

# Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Autumn 2019: Issue 32

20th Anniversary Second Edition



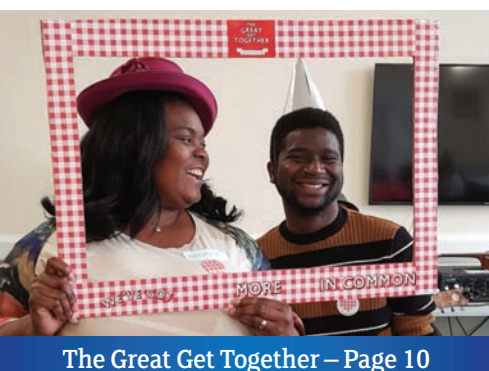
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# 20th Anniversary of Interfaith Scotland

**There has been so much interfaith activity in Scotland recently that we decided we needed to publish an additional newsletter this year to capture the great work taking place, both locally and nationally. In many ways it is a fitting way to celebrate our 20th Anniversary year - celebrating achievements across the country with the local interfaith groups and faith communities who have so much to tell us about.**



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

The publication of this newsletter will coincide with our 20th Anniversary Celebrations. On 10th October 2019 we will be celebrating exactly 20 years to the day that Interfaith Scotland (formerly The Scottish Inter Faith Council) became a registered charity. Our celebratory event will be held in Glasgow University Fore Hall and Chapel and joining us will be the diverse faith communities, government representatives and friends who have made the success story of interfaith engagement in Scotland possible.

The founding of a national interfaith organisation coincided with the re-convening of the Scottish Parliament. This was not a coincidence as it was the faith communities of Scotland who decided it was critical to have a national interfaith organisation that would be able to demonstrate in the 'new Scotland' that we are a multi-faith nation and that this is something to celebrate and build upon. From small beginnings in an office in St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art and four functioning local interfaith groups, there is now a National Dialogue Centre, 20 local interfaith groups (two of which receive Government funding), an annual Interfaith Summit with the First Minister, a nationally recognised Scottish Interfaith Week, international interfaith engagement, and a widening circle of friendships being built between faiths in Scotland – and so much more. This newsletter, we hope, captures some of this.

The world has changed so much in 20 years. 20 years ago there was no social media, 9/11 had not yet happened, climate change was spoken about by environmental enthusiasts and scientists only and here we are today facing a world that is dramatically different. Over the coming year Interfaith Scotland hopes to focus on two critical issues; the Climate Emergency and Tackling Hate Together. We recognise that there are other conversations to be had and no doubt we will have them, but these will be at the forefront of our thinking and we will do our best to host meaningful dialogue and joint engagement on these two important areas.

It is hard to imagine what the coming years will bring but our sincere hope is that all of you will still be engaging with us and that our circle of friendship and influence will have grown – but for now let us celebrate 20 years of national interfaith engagement in Scotland – and over 40 years of local interfaith engagement too.

**Dr Maureen Sier, Director**

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# In the Beginning...

**On 1st July 1999 the Queen opened the Scottish Parliament. It was, in the words of Ian Crichton Smith “the beginning of a new song for Scotland”. It was a day of rejoicing and redolent with possibilities and hope. There was a new sense of what it meant to be Scottish and a desire to make the Parliament work. This was the atmosphere in which Interfaith Scotland came into being. The chair of the newly formed Council, Rawdon Goodier, was present in Holyrood that day and took part in the joyful procession up the Royal Mile past the Queen and beaming new First Minister Donald Dewar.**

Discussions about a national interfaith body had been taking place since 1992, encouraged by Brian Pearce of the UK Interfaith Network who probably foresaw the implications of devolution for interfaith relations in Scotland in a way that those of us engaged in interfaith at the time didn't. The Interfaith Network had been launched in 1987 and as part of its work had occasionally held networking meetings of local interfaith groups in Scotland, of which at the time there were only four – Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee.

In 1994 I undertook to explore the idea of a Scottish Network. I met with whole range of people from faith communities as well as a number of interfaith practitioners the length and breadth of the country. There was a lot of interest in this but a certain hesitancy because of a concern that a new structure might divert time and energy away from existing interfaith initiatives and faith community commitments, some of whom were setting up new initiatives to interact with the Parliament. It was about this time that the Churches Parliamentary Office, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and the Muslim Council of Scotland were established.

What emerged as a result of this research was a Scottish Interfaith Consultative Group located within the framework of the UK Network and formed by representatives of bodies that had membership in Scotland and were already affiliated to the Network. This was expanded to make sure there was a fair representation

of all the major faiths in Scotland. Conversations tended to focus on the kind of Scotland we wanted to live in and what the new Parliament would mean for faith communities. One meeting I particularly remember showed that, apart from the Christians, religious freedom was a real concern among people of the other faiths – something that had never entered the head of the majority faith.

It was these discussions and the recognition that others were planning some kind of relationship with the Parliament that led in the end to a more formal organisation – called the Scottish Inter Faith Council with representative membership from the major faiths and the established interfaith groups. Although it was formally recognised as a Scottish charity on 10th October 1999 it had actually been launched weeks before that in St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art by Patricia Ferguson the deputy Presiding Officer. The link with Government was important and its support helped establish us. As happens so often things happen by chance. It was an encounter with Jack McConnell and his wife Bridget at a Royal Garden Party that we got the promise of a senior politician to launch the Council and a desk at St Mungo Museum from which to work. In the beginning we had to learn how to work together and how to develop this burgeoning organisation. Almost immediately problems of membership and identity arose – something that we in our naiveté had not foreseen.

Immediately after the launch of the



Council we received a letter from the First Minister's office saying that he would like to meet with the Council on an annual basis – an extension of the traditional meeting that the Secretary of State for Scotland had had with Church leaders. It was at the second of these meetings that the then First Minister, Henry McLeish, offered us funding which allowed us to employ a secretary and development worker. This meeting with the First Minister continues until today. Another significant moment was the request from the Moderator, the Cardinal and Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh to organise a gathering of religious leaders as a response to the attacks of 9/11 2001. It took place in Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, and included a reflection on the values on the Scottish Mace: wisdom, justice, integrity and compassion as values that united us in our common concern for the future of Scotland. This meeting also continues until today.

There never was a master plan for the Scottish Inter Faith Council – it grew gradually, eventually changing its name to Interfaith Scotland. But it has continued to flourish thanks to the involvement and commitment of so many people who participated in its development and to the staff who today take forward the work of interfaith which increasingly grows in importance and significance.

**Sr Isabel Smyth**

# Annual Public Lecture

Every year Interfaith Scotland seeks to find an important topic for the annual public lecture. This year was no exception and we were delighted to welcome Julie Cameron, Head of Programmes at the Mental Health Foundation, as the guest speaker for the evening on 2nd April.

Julie highlighted how common mental health problems are and that one in six people in the past week will have experienced anxiety and/or depression. Mental health problems can have a severe and long lasting impact on people's lives and Julie explored what faith communities could do to support people.

During the Year of Young People, the young people that we engaged

with were asked about issues that concerned them and they stated that mental health was a key issue for them. At the annual lecture we were delighted to be able to launch the Interfaith Scotland Youth Network and to have young people engaging in the dialogue around mental health. Those who wish further information about mental health issues can find useful ideas and resources on The Mental Health Foundation website.



## Religious Leaders Forum



On 21st April the terrible Sri Lankan terrorist attack took place and so it was with sadness and solidarity that the Religious Leaders gathered on 1st May to remember those who had been victims of the attack.

Since 2002 the Religious Leaders Forum has been meeting twice a year and sadly it was a terrorist attack, 9/11, that initially brought the leaders together. So it was with deep reflection that they gathered almost 20 years later to ponder why such division still exists in our communities. The Forum also discussed 'The Ark of

Fraternity', a paper that came out of the Pope's visit to Abu Dhabi, led by Sister Isabel Smyth; assisted suicide, led by Anthony Horan the Catholic Churches Parliamentary Officer; and The Global Ban Treaty led by David McKenzie.

The religious leaders expressed their

deep appreciation for the continuing opportunities for friendship building that the Forum offers and they also committed to continuing to stand in solidarity with each other when any one of their communities becomes a victim of hate, recognising that 'an attack on one is an attack on all'.

# Interfaith Scotland responds to our Climate Emergency

**On 14th May 2019 the Climate Change Secretary Roseanna Cunningham made a statement to the Scottish Parliament declaring a Climate Emergency. The faith communities of Scotland have been active in drawing attention to this emergency for many years.**

Interfaith Scotland dedicated Scottish Interfaith Week 2015 to 'care for the environment', stimulating interfaith dialogue events on the environment across the length and breadth of Scotland. In 2015 at the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week the religious leaders of Scotland gathered to sign a petition to be taken to the Climate Conference in Paris. Diverse faiths have worked hard for many years to bring awareness of the sacredness of the earth and our role in caring for it to the attention of millions of adherents.

In our response to the Scottish Government declaring a Climate Emergency we immediately took action to show our commitment to this central

issue of our time. The staff and Board of Interfaith Scotland met with world famous environmentalist Arthur Dhal in a round table discussion of the most effective action that could be taken. Seeking an opportunity for faith communities to do something together in solidarity Interfaith Scotland bought a grove of trees under the Trees for Life scheme based in the Scottish Highlands. This grove is the World Interfaith Harmony Grove and having promoted this grove we are delighted to see so many faith communities of Scotland contributing to it. The grove has over 200 trees donated and we hope there will be many more. To donate a tree you can find the World Interfaith Harmony Grove online.

We also reprinted our booklet 'Our Sacred Earth' to encourage eco-friendly practices in our faith communities and finally we were honoured to hold an interfaith dialogue event in partnership with the former Head of State of Samoa and the University of St Andrews.

We wish to continue to increase our environmental commitment and at the networking seminar for local interfaith groups we committed to a 'bring your own cup campaign' so that we could improve our environmental practice in our Interfaith Scotland Dialogue Centre and public events.

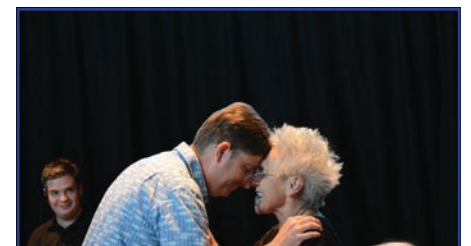
## The Breath We Share: An Indigenous and Interfaith Approach to our Climate Emergency

**In June we were honoured to partner with His Highness Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi (the former Head of State of the Pacific Island of Samoa) and the Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of St Andrews to host an Interfaith Dialogue event and book launch focussing on an indigenous and interfaith approach to our climate emergency.**

Gathered at the Byre in St Andrews were Maori, Samoan and Fijian Islanders, diverse faith communities and renowned academics and the event introduced those present to the profound approach of indigenous people to the climate emergency. Central to making the event a huge success was Dr Tony Crook from the University of St Andrews and of course the presence of such a renowned statesman and academic as His

Highness, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese and his wife Her Highness Masiolo Filifilia Imo Tamasese.

The book 'Pacific Climate Cultures, Living Climate Change in Oceania' was launched at the event and we would highly recommend readers to purchase this if they wish to see how climate change is impacting on indigenous people and particularly small island nations.







## Staff and Board Away Day

**The staff and board away day was a huge success and we wanted to celebrate in this 20th anniversary edition of our newsletter both the commitment and the diversity of the staff and board of Interfaith Scotland.**

Our staff team includes; Baha'i, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Humanist and agnostic staff members; and our Board includes Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh representatives. Our staff team is 80% female and 20% male and our Board is currently 60% female and 40% male.

## Great response to our first public training courses

Until recently our training courses were always delivered for one organisation at a time, but after our first public sessions were so well received, we will keep providing them on a regular basis. Here is just some of the feedback:

- *Brilliantly delivered and thought provoking*
- *Extremely good. Understandable and easy to follow*
- *Very interesting and helpful, a very worthwhile course*

In a public course, delegates book individually, and bring their own perspective and focus, which make for some fascinating discussions! We are now offering three different half-day courses:

1. 'Working with People from Diverse Religion and Belief Identities'
2. '3 mottos for Guiding our Approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion', which considers diversity in its widest sense
3. 'Interpreting Culture - Improving Cross-Cultural Communication' which looks at the way that our cultural background shapes how we understand each other's speech and behaviour.

For more information, and how to book a place, go to the training section of Interfaith Scotland's website or go to [Eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk) and search for 'Interfaith Scotland'. Places are only £40.



## Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

**We continue to support the CPG on Freedom of Religion or Belief in our role as secretariat.**

In recent months the group has heard from members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community who spoke passionately about experiences of persecution faced by their community, particularly in Pakistan. Most recently, the group, chaired by John Mason MSP, also heard a presentation on freedom of religion in the UK by David Robertson of St Peters Free Church. After each presentation there is time for questions and discussion, and for the group to agree on any actions it will take. The meetings are open to all, but due to security in the parliament building, all participants must register. To be included in the invitations to subsequent meetings, please email [jamie@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:jamie@interfaithscotland.org)





# OutsideIn Project Ends with Dissemination Event ‘Transforming Hate in Youth Settings’

For the last couple of years we have been involved with partners across Europe in running OutsideIn – a project that saw 25 young people from amazingly diverse backgrounds design and deliver training on how to tackle hate speech in youth work.

Here in Scotland our five committed participants, from a range of faith identities, trained over 100 youth workers on how to recognise, manage and ultimately transform racist or other prejudicial language. The project also produced a comprehensive practice manual on the same topic for those

who work with young people, which is now available on our website, and an online forum for youth workers to discuss their experiences.

In April we held an event to launch the practice manual and share some of the tools with the audience.

Presenting at the event were the five participants: Mirella Yandoli, Rania Qussasi, Mohamed Omar, Suki Sangha and Sangeeta Bhopal, as well as Farkhanda Chaudhry who provided extensive support throughout the project, and our director Maureen Sier.

## Women’s Interfaith Retreat

Interfaith Scotland organised a retreat for women to Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery and Buddhist Centre in Eskdalemuir, Dumfries and Galloway from 4th - 6th September.

Interfaith Scotland has developed a great relationship with the monastery over the years and we were delighted to be offered their beautiful Chenrezig Shrine room for dialogue over the course of the weekend. We were also given a delightful tour of the grounds by one of the anis (nuns). The women



were able to participate in the worship and meditation in the temple while also having sessions led by Frances Hume and Aparna Ramesh looking at what we valued about our own and each others faiths and what our faiths had to say about prayer, wisdom and compassion. There was also time for cultural sharing, trying on saris, henna

hand painting, sharing songs, story telling and Scottish folk music.

One of the things that made the weekend so special was not only that there were women of five different faiths participating but also that there were women from every decade of life from young adults in their 20s to great grandmothers in their 80s which led to a real wealth of experience to share with one another.

There was a real sense of openness and enthusiasm to learn from one another, plenty of laughter and sunshine and the feeling that we had made great friends in the process - true interfaith in action!







# Annual Networking Seminar

**On 19th August, members of 12 local interfaith groups gathered for their annual networking seminar which took place at Interfaith Scotland's dialogue centre in Glasgow. These networking seminars are an opportunity for local groups to meet, explore key opportunities and challenges and share best practice.**

There were presentations from four local groups – Glasgow; Skye and Lochalsh; Dundee and Tayside; and Ayr. This was followed by a presentation by PC Ewan Smith from Police Scotland on Hate Crime Awareness. After lunch Interfaith Scotland staff shared about their environmental initiatives and gave advice on fundraising and obtaining grants for local interfaith group activities. There was an opportunity to discuss activities for Scottish Interfaith Week 2019 on the theme of 'Eat Share Love', try out the new games and resources on the theme including the SIFW art competition, and find out more about the SIFW Ambassadors Programme.



# Come Dance With Us...

**Interfaith Scotland hosts regular dialogue events for women across Scotland including dialogue teas, retreats and events during Refugee Festival.**

Interfaith Scotland teamed up with Interfaith Glasgow and the Refugee Survival Trust to host an event during Refugee Festival Scotland entitled 'Come Dance with Us' on Wednesday 26th June from 11am to 2pm at Kelvinbridge Parish Church Hall in Glasgow. Participants took part in three different styles of dancing – 'Dances for Universal Peace', African dance and Salsa – all ably led by thoughtful and enthusiastic dance instructors. There was also an opportunity to participate in arts and crafts activities as well as trying on traditional dress from Africa and India. The event concluded with a delicious vegetarian buffet.





# Sowing Seeds of Hope

**Interfaith Scotland staff and volunteers were invited to be guest speakers at an event with staff and patients at the psychiatric unit of Leverndale Hospital on 24th April organised by the hospital chaplain.**

The hospital has a beautiful and well equipped chaplaincy centre which offers a relaxing and reflective space for patients with wonderful artwork from patients displayed on the walls. The theme for this particular gathering was 'Sowing Seeds of Hope' and our volunteers from the Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhists and Hindu faiths shared about what gives them hope in life followed by dialogue in small groups. At the end, we literally sowed some seeds as a symbol of hope for the future! It was a very moving and reflective afternoon and we want to say a big thank you to our volunteers for making the event such a great success!



## National Interfaith Youth Conference



**On 13th April, students from the University of St Andrews Co-existence Initiative teamed up with Interfaith Scotland to host a National Youth Conference at the University of St Andrews Art Centre. The students chose the theme 'What is Justice?'**



There were four keynote speakers, each coming from a different religious perspective. These were Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network; Professor Hossein Godazgar, Professor of Islamic Studies at Al-Maktoum College; Dr Jasmine Gani, Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of St Andrews and Laura Dunlop QC, Procurator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Around 100 participants attended this fascinating event.





# Chaplaincy Research Project

Interfaith Scotland conducted research with university chaplains throughout Scotland to ascertain how good interfaith relations are currently being promoted on university campuses and to identify best practice and future opportunities for ongoing collaboration.

A wide spread of university campuses were selected for the research: Glasgow, Strathclyde, Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt, Aberdeen, Dundee, Stirling, St Andrews and the University of the Highlands and Islands (Moray campus). The hoped for outcomes of the research project were to inspire and resource universities to support good interfaith relations on campus and to create better links with other university chaplains, and local and national interfaith associations. The research was carried out by staff at Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Glasgow. It was really inspiring how many faith and interfaith based activities were already taking place across campuses – over 100 and counting! About half of these

activities are student-led and half are chaplaincy-led with a few led by the Students Union or other organisations.

The document outlines the different set up of chaplaincies throughout Scotland in terms of roles and aims of the chaplains and chaplaincy centres, what buildings and spaces they use, their paid chaplaincy teams and their honorary chaplains who are unpaid and represent many different faith communities. In terms of faith societies on campus, societies representing nine religions were identified of which there were a number of different types of societies named within these religious groups. For example there were 17 different Christian societies named from 'Christian Union' to 'Dental



Christian Fellowship'. The research also looked at ways that the chaplaincy centres linked in with other university bodies such as Equality and Diversity officers, and with local interfaith groups, faith communities and Interfaith Scotland. The research looked at the challenges that chaplains faced and how they could be supported to overcome these. The research was disseminated to chaplains during an event on 22nd May at Interfaith Scotland's Dialogue Centre and PDF copies are available from Interfaith Scotland.

## The Great Get Together

Interfaith Scotland hosted a "Hats on Tea Party" on 20th June, as part of The Great Together 2019. The Great Get Together campaign is inspired by Jo Cox, a Member of Parliament (MP) who was murdered on 16th June 2016, to encourage people to spend time with their own communities, and celebrate all that unites us.

The event was joined by members of local interfaith groups, volunteers, and organisations (our lovely neighbours) based in Flemington House. Participants enjoyed the food, music and games, and engaged with each other through sharing their own stories, experiences and favourite jokes!



*"We are far more united and have far more in common than that which divide us" Jo Cox*





# Adventures of a Trainee Development Officer

**I started on my journey with Interfaith Scotland as a volunteer in February 2018, visiting schools to talk to the students about my Hindu faith, as well as Indian culture and practices.**

In August 2018, I was delighted to take up the post of Trainee Development Officer while continuing to speak in schools and latterly at local interfaith groups too. In May I visited a secondary school in the Highlands, a primary school in Moray, and in July I visited four schools in Orkney.

## Moray and Highlands

On 28 May I gave a talk to S2 pupils at Grantown Grammar School alongside Debby Taylor, a Jewish volunteer who also spoke about her faith and our Senior Development Officer, Frances Hume who gave a presentation on interfaith dialogue. I found the students a little shy and reluctant to ask questions but they were interested in knowing the information. Dyke primary was my first time speaking with primary students. It was a very different experience. The children were enthusiastic and asked so many questions. They were open and eager to learn more. I loved every single moment.



Moray Interfaith Group

We also visited the Moray interfaith group. This was my first time speaking to adults. I was given an hour to talk about Hinduism including a Q&A. The audience were very interactive and I got a few questions which I thought I could share here.

**Q: Indian festivals are so colourful. Is it just cultural or are there religious aspects to it?**

**A:** Colours play a big role in Hinduism

and Indian culture. Red, yellow and saffron (orange) are considered holy colours. We take great joy in wearing colourful dresses, lighting lamps and drawing colourful rangoli (artwork on floors and roads using rice powder) during festivals. In fact there is a festival of colours, Holi where we throw colour powders at each other.

**Q: Why don't Hindus eat beef?**

**A:** Cows are the major source of milk in India for many years. After birth, an infant is fed with mother's milk and then a cow's. Hence cows are treated with the same respect as mother. The latter question brought up a very interesting point by Debby, the Jewish speaker, who said that this line of reasoning is very similar to one of the Jewish food laws that 'a young goat should not be cooked in its mother's milk' (Exodus 23.19), which is why milk and meat products are stored and cooked separately.

## Orkney visit

After my experiences in Moray, I was looking forward to visiting Orkney to speak in three primary schools (Stromness, Glaitness and Papdale Primary), one secondary school (Kirkwall Grammar) and the local Orkney interfaith group. I was not disappointed! I tried quite a few new ideas that were a great success with them: colouring in rangoli patterns, trying on saris and dhoti, writing their names in Hindi and Tamil (two of the Indian languages I speak). It was delightful to experience the children's enthusiasm, curiosity and excitement at learning new things. The dressing up was everyone's favourite part!

As a bonus we got to talk on BBC Radio Orkney about Interfaith Scotland and our work in Orkney! We shared about our visit and Interfaith Scotland's



Radio Orkney

objective in visiting schools and communities such as the importance of 'normalising' religion, counteracting negative stereotypes of people of faith in the media and bringing people together in a spirit of friendship and understanding.

While in Orkney we hosted a women's dialogue on the theme of 'Health and Wellbeing for Body and Soul' at the Albert Hotel in Kirkwall. Everyone seemed to enjoy the dialogue and we had some very good feedback.



Orkney Interfaith Group

I also gave a presentation about Hinduism to the Orkney Interfaith group. We had a full house at the Baha'i centre and I spoke about scriptures, practices, festivals, weddings, dressing and so much more. I was asked to talk for two hours, which turned into three hours, there were so many questions afterwards! For example I was asked about what is Hinduism's take on Evolution? I explained that most Hindus believe in evolutionary theory. We believe that one of our gods, Lord Vishnu, has incarnated on Earth from the beginning of time in various forms in this specific order - fish, tortoise, boar, and human, which is the same order as evolutionary theory describes. This was just my experience at these two places in a nutshell. I look forward to more school visits and local group visits to build upon this experience.

**Aparna Ramesh**

# News From Local Interfaith Groups

## Skye and Lochalsh Faiths Together: Climate Change and Islands

**Skye and Lochalsh Faiths Together has been in existence since 2003 with a core group of members continuing to support it to the present day. We generally decide on a programme of four meetings in the course of the year with a public event to mark Scottish Interfaith Week.**

This year the group decided to support, as one of our core meetings, a public talk entitled "Climate Change and Islands: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century". The talk was organised by the Skye Baha'i community, and the Faiths Together members helped in disseminating the publicity material. The speaker, Dr Arthur Lyon Dahl, was a former senior official of UN Environment and President of the International Environmental Forum. As a scientist and a practicing Baha'i,

Dr Dahl's talk was both technical and spiritual, and we felt privileged to have such an eminent speaker come and talk to us. There was a very encouraging turnout on the evening with much positive feedback.

In addition to our four programmed events through the year, we have recently formed a 'reading group' for more frequent and more informal meetings. We meet monthly in a cafe to talk about the books of a spiritual

nature that we would like to share.

This is proving to be a great success with a rich diversity of materials (not only books but online talks and meditations) all of which are uplifting, heart-warming and inspirational.

Notes are taken of the material shared and then emailed to those members unable to join us on the day. We would thoroughly recommend this activity to the other groups around Scotland.

**Pat McNicol**

## Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group Summer Outing



**Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) organised a summer outing on Saturday 27th July. 31 women and children from diverse faiths visited Abbotshall Parish Church in Kirkcaldy. We received a very warm welcome from Rev Justin Taylor and his team on our arrival.**

We were given a history of the church which was established in 1650 and continues to be focus of Christian worship and social gatherings. EWIG ladies gave a blessing from the Hindu and Islamic faiths and then we had an opportunity for Q & A over the lovely hospitality provided by the very

generous ladies from the church.

In the afternoon we visited the beach at Burntisland and had a wonderful walk by the seaside. Our journey home was enlivened by some singing and we all felt that we had really enjoyed our outing with its opportunity to meet

with women of other faiths in a relaxed and informal way. All in all, it was a wonderful and spiritually uplifting day out. We are extremely grateful to the John Wigham Trust for funding our summer outing.

**Nila Joshi**



# Ayrshire Interfaith Group: Understanding Hate Crime



Ayrshire Interfaith Group covers all of Ayrshire and our objective is to ensure good relations between the diverse religions and faith communities in Ayrshire through interfaith dialogue. The group held an Understanding Hate Crime Discussion event on 11th June to help faith groups in Ayr understand what hate crime is and how we can make a united and positive impact and make sure that we are not bystanders watching other people suffer. PC Colin Johnson, Preventions and Interventions Officer for North Ayrshire, gave a presentation to help the audience identify and report hate crime. Rev David Prentice-Hyres from Troon Old Parish Church detailed his experience of hate crime in the USA and outlined ways in which we can unify as faith

groups to prevent this growing in our communities. After the talks we sat together in groups to discuss various questions to explore our personal views on hate crime and how we can work together as a faith community to reduce this in Ayrshire.

It was an excellent evening of discussion between people of different faiths and no faith coming together to learn, discuss and enjoy each others' company. As we dialogue we soon realise we have more in common regardless of race, religion or where we were born, and if we come together we can be a positive force in the community.

**Stuart Lang**



**Group Photo left to right:** PC Colin Johnson, Preventions and Interventions Officer for North Ayrshire; William Grant, Depute Provost of South Ayrshire; Douglas Yates from the Paisley Stake Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Councillor Laura Brennan-Whitefield, Ayr North; Rev David Prentice-Hyres from Troon Old Parish Church



## West Lothian Faith Group Walk

The West Lothian Faith Group arranged a walk to Cairnpapple Hill in June 2019 to explore the rare ceremonial complex in the Bathgate Hills. The broad summit of Cairnpapple Hill was a significant site for ceremonies and burials for at least 4000 years and the view is really spectacular. While the reconstructed cairn wasn't open to the public during our visit we were able to read the information board and view the burial/ ceremonial site.



Although small in number we were big on enthusiasm! One of our members, Margalit, provided the feedback below: "I have to say we experienced all four seasons during the afternoon but that did not keep us from enjoying a lively outdoor lunchtime chat, overlooking the Forth Valley, talking about our own (close) ancestors and where we originated in different areas of Scotland and what historical changes brought us to where we are now. We also spoke about burial/ mourning customs and traditions within our own faith traditions".

**Joanna Anderson**



# Dundee Interfaith

**During the past year Dundee Interfaith has re-established its committee and held dialogue evenings. What has been most encouraging is the number of younger people who have participated. Members have also been able to engage in Interfaith Scotland events and in local meals held by one of the Muslim communities.**



We are now almost ready to submit a new registration to the Charity Regulator for us to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). Once it is agreed then our new name will be Faith and Belief (Dundee and Tayside). Our title reflects

the desire to include belief as well as faith, which confirms the involvement of Humanist organisations as part of our team. We are also looking at a statement of intent where we affirm our belief in human flourishing, human rights and the one human family. For

our 2019/20 programme we hope to help organise panel sessions in secondary schools where people from different faith and belief backgrounds can share their own perspectives, relevant to school pupils.

**Gordon Sharp**

# East Renfrewshire Faith Forum

**East Renfrewshire Faith Forum working in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council organised an event with refugee families resident in Barrhead which explored ways to integrate refugees into the community in Barrhead.**

A successful event was held at St Andrews Church on Wednesday 30th January, and attended by about 80 people. Members of the local refugee community were entertained with traditional Scottish culture by way of bagpipe tunes and accordion music. There was a banquet of Syrian food prepared and set out by our Syrian neighbours which everyone enjoyed and short talks by a Syrian teenager and a Syrian woman speaking of how they felt about living in Barrhead. Lots of conversations were seen taking place demonstrating that the aim of helping with integrating communities had been achieved.

East Renfrewshire Faith Forum held a second event for refugees as part of Refugee Festival Scotland on

Thursday 27th June at St Andrew's Church in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council and Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire. The event "From Syria to Scotland" was a celebration of Barrhead's diversity as local people indulged in a taste of Syria with the town's refugee families. A well-attended event with about 100 participants saw a mingling of Scots, Syrians and other nationalities tantalising their tastebuds with a variety of dishes. There was plenty of entertainment on offer from dancing groups and musicians such as the Neilston Strings Ukulele Group, plus a children's entertainer. The event allowed people to learn about which region of Syria dishes came from and how they are made. Recipe cards were available and there were lots

of conversations with families who were forced to flee the war-torn nation and there were moving video clips showing how Syria has changed over the last few years. Renfrewshire Councillor Colm Merrick was on hand to commend everyone for their efforts and expressed how much he had enjoyed the event.

East Renfrewshire Faith Forum held their annual Festival of Colour at Rouken Glen Park, Giffnock on Saturday 27th July. Along with the main attraction of throwing of coloured dye, participants were entertained by Hindu and Nepalese dancers, a singing group, a ukulele group, and a variety of other family entertainment.

**Douglas Yates**



# Renfrewshire Interfaith Group

Funeral of Mr Kartar Singh Sindhu, Founder member of Renfrewshire Interfaith Group

**Mr Kartar Singh Sindhu, founder member of Renfrewshire Interfaith Group, passed away in July. Rev Peter Gill, the founder of the group, was asked to speak at his memorial service and extracts of his talk appear below.**

"It is indeed my privilege to share a little bit about our beloved uncle Kartar Singh Sindhu. As we have gathered here to say a final goodbye to Uncle Kartar, who has completed his earthly journey so successfully, I can't forget the moment when I received a phone call from Uncle that he wanted to join our interfaith group. That was the answer to my prayers as I was praying for someone like him to join us from the Sikh community. I invited him to my church, we took several interfaith school assemblies together and attended many interfaith seminars, meetings and conferences. We had a good laugh as Uncle shared about his journey from India to the UK, about his culture shock and he explained about

his turban when people thought he was wearing a bandage on his head!

Uncle Kartar preached the message of love, harmony and peace for all religions. He once invited us to the Gurdwara for langar and said, "We all have come from different faith backgrounds, yet we are one family through Adam and Eve under one God. We have different ways of worship and different lifestyles in the world. We should celebrate our unity in diversity as our world has become a global village".

Scriptures of every religion tell us that our lives are on a spiritual journey, a progression from one stage to another with a starting point and eventually an ending point. A funeral service is just like saying goodbye to a friend



or relative at an airport knowing that one day we will meet again. Yet sometimes we shed tears as we say a final goodbye at the one end, but on the other end, people come to receive the same person, with a very warm welcome. We are here to celebrate the life of a man of God, who was a wonderful person and will be greatly missed. Let us reflect upon his life to follow his good example to be broad minded, accepting and respecting our differences with a joyful heart".

**Rev Peter Gill**



## Interfaith Moray

A group from Moray Interfaith gathered outside the new Elgin Mosque to show support after it was subjected to an act of vandalism with racist graffiti on the windows, front wall and the mosque's sign during Ramadan. The group met with Lansana Bangura from the mosque to offer their support. The group

was joined by Frances Hume from Interfaith Scotland along with Debby Taylor and Aparna Ramesh who were in Moray to give talks on Judaism and Hinduism respectively, both to the local interfaith group and with local primary and secondary school pupils.

**Juli Salt**

# Fife Interfaith Group

## Talk on Adult Protection

In March 2019, the Fife Interfaith Group organised a talk on Adult Protection which was given by Shona McEwan from Fife Council. The work of Adult Protection is to keep people safe and keep them from harm. Most at risk are the elderly, people with dementia and those with physical or learning difficulties. The individual can report in person or a concerned neighbour or friend can do this for them. Reporting can be done face to face or by a telephone call to a duty social worker. Abuse can be physical, sexual, mental or monetary such as telephone or internet scams. If anyone feels worried about any phone call or on the internet they should contact the Action Fraud Website. There is also a Recovery Project to help people who have been scammed or abused in any way. This is to help people regain their self-confidence and self-respect and volunteers are requested to help with this.

## Talk on Secularism

In May 2019, the Fife Interfaith Group organised a talk on Secularism which was given by Stephen Evans. The National Secular Society (NSS) was founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh. He was elected as an MP but as he was an atheist he was not allowed to take the religious oath. He was instrumental in bringing about a change in the law to enable MPs to affirm rather than swear a religious oath. Secularism is not the same as atheism. Secularism believes in free speech, democracy and religious freedom as outlined in Article 9 of the Human Rights Act where all beliefs are protected, including the right to not believe. Secularists believe that everyone should be free to believe or worship or not. It is up to the individual and should not be compulsory one way or the other. The right to manifest a belief is a limited right to ensure beliefs are not imposed on others and

everyone's rights are balanced fairly.

Secularism believes in the division of religion and state. Unlike many other modern secular states, the UK government is tied to religion by the established Church of England. The law is secular although 26 Anglican bishops still have the right to a seat in the House of Lords giving them unique political influence. Secularism is also opposed to the state funding of schools run by a particular faith as they believe that this can divide children and that the view of teachers can be strongly put in the education process. They believe that inclusive secular schools encourage integration and inclusivity.

The kind of Secularism the NSS campaigns for can be summed as live and let live, but within limits. Everyone should be treated equally, living their own choices within the law.

## Talk on Becoming Dementia Friendly

Ruth McCabe gave a talk to members of Fife Interfaith Group in July about the Dementia Friendly Fife Project. She asked those gathered to imagine that they had been diagnosed with dementia. She posed the following questions: How would you like to live your life? Would you want to be able to do the same things you have always done or do you think you would need to shut yourself up at home to stay safe and avoid people who may not know how to talk to you? If we can create a Dementia Friendly Community across Fife then people living with a diagnosis of dementia in their lives will be able to do what they have always done. That means going to the same shops, banks, cafés, pubs, libraries, museums, galleries, sports clubs, churches and anywhere else that is 'normal' in their lives.

Over the last two years Fife Council has worked with Alzheimer Scotland on a project to endeavour to support Glenrothes and the surrounding area to become Dementia

Friendly. This has involved a two-fold approach, firstly assessing the signage in the physical spaces of local businesses and services, and secondly offering 'Dementia Friends' training. The Project was very successful and Fife Council has extended this to the whole of the Kingdom.

Training to become a Dementia Friend is open to everyone and can be taken through a 15 minute course online or as an hour long face to

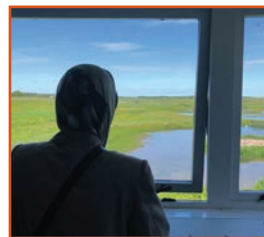


face session. The course provides people with a better understanding of dementia and how it can affect people at all stages of the illness. It is important for us all to know where to get information and support and how to look after ourselves and any family, friends or work colleagues who may get diagnosed so that people with dementia can live their lives in the way that they choose for as long as they can, knowing that they will be supported and cared for in our communities and our families.



# Aberdeen Interfaith Group

Aberdeen Interfaith Group has expanded this year and we have had many opportunities to network, work and walk together and attend each others' events as well as holding a stall and being part of a panel at the University of Aberdeen, NESCOL and Portlethen Academy. We have enjoyed nature and meditating together, which this year included planting trees and visiting an RSPB reserve with a representative of Faith Action for Nature. Our chairperson, Patricia Findlay, also had the privilege of being asked to be the case study for a Masters and also a PHD student concerning community, resilience, faith, interconnectedness and conflict.



Photos from visit to RSPB Reserve, Loch of Strathbeg



## An interfaith youth group for Aberdeen

We are delighted that an Interfaith Youth Group is developing in Aberdeen. An initial meeting took place at the synagogue which was facilitated by Patricia Findlay and Interfaith Scotland's senior development officer, Frances Hume. The young people created a WhatsApp group and have attended events together such as a poetry workshop; an open mic on Mental Health; the Eid celebration at one of the local mosques and also helping with cooking for the homeless as well as assisting on the interfaith stall at the local college.

## Interfaith Mindfulness Day

The second year of the successful interfaith mindfulness day at the Varapunya Meditation Centre was held on Saturday 11th May 2019. There were about 30 people from different faiths in attendance - Brahma Kumaris, Buddhists, Church of Scotland, Hindu, Unitarian church, Jews, Muslim, Pagan, Quaker and other interested people.



We were delighted to have meditation and reflection on the theme of Trees.

The day began with an introduction to mindful walking by Ajahn Sujana who led a silent mindful walk in the woodland for an hour to help connect people to nature and trees and foster a sense of wellbeing.

The Varapunya Meditation centre provided us with a wonderful lunch and we then heard about the significance of trees in different faith communities. According to Ajahn, trees play a very essential part in the Buddhist practice. The Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi tree at the age of 35, he gave his first discourse under the tree and passed away under the tree. Ajahn explained that both Buddhism and our



lives are similar to a tree. The Buddha talks of the three root causes that are subject to our birth and death. If we nurture good roots, we can make a huge difference to our lives.

Suki from the Sikh faith spoke about the importance of trees in his faith and the Ecosikh project to celebrate 550 years of Guru Nanak's birthday. The project intends to plant a million trees around the world. Caroline from the Unitarian church guided us in a meditation on the tree, standing on the ground as if we were growing roots; extending energy from the ground to the whole of the body and feeling the connection. Bruce reflected that every small seed possesses a massive tree. As the tree grows it becomes stronger when it is moved around with the wind. So too can humans become stronger surviving in the midst of difficulties. David from the Varapunya Meditation centre led us in a loving kindness meditation to end the session, the Melting Pot Collective played gentle music and everyone took part in planting trees in the woodland.

**Patricia Findlay**



## Cooking for the homeless in Aberdeen

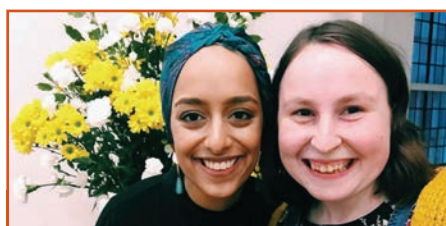
The Aberdeen Interfaith Group has teamed up with the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy to help with cooking for about 80 homeless people every Tuesday. There has been very positive feedback from members of the group and what this venture has meant to them. According to the Sisters of LDS, "We love working with the Holy Family of the Sisters of the Needy. They invited us to come and help them make food for the homeless. They are so generous and thoughtful in all they do. We are so happy to be able to serve alongside them."

According to Lakshmi from the Hindu community, "Helping with the cooking at St Mary's Cathedral has been an exhilarating experience for me. I am humbled by the commitment and sincerity that I see in all the volunteers. I enjoy the camaraderie and the many laughs we share. Like-minded people from different walks of life come together for a common purpose. So much thought and care go into planning and cooking the meals."

# Edinburgh Interfaith Association News

On reflecting on the last few months of Edinburgh Interfaith Association's activities I wondered to myself what connects all of these events. It then came into my mind that the events directly or indirectly are trying to respond to the very real threat to the world from passive and active violence. Arun Gandhi at a lecture in Edinburgh in 2015 described passive violence as the "non-physical violence that we commit every day - exploiting people, discriminating against people, wasting resources and creating disparities in society."

At our International Women's Day event in March our cross generational interfaith panel looked at the remaining barriers to equality for women in faith communities. Although it was encouraging to hear from Trishna Singh OBE Director of Sikh Sanjog and other panellists of how far women had come it was sad to hear that there were still obstacles to genuine equality in faith communities and more had to be done to challenge it.

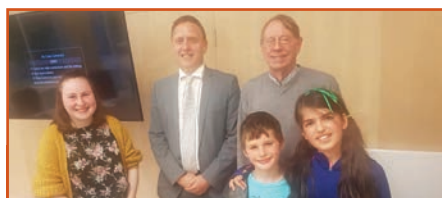


Madinah Javed and Clare Levy, panellists at the International Women's Day event

Similarly, our 'Faith and Sexuality' event at Edinburgh University saw contributions from our interfaith panel which showed that much progress had been made towards equal rights for LGBT+ members of faith but much still had to be done to help make our faith communities more inclusive.

In June our key note lecture came from Professor Arthur Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum, who reminded us of the very real threat facing the environment from over consumption. However, he had a message of hope that faith communities had a key role to play in helping to save the planet by countering the narrative of the love of materialism and capitalism and reminding people of the sacredness of our planet.

In May our Annual Interfaith Peace Walk was partly responding to acts of



Professor Arthur Dahl is welcomed by Clare Levy, EIFA director Iain Stewart and some new visitors.

physical violence as we remembered the victims of the Sri Lankan, Christchurch and Pittsburgh and Jallinwala attacks. All innocent people of faith killed as they went about their daily lives, some as they worshipped in the place that they once felt safe.



Interfaith Peace Walk

At Liberton High School we have been piloting a hate crime awareness course that we have put together with the help of our consultant Sebastian Geller and RME colleagues. As we hear of stories of increasing violence towards minority groups across the UK and internationally it is important that we increase awareness and empathy in our young people for those who are the most vulnerable in our society and encourage and empower them to report hate crimes against them.

Another initiative is the 'Taste of Faith Community Meal Programme'. These events have seen communities sharing something of the importance of their beliefs to their community and encouraging respect, understanding and dialogue. Two such events recently took place as we learned more about the Unitarian Church and the

importance of faith from our guest panellists at the 'Meet the Imam, the Priest and the Rabbi event' at Christ Church Morningside.



Meet the Imam, the Priest and the Rabbi event

In Dublin we had a meeting of the rebranded, 'Cities, Faith and Community Forum' formerly known as the Capital Cities Interfaith Network. This group looks to bring together European interfaith organisations together to share best practice and tackle issues of common concern such as the rise of faith based hate crime and extremist ideologies. These initiatives as with other programmes are looking to break down the barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice and encourage greater respect and stronger relationships between people of different beliefs.

Returning to the words of Arun Gandhi as I conclude, a non-violent individual "would be one who lives in harmony with all of creation; one that has a lot of love and respect for everybody, considers everybody to be equal, learns to share things with other people, and not to be selfish and self-centred". To live with harmony with nature and to protect and help the most vulnerable in society are key values that unite people of faith. In order to achieve that goal, we all need to work on our tendencies towards non-violent behaviour and, 'become the change we wish to see in the world.'

Iain Stewart



# Reception at Buckingham Palace

On 25th June, Interfaith Glasgow's Director, Rose Drew, was invited to attend a reception hosted by The Queen at Buckingham Palace, recognising the work of faith and belief groups, volunteers, and community workers in bringing about positive change in their communities and promoting social cohesion. Rose was honoured to be one of approximately ten (out of 160 guests) selected to talk to the Queen. She had the opportunity to explain what Interfaith Glasgow does, as well as to thank her for the ways in which she has used her platform throughout the years to draw attention to the importance of good interfaith relations and the value of interfaith work, and to highlight the importance of this, given how difficult it can be to secure media coverage of positive interfaith stories.

Also attending the event was Venus Carew of the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith group and South West Scotland Baha'i community who was recognised for her work in supporting communities and bringing together people of different faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

Along with others, Venus supports activities that nurture community cohesion and healthy neighbourhoods including the Children's Peacemaker club, a Baha'i inspired social action activity which aims to empower young people to develop positive language and qualities such as kindness and truthfulness through stories, music, drama and games. Venus was humbled and honoured to be invited to the reception and to meet the Queen. She also felt it was a celebration of the work of everyone in the region serving the community.



Rose Drew, Interfaith Glasgow



Venus Carew, Dumfries & Galloway



## Interfaith Glasgow - One Big Picnic

Interfaith Glasgow continues to coordinate the Interfaith Food Justice Network in partnership with Faith and Community Scotland, and in June the network delivered One Big Picnic, an annual event in Glasgow's George Square. One Big Picnic 2019 took place on Sunday 30th June in for the third year in a row. This free community meal in the heart of Glasgow runs on the ethos that everyone - regardless of cultural and religious background, social or educational status, homelessness or wealth - should be able to enjoy food in dignity and feel part of One Big Community.

Diverse community groups and a highly committed volunteer team worked together to deliver an afternoon full of delicious food,

vibrant cultural activities, and exciting performances. Many of Glasgow's faith and belief groups - including Jewish, Sikh, Christian, Alevi, Muslim and Humanist - served free food alongside various other community food initiatives from across the city.

There was a variety of entertainment and craft activities on offer. Ricefield provided Chinese tea tasting and paper lantern making. Refuweege offered the chance to design tote bags for refugees coming to the city. The Art of Living provided a quiet space to learn basic meditation and breathing techniques. The Village Story Telling Centre brought their wonderful yurt to George Square. There was also an opportunity to try on turbans or hijabs, see your name written in Arabic

calligraphy, and have henna applied.

A large crowd gathered to watch a thrilling Sikh Gatka (martial arts) performance - accompanied by dhol drums. This rounded off a full music programme with performances from the Woodlands Community Band and local musicians from various cultures.

One Big Picnic saw a high number of diverse attendees with thousands of food portions served throughout the day, including a stall of products for people to take home. The organising team were delighted with the turnout and commented on how positively people responded to the message of unity and dignity for all. Plans are already afoot for One Big Picnic 2020 - we hope to see you there!

**Katie Sproull**





Interfaith  
Scotland

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through Dialogue

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