith Association as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). In addition, they are changing their name to Faith and Belief (Dundee and Tayside). Respondents have suggested that the new name is more representative of both faith and belief communities, such

as Humanists. They are reviewing the underpinning values that affirm human flourishing, human rights and the one human family. Those interested in learning more are welcome to contact the convener Gordon Sharp at gordonsharp264@gmail.com



East Renfrewshire Faith Forum

In January 2018, East Renfrewshire held a joint event with Renfrewshire Faith Forum. It was an interesting and informative tour of Garnethill Synagogue. A pakora masterclass event took place in Maccabi in May. Farkhanda Chaudry from East Renfrewshire Council acted as master chef. Attendees took instruction well and said it was a fun event, reporting how well equipped they were to make delicious pakora for family and friends. The Festival of Colour event took place in July 2018. Volunteers from the group collected 50kg of colour into small bags to sell at the event. They worked in 5 hour shifts and donned what looked like forensic suits to protect their clothing!

September 2018 saw the Annual Diversity Day where the selected

schools were St Ninian's High School, St Cadoc's, St Joseph's, Our Lady of the Missions, St Clare's and Calderwood Lodge. More than 300 children attended the event where they engaged in Bollywood and Israeli dancing and sports activities. At the faith tables they dressed in saris, wore turbans, practised their skills with a variety of Israeli musical instruments, learned how to write their names in Arabic script and more. Members of the Faith Forum subsequently attended school assemblies at which the video of the event was shown and children were given a certificate. Some were presented with an award for special effort at the Diversity Day and each school received an engraved plaque as a memento. Foundation Scotland assisted in the funding of the event and East Renfrewshire Faith Forum

extend a huge thank you for their contribution.

During Scottish Interfaith Week in November 2018, an interschool debate took place in Barrhead High School in line with the theme of 'Connecting Generations'. Senior pupils from Barrhead High School and St Luke's High School debated the motion 'The positives of World War 1 outweighed the negatives'. The pupils researched the subject and gave outstanding performances, showcasing their debating skills. The judging was very close and St Luke's High were the agreed upon winners, who were presented with the trophy for their school. All the pupils who took part received an engraved plaque. It was such a success that the Forum intend to make it an annual event.

Fife Interfaith Group

Fife Interfaith Group hosted a number of interesting talks during 2018 and flavour of these are below.

Talk on Judaism by Professor Joseph Goldblatt

Professor Joseph Goldblatt, Education Ambassador for the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, delivered an informative and interesting talk on Judaism to Fife Interfaith Group. He spoke of how they celebrate their faith through customs and rituals dating back centuries. He started by producing one of 'Joe's Boxes', an acronym for Jewish Objects for Education in Scotland. One was sent to all the local Councils in Scotland to raise awareness of the Jewish faith. As he revealed the items enclosed in the boxes, he explained which were used in the Synagogue and celebrations of the Sabbath and festivals such as Hannukah and Passover, and how these all relate to past incidents in the history of Judaism. His enthusiasm for his faith was catching and his humour brought character to the whole talk. He said he had a special affection for Scotland, as it was a country that had never expelled the Jews.

Remembering Srebrenica

Imam Habibur Rehman of Dunfermline Mosque organised a meeting on 15th July to remember the dreadful events in Srebrenica during the Civil War in former Yugoslavia. He arranged a number of speakers, the central figure being Elvira Mujkanovic who relayed her terrible experience with much dignity and some tears. She spoke of how she lived a contented life when the violence erupted, and that many people she knew were taken to concentration camps. Elvira (who was 18 at the time) tried to get as much food to people in the camps as possible. Elvira was eventually sent away and moved to another part of Bosnia, eventually coming to Britain as a refugee. Elvira's story encouraged an elderly member of the mosque to also share about the terrible things he witnessed during the partition of India and Pakistan.

Visit to Edinburgh Synagogue

Members of the Fife Interfaith Group were excited to visit the magnificent Synagogue in Edinburgh on 17th July. The visit was hosted by Rabbi David Rose who first took the party to a smaller recently renovated Synagogue which was full of light and colour.

He explained the seating arrangements meant that the men and women prayed separately as part of Orthodox Jewish tradition. The women did play a role at services and were sometimes the presenter. The centrepiece of the Synagogue was the Ark where the Torah scrolls were stored; all Torahs were handwritten on parchment and we were told it could take a full year to write one. From a distance, the wording looked like print, but the skilful scribes wrote the entire script in straight lines and letters. The Rabbi read the 5th commandment from the Torah in Hebrew; 'Honour they Father and Mother' against a melody used for all readings.

Many questions were answered by the Rabbi in good humour; some of these were around the Torah which consists of the Five Books of Moses, and it was explained that there were smaller scrolls or books relating principally to Esther, Ruth and the Song of Solomon. The party then moved on to the rest of the building, to spacious community rooms and a large kitchen, where the Rabbi explained milk and meat are stored separately according to the Kosher food laws.

We then entered the large Synagogue which was truly stunning, containing a high roofed large room with a windowed dome in the ceiling. One end had an ornately decorated Ark which contained the large Torahs the Rabbi earlier displayed, surrounded by a large platform and thus elevated above everyone in the Synagogue. This Synagogue was built in 1932 and replaced smaller Synagogues in Edinburgh, including one which dated back to the early 19th Century, indeed the first in Scotland.

Serving the Community

Fife Interfaith Group held a large event in Dunfermline on 1st June at the Holy Trinity Church entitled 'Sharing Interfaith Relations through Interfaith Dialogue and Service in the Community'. There were five speakers including Dr Maureen Sier (Director of Interfaith Scotland), Mrs Tuesday Palmer (member of Dunfermline Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Cllr Judy Hamilton of Fife Council (member of the Salvation Army), Canon Oliver O'Donovan (the Episcopalian Church) and Imam Habibur Rehman (Dunfermline Mosque).

All five speakers gave excellent talks from their personal perspectives, and yet in so many ways each reflective talk seemed to echo some of the aims and ideals of the other speakers. It was a great demonstration of the interfaith ethos of observing other beliefs with an open mind and acknowledging the fact that there is more to unite rather than divide us.

Talk on Buddhism

A talk on Buddhism was given by Kasia Grycuk. Kasia shared about her first experience of Buddhism when her mother encouraged her to chant Buddhist mantras when she was experiencing problems at school. She found this so uplifting that she became a Buddhist. Kasia shared how chanting had helped her throughout her life, helping her to grow as a person, accept life for what it is and to overcome negative emotions. When she chants she uses beads which help to focus her thoughts. Silent prayers are also made for 'peace throughout the world for all human beings'.

Kasia explained that there was no Deity in Buddhism. When asked what happens when we die she said that Buddhists believe in reincarnation and that there is a circle of life and death. The Universe has no beginning and no end and each person is an energy which cannot be destroyed.



Edinburgh Interfaith Association

During Scottish Interfaith Week 2018, Edinburgh Interfaith Association launched a new national resource to fight religious prejudice: 'The Ground We Share'. Students from Trinity Academy partnered to launch the national educational resource suitable for schools and youth groups to tackle religious prejudice. The resource was officially opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities, Ms Aileen Campbell and included presentations from faith representatives including Jewish and Muslim speakers who shared their personal experiences of hate crime. References were made to attacks on

the Pittsburgh Synagogue and the arson attack on Leith Gurdwara.

The resource was born out of concern for the growing reports of religious hate crimes including Islamophobic and anti-Semitic hate crimes across the UK. The online resource recognises that much of the hate crime is born out of ignorance and seeks to educate against it by providing an online platform which looks to answer young people's questions around faith and belief and break down



any misconceptions that exist. The project co-delivered with Trinity High School students saw them interview representatives of the main world religious and belief traditions on the big questions that mattered to them. The responses to their questions are available on the new site www.thegroundweshare.com where there is also an opportunity to email in questions.

Moray Interfaith Group

Moray does not have a large population of individuals from diverse faith groups, such as Muslim, Hindu or Jew, but still operates a wonderful and engaging Interfaith group. One older and original member has said she found herself to be very open minded but confesses how much she has learnt from other faith groups

since she joined and is grateful for the opportunities presented to her by being a part of this group. The group has had some interesting experiences this year, such as a shamanic practitioner from Ullapool impressing them with her integrity and sincerity, allowing the younger members of the in the group from the Church of Jesus Christ

of Latter-day Saints to be the first to experience a shamanic rattle.

Each year Moray Interfaith Group is visited by Interfaith Scotland and enjoy the encouragement and support received from them, particularly Frances and Maureen. There are already two sessions planned around these visits in 2019.

West of Scotland Council of Christians and Jews

The West of Scotland Council of Christians and Jews organised a Hanukkah and Advent party attended by 85 people. Hanukkah and Advent are festivals of light and have a focus on candles. The hanukkiyah, the candelabra used at Hanukkah, has nine candles. On each of the eight evenings of the festival a candle is lit from the ninth one so that by the eighth day of the festival all nine are burning. The tradition is to display these candles at a window to illustrate that the Jewish community can now enjoy religious freedom. Today large hanukkiahs are lit in major cities and public places such as the Scottish Parliament and the White House as an expression of religious freedom and tolerance.



Antiochus, the Maccabees purified the Temple but found they hadn't

enough oil to light the everlasting lamp. Miraculously the little oil they did have lasted for eight days until replenishments could come. This is the miracle celebrated at Hanukkah.

It was the head girl and head boy from the Catholic primary who

told us about Advent, sharing that the Advent Wreath helped Christians take time to think about the real meaning of Christmas and reflect on how they could bring God's light, joy, peace and love into the world today. They explained the four candles - the first one representing hope which is like a light shining in a dark place; the second candle representing peace and reminding us to try to be peacemakers in our schools and homes; the

third representing the joy we feel celebrating the birth of Jesus and the fourth one representing the love we share in Jesus and how we try to show this love in the way we treat those around us, not just friends and families but also those less fortunate than ourselves.

As you can imagine the children were very well received. I found it very moving to see the children from both faiths participate in our celebration. What a contrast to the enmity that existed between our communities for centuries but has thankfully given way to a new reality. Their school is rather a special one as it shares a campus with a local Catholic school. It may be the only shared Catholic - Jewish campus in the world! Each school promotes the ethos of their particular faith but the pupils share the playground and are getting to know one another. Already the children from both schools have collaborated on helping the homeless, enjoyed a ceilidh together and are now beginning to learn a little about one another's faith. As one of the children said "we really do enjoy one another's company and love finding out about one another's faith. In St Clare's we are always saying we are making memories to last a lifetime but we also think we are making lifelong friends". We cannot ask for much more than that.

Isabel Smyth

Advent is also a time for the lighting of candles but it looks forward rather than back. It begins the Christian year and is a time of preparation for Christmas. There are candles in some homes but in many churches there will be an Advent wreath - a circle of everlasting greenery to symbolise the infinity of God with a white candle to be put in the middle of the wreath to symbolise the birth of Jesus.

What made the party so enjoyable was the presence of children. The story of Hanukkah was shared with us by two of the children of the Rabbi who told us about the victory of the Maccabees over the forces of a Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes who, in the second century BCE, desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem and forbade Jews to practice their faith. Defeating

“**We really do enjoy one another's company and love finding out about one another's faith. In St Clare's we are always saying we are making memories to last a lifetime but we also think we are making lifelong friends.**”





Interfaith Glasgow

Interfaith Glasgow (IG) aims to tackle prejudice, increase interfaith understanding and respect, and equip people with the skills to engage fruitfully with religious diversity. A few years into becoming an independent charity, IG were delighted to find themselves the 2018 bronze medal winners in the prestigious H.M. King

Abdullah II of Jordan World Interfaith Harmony Week competition. Chairman Philip Mendelsohn, and Director, Dr Rose Drew, were presented with the award by H.M. King Abdullah II at a ceremony in Amman on 24th April. Subsequently, a motion of congratulations was endorsed by the Scottish Parliament where the

group was honoured and delighted to receive an international recognition for their work.

Over the past year, IG have continued to deliver innovative programmes based on a threefold model of interfaith engagement, comprising friendship-building; dialogue; and cooperation.



Interfaith Family Fun Day

To mark Scottish Interfaith Week, this year IG once again held their Interfaith Family Fun Day in Glasgow's West End to celebrate religious diversity and increase interfaith interaction and understanding. At the heart of the event are 'faith table workshops' at which people learn about different religious traditions by participating in arts and crafts activities which illuminate particular aspects of those traditions. Participants could also try on Sikh and Sufi turbans, Jewish Kippahs, Japanese Kimonos, Indian Saris, and Christian altar vestments. There were also chess tables, a smoothie bike, a Quaker-led Interfaith Tree Workshop, henna, face-painting, craft activities led by St Mungo Museum staff, and a Police Scotland stall with children's activities and information about hate crime reporting ... not to mention free food for all! This year around 220 people attended, half of whom were children.



Faith to Faith

This series of monthly dialogue events is delivered in partnership with St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. These events are opportunities for people to hear diverse perspectives on topical issues related to faith, belief, and society (over tea and cakes). Recent topics have included, for example, 'Poetry and Spirituality', 'Gender and Sexuality', 'Solutions Not Sides in the Israeli Palestinian Conflict' and 'Religion and Popular Culture'.



Scriptural Reasoning

Scriptural Reasoning meetings offer participants the opportunity to engage in focused dialogue and to deepen their understanding of the religions concerned and the people who practice them. Muslims, Jews and Christians from all walks of life have been meeting in Glasgow since the Autumn of 2014 and there has been a wonderful atmosphere of honesty, friendship and frequent laughter when they come together.



Religious Dress in the Flesh

In August, Interfaith Glasgow worked with Dr Saeko Yazaki at the University of Glasgow and St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art to deliver a pilot event exploring religious clothing through personal encounter. Attendees heard from five speakers who introduced the 'Five Ks' or articles of faith of Sikhism, the Muslim Hijab, the Zen Buddhist Rakusu, Orthodox Jewish dress and the Japanese Kimono. The speakers gave short, engaging introductions to their religious dress, describing what they were wearing and its significance, both within their tradition and for them personally.

Interfaith Food Justice Network

Supported by Interfaith Glasgow and Faith in Community Scotland (assisted over the past year by a Food Power grant), Glasgow's Interfaith Food Justice Network has gone from strength to strength, increasing its reach and impact. They have held monthly development group meetings and delivered One Big Picnic (a largescale community meal in George Square in May) as well as a networking event for people involved in delivering community and emergency food projects in October.



Interfaith Outdoors

This pilot project facilitated interfaith experiences through a series of woodland activities and outdoor explorations over the Summer. Religiously mixed groups visited beautiful locations near Glasgow, including: Aberfoyle; Loch Ardingning; Mugdock Park; Falls of the Clyde; and Inchcailloch. As well as walking together, groups learned new skills such as bushcraft and outdoor cooking and participated in dialogue on nature-based themes including sacred trees, water, and retreat.

The Weekend Club

A team of committed Weekend Club volunteers continues to deliver fun, welcoming events each month for people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, providing them with a warm Glasgow welcome as they settle in their new city. The difficulties experienced by 'New Scots' are a concern shared by many across Glasgow's faith and belief communities. The Weekend Club was conceived to give people from different backgrounds a chance to work cooperatively to make a lasting difference for those who arrive in Glasgow, often with little or no money, unable to work (in the case of asylum seekers) and struggling with the effects of trauma.

Each month's event is themed to introduce newcomers to aspects of Scottish life and history, as well as helping them get to know Glasgow and Scotland better and improve their English. They regularly welcome people from Syria, Iran, Iraq, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Libya, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Poland, Eritrea and Somalia.

The Weekend Club's innovative interfaith approach has been attracting increasing recognition. A visiting researcher from Durham University recently reflected: "The Weekend Club feels like a different way of welcoming new arrivals to the city... This is a fantastic model to follow, and I hope its success can be replicated in other cities throughout the UK."





Interfaith
Scotland

Making a Difference
through Dialogue

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