

# Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Summer 2020: Issue 34

Making a Difference through Dialogue



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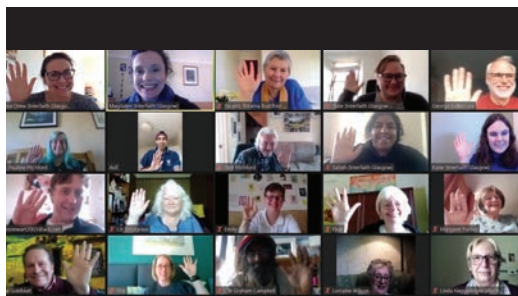


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[www.interfaithscotland.org](http://www.interfaithscotland.org)

# Resilience, Hope and Connection in a Time of Crisis

Who could ever have imagined how much the world would have changed since our last newsletter which was published in February 2020! Here we are just six months later and we are in the middle of a global pandemic. In writing this my first thoughts are that I hope all of you reading this are safe and well and that you haven't lost loved ones to this horrible virus. The world is praying for a vaccine so that life can continue without the severe restrictions necessary to protect all of us.



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

Many are saying they wish to find a new normal as the virus has highlighted so many things including; the gross inequalities in society; the kindness and compassion of ordinary people; a reminder that we need to protect our planet from an impending climate crisis; the fact that many of our lowest paid workers have been pivotal in keeping all of us safe and taking care of us when at our most vulnerable and that we all need human connection for our spiritual and emotional health.

'Connecting' is the theme of Scottish Interfaith Week 2020 and although we know that we will have to do things differently this year we are still hoping for an uplifting, inspiring and motivational online Scottish Interfaith Week.

The impact of the virus on individuals and communities across the world cannot begin to be imagined and in Scotland the role of faith communities in navigating us through this crisis has really come to the fore. The practical as well as spiritual help that faith communities, along with others, have delivered has been truly outstanding. Our newsletter captures just some of the great work done by so many of you during this time of crisis.

Many of you have sent in stories, art work and poems for this newsletter and we thank you for your resilience and creativity. Going forward, I hope that in the not too distant future we will all be meeting again face to face.

**Dr Maureen Sier, Director**

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# Interfaith Scotland's Support for communities during COVID-19

**When lockdown hit, the staff team of Interfaith Scotland met together online to discuss ways in which Interfaith Scotland could support communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

It was decided that we would offer the following: free one to one conversations for those who might be feeling stressed, lonely or vulnerable; information and advice for groups to help them set up online meetings and events; a monthly public online dialogue hosted by Interfaith Scotland; regular meetings for our different constituent groups to share with one another about the challenges of lockdown and how they were supporting each other and their communities. These meetings were organised for members of local interfaith groups, faith communities, women, young people and University Chaplains. A new e-newsletter was

created which keeps people up to date with upcoming events organised by Interfaith Scotland and local interfaith groups and also shares important up-dates from Government and other relevant organisations. Interfaith Scotland received funding from the Scottish Government to distribute to faith communities and local interfaith groups who were supporting people during COVID-19. The funds were distributed to 66 projects across Scotland (see page 6). We also encouraged people to create art, poetry, music and stories on the theme of 'Creativity in Crisis' and some of these creative offerings are featured on page 22.

## Online meeting for Young people

**At the beginning of the lockdown period, our main focus was to get in touch with volunteers, friends, members, and other contacts to ensure they were safe and able to reach out for help if required.**

As a part of a series of online meetings, we held an event for young people on 26th April, to understand the challenges faced by them during COVID-19 and what they have been doing during the lockdown period. The meeting began with a short poem by Rumaisa Zubairi about what lockdown meant to her, which is featured in the Creativity in Crisis section of our newsletter. Some of the challenges mentioned by the young people were job changes, completing university courses, not being able to visit places of worship and reduced social contact. Some of the highlighted positives were being able to attend

services worldwide online, increased contact with relatives via social media or phone, and a time to reflect. A very interesting point was brought up regarding an increased number of people attending online faith community services. People who might have felt anxious or uncomfortable attending a service in person were willing to explore and attend these online and experience different types of worship. The meeting helped us get a good idea of challenges faced by young people and how Interfaith Scotland might be able offer support and further meetings are being planned.

## Chaplaincy Meeting

**Interfaith Scotland hosted a meeting for University Chaplains and Honorary Chaplains on 27 May.**

The meeting was to provide an opportunity for Chaplains to share with one another about chaplaincy life during lockdown, any issues that they were dealing with or concerns they might have and looking at ways that Chaplains could support one another and their students. The meeting was well attended by 13 chaplains from eight universities and colleges across Scotland. A number of Chaplains mentioned that it had been a difficult shift moving from working face to face to having to find new ways to reach out to students through technology. A number of universities had organised 'virtual cafés' to bring students together. The Muslim chaplain at one university was able to liaise with the Muslim Society to deliver fresh food to students for Iftar meals during Ramadan and also organise online Zoom meetings for students from four universities which were recorded and disseminated to the rest of the Muslim student body.

One Chaplain mentioned that the pandemic had brought the chaplaincy team closer together as they worked together to support students whose personal issues such as bereavement and mental health issues had been exacerbated by lockdown. One of the universities offered free accommodation to students who had been stranded over the summer break. Humanist Chaplains had been particularly busy conducting funerals where there was an increased depth of grief and sadness as people were unable to say their goodbyes or attend funerals in person. The feedback from the event was that it was a very helpful way to share good practice and ideas for the future as well as show solidarity with one another during the isolation of lockdown.

# Earth Day

**On 22 April Interfaith Scotland hosted an online dialogue to mark Earth Day.**

Interfaith Scotland's director, Dr Maureen Sier, outlined the significance of Earth Day which is a global movement that promotes environmental education and conservation with the aim to engage millions of citizens to transform the world for a healthier, safer, more just and more sustainable future for all. Events were held online across the world in 2020 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. See [www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org) for more details about events that took place and about their ongoing activities and campaigns.

At our online dialogue Rev Philip Huggins was invited to give a spiritual reflection about our relationship to nature and our role in conserving the environment. Rev Huggins is the

President of the National Council of Churches in Australia and patron of the Interfaith Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. This was followed by a presentation by Mamie Philips, a freelance writer and educator, who spoke about the inspiring initiatives that she had witnessed in Rwanda to combat climate change. Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland's development officer, gave a short reflection on the effect of lockdown on the natural world, for example reduced pollution from global travel. She invited people to think about what we actually need in order to be comfortable and happy and what is superfluous or a 'luxury' that we enjoy that could potentially be detrimental to the environment. She also reflected upon her renewed appreciation of nature on her doorstep within the city where she lives when travel was restricted to one



walk or cycle per day.

Participants were then divided into small groups to make their own personal reflections on the following question: 'What things am I and/or my faith community doing during and after lockdown to increase our positive impact and reduce our negative impact on the planet?'

To aid further thought and reflection on the topic, there are a

number of resources on Interfaith Scotland's website which include a document outlining what each faith has to say about our relationship to the environment, activity cards for dialogue, and a list of faith-based and interfaith websites dedicated to environmental issues. These can be found at <https://interfaithscotland.org/news/events-2020>.

**Frances Hume**

## Women and Leadership Workshop

**Interfaith Scotland organised an online event in May for women of all faiths and beliefs entitled 'Women and Leadership'. We were delighted that 60 women signed up to attend from across the UK and beyond.**

The event was originally due to take place in the dialogue centre on 16 March but had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. The keynote speaker was Dr Susan Madsen, a Professor of Leadership and Ethics in the Woodbury School of Business at Utah Valley University in the USA. Susan is considered to be one of the top global thought leaders on the topic of women and leadership, has authored or edited six books, and has published hundreds of articles and reports.

The workshop focused on developing women's leadership through strengthening identity, purpose, and confidence. Susan started by stressing the important role that women play in the workplace, encouraging greater philanthropy in companies and finding 'win-win' solutions to problems rather than an approach that encourages

winners and losers. She shared evidence that men and women are more productive working together to solve complex problems. Susan then asked participants what things impact their identity. Participants mentioned the importance of having female role models and the impact of seeing women in public life in positions of leadership. Some women may struggle with 'imposter syndrome', not believing that they can take on these roles. However words of encouragement from even one individual can make all the difference. The attitude of caregivers from childhood can also have a strong impact. Parents from some cultures discourage their daughters from taking public leadership roles whereas others



encourage them to be fully engaged in public life. Susan also focused on having a sense of calling, which she described as 'the place where your deepest gladness meets the world's deepest need'. The workshop invited participants to reflect upon their own developmental journeys in small 'breakout' groups and provided ideas about ways in which women can continue to strengthen their own leadership capabilities and help other women do the same. Professor Madsen was a truly inspiring speaker and the feedback from the event was very positive. A copy of PowerPoint slides from the meeting is available on request.

**Frances Hume**

# Black Lives Matter, Marie James and the Great Get Together

**The Great Get Together events each year commemorate the life of the MP Jo Cox, who was killed on 16 June 2016. This year Interfaith Scotland focused on the theme of Black Lives Matter, in recognition of the killing of George Floyd in the US, and the worldwide protests against racist violence and racial inequality.**

We invited the producer, and soon to be mental health support worker, Marie James to speak about her own experiences as a black woman living in the UK. Marie's powerful presentation described multiple experiences of racist discrimination and prejudice throughout her life. Some were explicit and undeniable like a racist image she encountered of a person with a noose around their neck painted on a wall in the park, while others were more subtle - such as the continual minimising of her experience and abilities in the workplace. She also spoke of the internalised impacts of racism, including her own unhappiness as a young girl with the shape of her nose and with the colour of her skin.

In training courses on diversity issues, I often share the phrase, 'Advantage is invisible to those who have it'. It is a paraphrasing of the words of American academic Michael Kimmel. This simple statement describes a pattern that we see recurring endlessly in different forms, in relation to every aspect of human diversity. Marie described using skin creams to lighten her skin as a young girl, creams that burnt her skin as they were essentially bleach.

As a white person the pressures to conform to idealised images of white beauty, are often hidden from us. The internalised impact of stereotypes gave another striking example. Marie described being in a swimming pool changing room with her grandmother, a white friend and her friend's mother. The white woman lost her purse and left the cubicle to look for it. Soon

after Marie's grandmother saw the purse on a hook, exactly where the woman left it and left the cubicle to find the woman, leaving the purse on the hook behind her. Confused about why she had done this, Marie took the purse from the wall and hurried after. The purse was returned but it was only later that her grandmother explained why she had left it on the hook, saying 'these people think we are thieves, so I wanted her to see that the purse was exactly where she had left it'. Marie was only six when this happened and it profoundly affected her. As a white person the need to prove that I do not fit such negative stereotypes about me has never affected me. And this powerful advantage is often invisible to us, until we hear the experiences of those who do not share this advantage.

Of course, the pattern is not just true in relation to race - it can be observed in relation to age, disability, sexuality, and of course in the context of religion and belief too. We never need anyone to tell us about the prejudice



and discrimination that we experience - it is usually painfully obvious to us. Much more challenging is to stay aware of the challenges faced by other groups and to avoid dismissing or belittling them. A fairer society is founded on this awareness and it is one that we should all continue to develop within ourselves.

**Jamie Spurway**



# Local Interfaith Resilience Fund during COVID-19

The Scottish Government approached Interfaith Scotland with an offer of funds to support local interfaith groups and faith communities during lockdown to assist them in keeping in touch with one another and supporting local initiatives to help others in their community. Many groups applied for the funds and £25,000 was distributed across 66 projects between April and June 2020. The projects that were set up by local interfaith groups are outlined in the local interfaith group section of this newsletter. Below we offer a snapshot of some of the projects set up by the different faith communities across Scotland.

## Muslim Community

The Al-Khair Foundation, a Muslim aid charity, has been preparing cooked meals for the homeless and also to those who have been homed and are struggling. The Foundation has provided them with a food package for a few weeks until they get on their feet.

## Jewish Community

Glasgow Jewish Representative Council organised a wide variety of weekly cultural, educational, social and religious events as well as two large scale events, a Commemoration for Holocaust Victims which normally would have been a live event in April but this year was held virtually. They also organised a very well attended cross-communal service to pray for the victims of the crisis and those who were suffering due to COVID-19. This Interfaith prayer event was attended by over 300 people and available after the event on YouTube. Frequent newsletters were produced to keep the community updated with all the latest information of help available, updates and advice from the Scottish Government as well as keeping people informed of the great variety of events happening virtually to keep the community connected.

During the first three months of the lockdown, SCoJeC (the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities) had financial support from Interfaith Scotland to

cover the cost of a large 'Zoom' space. They held a ground-breaking Virtual Klezmer and Yiddish Song concert (for which over 630 people registered), as well as author talks, a well-attended Klezmer Kabaret, a weekly Art Club and regular Zoom tutorials. They have also been able to share the space with many other communal organisations for events and meetings, for example the 5th Giffnock Girl Guides who meet weekly at the synagogue. Their Guide Leader, Evelyn Yedd, said "I have told the girls' parents that SCoJeC have generously allowed us to use their Zoom account on a Monday night to enable us to do Zoom girl guiding. The parents are so grateful because they say that the friendship on a Monday night is making a difference to the girls during lockdown when they cannot mix freely with their friends".

## Sikh Community

Through the funding received from the Resilience Fund the charity Sikhs in Scotland was able to provide 50 food parcels for families. One family gave the following feedback, "We just received our food parcel from The Sikh Food Bank. We cannot thank you enough. Thank you for supporting our family and ensuring that our children have food on the table". The fund also supported the charity Sikh Sanjog who adapted its entire service over the period of COVID-19 to be able to deliver all its services remotely via phone or online platforms reaching

over 80 services users. Food parcels have also been provided for 20 families on a weekly basis throughout the pandemic including culturally specific food for the Asian community.

## Hindu Community

The Hindu Temple of Scotland in Rutherglen supported struggling Indian students with essential food items such as rice, flour, lentils and cooking oil.

## Buddhist Community

The Temple Board of Trustees of the Thai Buddharam Temple in Aberdeen decided to show their gratitude towards NHS staff at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary by offering them healthy and nutritious meals. A team of volunteers purchased and prepared ingredients, cooked the meals, and picked up and delivered them to various wards at the hospital. A grant was also given to the Varapunya Meditation Centre in Aberdeen. The grant allowed the Centre to supply 400 face coverings to those who needed them, to accelerate their Facebook Live and Zoom presence, bringing to a wider audience daily talks, teaching and meditation practice, and reaching more people than would otherwise have occurred in these circumstances. So many have said that they are so grateful for the positive impact on their 'connectivity' during lockdown, their mental health and spiritual wellbeing, including many who have never been to the Centre!

## Christian Community

At the Trinity Pastorate of Cumbernauld, Airdrie Park and Coatbridge, the Resilience Fund paid for a Zoom account so that members of the congregation could continue to worship in their own homes. This has been a great source of comfort to them and has added a sense of well-being, as well as kept faith and spirituality alive during this time when people have been isolated from each other. At Airdrie Park United Reformed Church the fund has been used to print and distribute daily devotions of readings, reflections and prayers. Many of the congregation don't have access to the internet and so the

arrival of these booklets has been of great comfort to them. At St Peter's Roman Catholic Church St Vincent de Paul, the assistance has focused on providing food for homeless people living in hotels and for food parcels for vulnerable individuals and families in the local community of Partick, Glasgow. Rutherglen United Reformed Church has used Zoom with their young people who usually attend a Sunday evening club and this opportunity for socialising was very well received by the young people and their parents. Weekly news and reflection sheets which included COVID-19 updates for church members on keeping safe were emailed to those who have email but about a

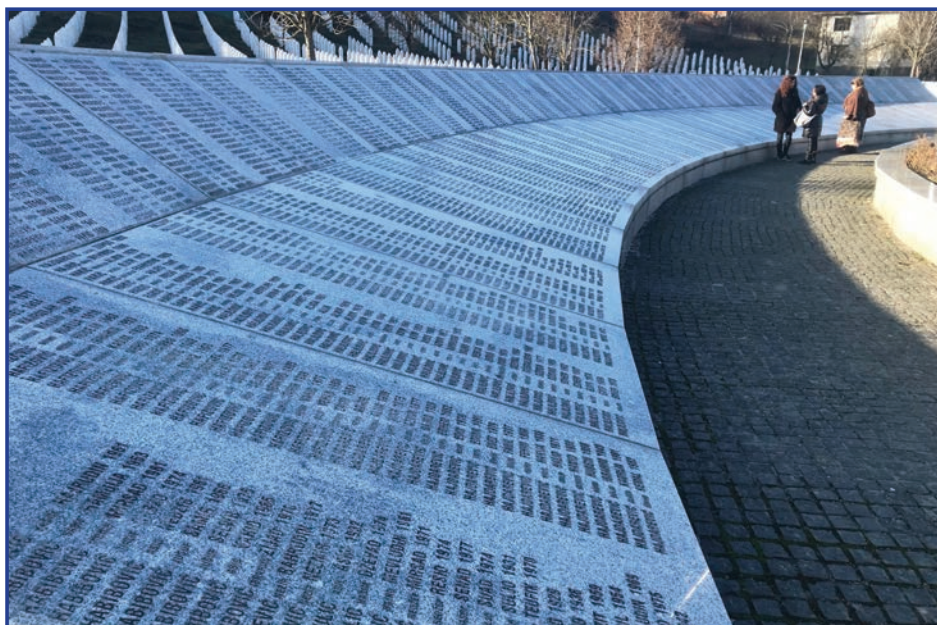
quarter of the congregation doesn't have access to email. Those members have received a hand delivered copy and have thoroughly enjoyed the doorstep chat with their volunteer. Dunfermline United Reformed Church printed a monthly service for people to read through and a DVD for people to watch at home. Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Dunfermline did a live stream of their services and again DVDs were also produced and service sheets posted out to the most vulnerable. It was noted that their outreach was growing with new members joining online, some of whom lived in small island communities without access to an Episcopal Church.

# Remembering Srebrenica

**To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the massacre of Bosnia Muslims at Srebrenica Interfaith Scotland invited an author, and survivor of the genocide, Hasan Hasanovic to speak at an online interfaith dialogue on 8th July.**

Hasan described his escape from the town of Srebrenica as the Bosnian Serb forces invaded, and his subsequent 100 kilometre march over rough terrain to eventual safety. He survived without sleep and only sugared water for eight days. His father and twin brother were not so fortunate, dying along with over 8000 other men and boys.

In March this year I took part in an interfaith delegation to Bosnia to learn about the massacre and about the nearly four-year siege of Sarajevo. For me, dehumanisation was the pervading theme. A recurring pattern in each museum, at the memorial to the massacre, and in the stories of the survivors we met, were the horrors that are enabled by a mindset that denies a group's humanity. We heard how in the years following the break-up



of the state of Yugoslavia, a form of nationalism emerged that portrayed those of other ethnic heritages as inferior. This feature is common across the genocides that have scarred our collective history over recent decades. Whenever a society allows it to become a common perspective that any group of people are lesser, beneath others or worthy of contempt, it paves the way for discrimination, violence and ultimately even genocide.

There was a great deal to learn from the experience, but my most

prominent impression is that we must all take responsibility to guard against even the small, more subtle forms of dehumanisation that occur in all societies. We must not allow our thoughts, words, or actions to reflect a hierarchy of human beings. When we value any groups of people above others, we permit a mindset that, at its worst, allows the most terrible crimes our species is capable of. This is the lesson we must continue to learn, and to teach, in all societies.

**Jamie Spurway**

# Religious Leaders Forum



**Eighteen religious leaders and guests gathered at an online meeting in June as part of their twice annual engagement. It was the first time they had met together online in this way and everyone expressed their disappointment at not being in Samye Ling Buddhist Centre where the meeting was originally planned to be held.**

The Forum was delighted to welcome Ms Campbell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government. Ms Campbell thanked everyone for welcoming her to the meeting and spoke about the tough time that individuals and communities in Scotland and around the globe were facing because of the pandemic. She highlighted the economic disruption to some sections of the community, the feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by many, the difficulty of families not being able to come together, the mental health crisis that society is facing, and the sadness that everyone was facing knowing the number of deaths and the health issues faced by those who contract COVID-19.

Ms Campbell mentioned that the Government is faced with a very complex balancing act in knowing how to protect people from the major health threat while at the same time acknowledging the economic crisis and the other crises that come from having to be in lock down. She acknowledged the great work that the faith communities of Scotland were undertaking. She has been impressed with the resilience of the people of Scotland and that despite such harshness and challenges there were incredibly inspiring stories coming from all across the country. There are so many stories of human goodness and these stories help us to cope when things are at their most difficult. The Scottish Government doesn't want to lose the sense of community, care,

interconnectedness, support and resilience that they have witnessed and experienced. They want to talk about Building Back Better, about social renewal rather than 'going back to normal' and also that they want to tackle the blatant inequalities that the pandemic has distinctly highlighted. These are stubborn inequalities that must be tackled. The Scottish Government want to be clear about making this a priority.

One good news story Ms Campbell shared was that in Scotland currently there are only around 30 rough sleepers and that this most marginalised section of society (the homeless) have been helped incredibly during this crisis and that organisations who work with the homeless have pulled together. This is exciting new territory and they don't want to lose sight of how powerful this is and how to continue with this after 'recovery'. She shared a great insight from Sally Thomas (who works for a homelessness organisation) who said that they have worked together with 'no egos, no logos and no silos'. The Religious Leaders had an opportunity for a frank and open discussion with Ms Campbell and this was followed by further engagement around the re-opening of places of worship in the various phases of lockdown.

The Baha'i representative highlighted the inter-linking between Racism, the pandemic and climate change and offered to share a recently circulated

statement of solidarity from the Baha'i Community of Scotland: 'We, the Bahá'í community of Scotland, are optimistic that humanity will find a positive way to deal with the multiple crises it faces, an optimism affirmed by the International Governing body of the Bahá'í Community in a recent statement below:

**'However difficult matters are at present, and however close to the limits of their endurance some sections of societies are brought, humanity will ultimately pass through this ordeal, and it will emerge on the other side with greater insight and with a deeper appreciation of its inherent oneness and interdependence.'**

The full statement can be accessed by contacting Alan Forsyth at [allan.j.forsyth@gmail.com](mailto:allan.j.forsyth@gmail.com)

The Forum members then broke into groups to explore the following question - 'What wisdom would you share with the world at the present time'. A representative or a religious leader/member from each faith present shared their words of wisdom which were captured via zoom record and then shared on social media platforms. A link to the messages can be found on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gv4EgEAONo&t=27s>



# Scotland Abroad Faith Exchange (SAFE)



**In February I set off for an extensive interfaith engagement with Australia and New Zealand. For a number of years Interfaith Scotland and the Religious Diversity Centre of New Zealand, Auckland Interfaith Association and the many local interfaith groups of NZ have been engaging in a learning exchange and recently this exchange has also included engagement with the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne.**

The engagements in Australia went ahead and my first meeting was with the inspirational founder of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne, Rev. Helen Summers, and this was followed by an equally inspiring meeting with Rev. Philip Huggins an interfaith and climate activist who is known globally for his commitment to spirituality and justice.

On Monday 2nd March Helen had organised a public meeting for World Interfaith Harmony Week on the theme of 'Bushfires and the Climate Crisis: How do we make 2020 a transformative year for all Creation?' and I along with other guest presenters spoke to the topic. My close friends in Corryong, Australia, James and Christina, had recently had their 90 acres of bushland and their home completely burnt in the fires and so I knew through them the extreme trauma and sadness caused by the fires. The meeting was very well attended and demonstrated the diversity of faiths found in Australia and the huge impact the climate crisis has had on their land and people.

A further cuppa and conversation took place with Michael Hail who had

worked for Interfaith Scotland for a year during the Year of Young People. Michael is now working in Melbourne focussing on domestic violence. Michael is keeping in touch with us and will continue to promote diversity and tackle injustice.

From Melbourne I flew to New Zealand and met with Jocelyn Armstrong and her husband George. Jocelyn is the founder of the Religious Diversity Centre and has recently been awarded the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lambeth Hubert Walter Award in recognition of her "outstanding contribution to interfaith relations in New Zealand."

The meeting focussed on helping to prepare papers for a meeting with the NZ Government in the hope of raising funds for the great work that the Religious Diversity Centre undertakes. We parted fully expecting that we would be meeting again shortly. A public meeting had been planned with the Auckland Interfaith Association and with the Local Interfaith Group of Whangarei. I was also looking forward very much to our Board Member, Trishna Singh, joining me for engagement with diverse



**Jocelyn Armstrong with her husband George**

faith communities in Auckland, including the very active Sikh Community.

Then with the rise of COVID-19 cases, New Zealand went into full lock-down and I found myself (along with my husband Nick) stranded and having to go into isolation. We spent the next 4 weeks trying to get home and were eventually repatriated on the 24th of April. It was interesting, challenging and inspiring being in NZ at such a critical time and although now engaging from afar I was delighted to be zooming in to the AGM of Auckland Interfaith on 6th August to give the public address originally planned for March!

**Dr. Maureen Sier**



## Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

The first ever online meeting of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief was held on 22nd June this year. Interfaith Scotland are secretariat for the group, so we assist with contacting speakers and making notes of the discussions.

The June meeting focused on the new Hate Crime Bill in Scotland, and featured two speakers, Danny Boyle of BEMIS, and Kishan Manocha of The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Broadly, both speakers expressed support for the new bill and its intentions.

Danny spoke of the need to have better data on the patterns of hate crime across Scotland, commenting that the data for incidents of Islamophobic hatred would suggest a much lower level of such incidents than we suspect Muslims experience.

He also expressed his support for the exclusion of sectarianism from the new bill, as it is already covered in other legislation. In addition, Danny described that we need to still be able to have 'brave, informed and inclusive discussions about our differences'. The Law should be the remedy of last resort he concluded, 'dialogue, respect and citizenship come first'. Kishan's presentation focused more on the international context. He relayed how the international community has been long concerned with intolerance, but despite efforts to address the issue it is on the rise globally. He

explained that differences in the way that data is collected by different states makes comparison difficult, but that there appears to be a growing climate of intolerance, with both states and non-state actors contributing to it. This climate leads to acts of violence against groups of different religions and beliefs.

Kishan closed by emphasizing the role of change agents such as the media, and the importance of religious literacy, critical thinking and empathy.

## Supporting faith communities and local interfaith groups online

Since the beginning of lockdown Interfaith Scotland has been delighted to support fortnightly and then monthly meetings for faith communities and local interfaith groups online. Participants have

joined the online engagement from diverse faith communities and diverse geographical locations. The meetings have been a great opportunity to find out what challenges communities are facing across Scotland; to signpost

communities to resources, including funding resources; to share best practice and to stand together in solidarity at this time of crisis.



# Scottish Interfaith Week 2020



**SIFW** Scottish  
Interfaith  
Week

## Connecting

8th - 15th November 2020

#sifw2020 #keeponconnecting

[www.scottishinterfaithweek.org](http://www.scottishinterfaithweek.org)



**This year Scottish Interfaith Week will look a little different, but only slightly. Your events may be online or require social distancing but we will still share and promote your events, as we do every year!**

All you need to do is submit your event on our website as usual at <http://scottishinterfaithweek.org/submit-an-event> and we will promote it and put it in our brochure for all to see. This pandemic is allowing us all to engage with more people in Scotland and across the world and we hope you will all be as inspired as we are to create new and unique ways to gather and share in these unprecedented times.

Our theme for 2020 is 'Connecting'. People have been connecting more than ever to support one another, to pray, offer hope, guidance, work and build relationships. We may not always

have been able to see each other or meet but the importance of connecting has never been so prevalent. Finally, during SIFW itself and for the first time ever, SIFW will be curating our own exciting week-long programme of online events for you to take part in, so watch this space!

If you can't wait till 8-15th November to get involved, you can:

- Follow us on our social media platforms: Facebook: FollowSIFW  
Twitter: @SIFWevents  
Instagram: sifwevents  
YouTube: Scottish Interfaith Week

- Organise your own event during SIFW and submit it on the SIFW website at [www.scottishinterfaithweek.org/submit-an-event](http://www.scottishinterfaithweek.org/submit-an-event)
- Use our hashtags when you tweet us: #sifw2020 #keeponconnecting
- Print and put up our posters in shops/bus stops/garden centres/parks/community centres. The poster can be downloaded from the Resources section of the Scottish Interfaith Week website

## Scottish Law Commission Consultation

**The Scottish Law Commission asked Interfaith Scotland to organise a focus group with faith communities to discuss the rights of cohabitating couples when their relationships break down.**

The Commission was keen to collect the views of the faith communities on whether they thought that there should be a reform in the law to better protect the rights of cohabitating couples. These views would feed into their recommendations to the Scottish Government on reform of the law. The

event was to originally take place at Interfaith Scotland's dialogue centre but was rearranged to take place via Zoom on 5th May. The advantage of moving the consultation online was that an extra 20 people attended from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths and the Church of Jesus Christ

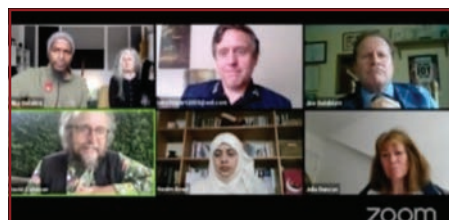
of Latter-day Saints. Two members of the Scottish Law Commission gave a presentation and facilitated the meeting. Participants from across the faith communities strongly expressed the view that the rights of cohabitating couples should be better protected under the law.

# News From Local Interfaith Groups

## Edinburgh Interfaith Resilience Programmes

For Edinburgh Interfaith Association, bringing faith groups together in dialogue is a key part of our mission along with promoting understanding, trust and positive action. Faith communities have played a central role in supporting vulnerable groups during COVID-19 and we as an interfaith organisation have tried to do our part. We have moved a number of our dialogue events online. We held a Collective Prayer Vigil against Coronavirus on 2nd April. On 23rd April the Religious Leaders of Edinburgh produced a video thanking the NHS for their tireless service. We held an event entitled 'Understanding Revelation' on 28th May with three speakers: Rev Scott McKenna, Shaykh Hassan Rabbani and Rabbi Davie Rose. We hosted a joint event to mark World Refugee Day in partnership with Dublin City Interfaith and on 17th June I spoke at the Cities Faith & Community Forum (CFCF) on the role faith communities can play in rehabilitating European Cities, which was attended by participants from 12 European countries.

In addition to our interfaith dialogue programmes we have taken on four additional emergency projects funded through Foundation Scotland and the Scottish Government; Interfaith Insights, Isolation Station, Faithful Friends and Time to Talk. Interfaith Insights is a weekly online live chat show airing on Tuesdays on our Facebook page from 1pm. Its primary aims are to help support the mental health and well-being of our faith community



The above photo is a clip from our 'Healing the Planet' episode for Earth Day.

members by sharing positive stories of faith community responses during COVID-19 and offering practical advice on how to cope during lockdown from sleeping patterns to meditation. It also aims to connect both organisations and guests and audiences of different faiths. Viewers are encouraged to get involved both by interacting with the hosts and guests and the social justice projects highlighted.

The show features interviews with amazing guests from founders of NGOs, musicians, human rights advocates, religious leaders, local volunteers and first responders. Special extended interviews entitled, 'Spotlight on Faith' are released each Thursday at 6pm. To date our guests have included Michelle John, finalist of The Voice UK, and Cabinet Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf. One of our audience members commented, "It was just like watching a Scottish and religious version of The One Show but more interesting and inspiring!" Interfaith Insights is all about celebrating work inspired by faith.

Isolation Station sees people of faith share daily short inspiring prayers and reflections to support people

during lockdown. Faithful Friends is a befriending project which has seen EIFA volunteers from different faith communities connect with vulnerable, lonely and isolated people during lockdown through telephone and zoom calls and they have delivered almost 1,000 meals to their befrienders. One beneficiary Aisha (name changed) has been struggling with feeling like she does not 'fit in' or identify with a specific religious group. Our co-ordinator Kirstee set up conversations with different Faith leaders and now she explains she has, "a renewed sense of excitement for her future."

Time to Talk offers a national multi-faith listening service to care home residents and their families suffering as a result of COVID-19. "No advice is offered, only kindness, empathy and a willingness to listen." It has been widely reported how badly care homes have been affected with such a tragic loss of life and we hope this service can provide some comfort at this time. For more details email Claire at [claireattimetotalk@gmail.com](mailto:claireattimetotalk@gmail.com) or go to [www.edinburghinterfaith.com](http://www.edinburghinterfaith.com)

**Iain Stewart, Director of Edinburgh Interfaith Association**



**Cabinet Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf takes the 'Spotlight on Faith' chair**



Nasim and guest discuss healthy eating.



# Interfaith Glasgow's Response to the Pandemic

In the past months, we have seen remarkable resilience among the communities we work with and it has been a privilege to play what role we can in helping foster that resilience. To provide comfort to people isolated from their communities and to foster interfaith solidarity, we produced two short films for social media. The first - 'We are Together' - has been viewed thousands of times and features ten religious leaders from across Glasgow's diverse communities offering messages of comfort and support to people of all faiths and none. The second film offers words of thanks from a wide range of religious and community leaders across Glasgow to NHS staff and all frontline workers. Both can be viewed on IG's YouTube channel.



Due to the closure of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, we have had to suspend our 'Faith to Faith' series (run in partnership with St Mungo Museum) and have instead developed an online dialogue series entitled 'Faith and COVID-19', which has sought to help people maintain a sense of connection with others and combat loneliness and isolation, whilst tackling some of the particular challenges that the pandemic has presented. The first event - 'Staying Connected at a Time of Physical



Distancing' - allowed people of all faiths to hear about some of the innovative ways different communities are connecting, practicing, and praying during lockdown. Not only did we hear from local places of worship, but the online format allowed us to connect with speakers in London and New York. The second event - 'Sources of Solace' - was more personal, as people from diverse traditions, shared their sources of solace, from prayers and passages of scripture, through to art and photography. Our third event in the series used the format of Scriptural Reasoning, as we heard from three speakers - Jewish, Christian and Muslim - on the theme of 'solitude' as it relates to the experiences of Moses and Jesus in the wilderness.

During the lockdown, we have also moved our Weekend Club for refugees, asylum seekers, and new migrants online, with monthly virtual events that offer social connection, respite, and advice to refugee families facing particular challenges as a result of the crisis. So far our amazing interfaith team of Weekend Club volunteers have managed to source more than 15 second-hand laptops and tablets for participants and we are also providing data-top-ups for those without WiFi, so that poverty is not a barrier to participation.

Crucially, in the last few months, we have seen a greater need than ever before for the Interfaith Food Justice Network (IFJN), which we coordinate

in partnership with Faith in Community Scotland. Cooperation across the network has increased dramatically and provided a lifeline for many. The WhatsApp group is used daily and has doubled in size during the pandemic, now bringing together over 50 groups engaged in food provision; and we are now servicing fortnightly Zoom meetings for the IFJN development group, providing an opportunity for people to discuss the challenges they are facing.

We have also been working with a number of IFJN groups to produce a short film promoting GCVS's new 'Glasgow Helps' helpline and website, which is connecting people to the many groups working across the city to meet the variety of needs that the pandemic has exacerbated. We have released the film on social media and we hope it will be shared widely so that it reaches those in need. As the lockdown eases, we will continue to seek opportunities to build interfaith bridges; and to provide contexts in which we can come together to explore and reimagine the kind of normal to which we wish to return.



**Dr Rose Drew, Chief Executive Officer, Interfaith Glasgow**

## Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group

During COVID-19, we wanted to provide support to our members, and to others in the local community who are elderly, lonely, vulnerable and have health issues. We received funding from the Scottish Government's



COVID-19 relief fund via Interfaith Scotland. With the funding we were able to provide a variety of services including: basic food provisions; fresh fruit for the elderly; calling every week to see how people were doing; help and assistance with hospital appointments; picking up prescriptions and delivering medications; top-up on mobile phones for people to stay in contact with their families and friends, especially those who have been separated from their families and communities and those who were struggling in this crisis. The group also provided 100 masks to Edinburgh Sick Children's hospital for visitors, parents and admin staff.

One elderly member of Edinburgh

Women's Group told us, "I cannot thank you enough for your amazingly generous action in bringing me all these groceries and the huge amount of fruit as well! I should be really healthy now and all this will last me for a considerable time."



## Aberdeen Interfaith Group

After a month or so of silence, slowing down and readjusting to life at home, uncertain and afraid, we decided to meet online on Zoom at the end of April for an interfaith dialogue event. We chose to reflect on the positive theme of Gratitude at this time of so many negative thoughts and feelings. At our first meeting we had a visitor all the way from Lochaber who was delighted to be able to join us 'virtually' from there!

Our annual Meditation Day, which was originally to be held at the Varapunya Meditation Centre, was moved online and we had a dialogue on the theme of Sleep and Rest. It was amazing how much the faiths had in common as they shared about the necessity of a good sleep/rest. Our next meeting was our rescheduled event on Climate, which turned out to be even more relevant as we were all appreciating nature more and were aware of less noise and pollution. Jeff Rogers, a Climate Reality Officer trained with the Al Gore Foundation, was an excellent keynote speaker. Our June meeting looked at Community with a visit from Iain Johnston of Faith and Community

Scotland, an organisation which is doing so much to support people through the stages of lockdown with their community projects every week. Our July meeting was on the theme of Time, which we have all come to look at differently recently, have we not? These months have given us the opportunity for others to join us from around the country and for us to take part in events organised by other local interfaith groups - thanks to Interfaith Scotland for keeping us all informed. We have good reason to have an annual Zoom account to widen our net and cut down on the miles travelled and time spent in getting to meetings.

Aberdeen Interfaith Group received a grant of £450 through Interfaith Scotland from the Scottish Government to support people during COVID-19. The grant paid for 14 x 20 kilo bags of rice at a reduced price from Fair Deal to donate to the Christian charity Somebody Cares. This made up 480 portions of rice which were delivered to the poor, vulnerable and marginalised in the area as well as those self-isolating at this time.

The Manager of Fair Deal Superstore shared his appreciation: "We are feeling happy and overwhelmed to be a part of this service. We appreciate the contribution from Aberdeen Interfaith towards our community help of people during this pandemic crisis."



Nigel Dower, Treasurer of Aberdeen Interfaith Group, was present to see the rice being collected and loaded. "It was good to be involved with this initiative and to have some practical way to help those who are in need because of Covid-19."

**Patricia Findlay, Chair of Aberdeen Interfaith Group**



## Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh



Faiths Together Skye and Localsh has managed to continue with regular meetings during lockdown thanks to the availability of video conferencing. Alongside the benefit of not adding to carbon emissions travelling from one part of the island to the other to meet up, it has also been reassuring to see that everyone is safe and well. It has allowed us to join some of the wonderful events being hosted by Interfaith Scotland without leaving our own homes and we have been able to welcome guest speakers from as far away as India and Glasgow(!) and enjoy their wonderful presentations. We were delighted to be able to welcome a new addition to our group in the person of Rabbi Judith Berry whose fascinating talk on Judaism was very well received and prompted interesting discussion.

An ever-increasing awareness of the combined impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the Climate Emergency has given fresh impetus to our spiritual discussions on our vision for the future of the planet, its people and the environment in all its aspects. Therefore, many meetings have focused on identifying the spiritual qualities essential to bring about the change that is required and to achieve

the outcome for all humanity of a fairer, greener, more sustainable way of life.

In keeping with this theme and wishing to build on a project currently underway on Skye another meeting was organised with the primary focus on music. Prior to lockdown a Skye-wide choir of over 100 people had been formed with the aim of performing Faure's

Requiem at some point this year. With the onset of the pandemic this date has provisionally been moved to Spring 2021. The choir master wanted to commission a work for the second half of the concert focusing on the vision of a new way of life for all after lockdown. One of our members suggested her brother, Philip, who is a published composer of sacred music, might write such a piece. Philip has subsequently met with the members of Faiths Together Skye & Lochalsh to explore ideas for texts which resulted in a rich exchange of material. Further to this meeting it's likely a poem written by one of our group may also be set to music to be included in this choral performance. We have also submitted a number of our poems for the 'Creativity and Crisis' section of the Interfaith Scotland newsletter, many of which have as their theme connecting with nature during the pandemic.

We were grateful to receive a grant from the Scottish Government via Interfaith Scotland to support two worthy causes during Covid-19. The first was a donation to Counselling Care Skye and Lochalsh to enable counsellors to work online with clients during the pandemic. The second was the purchase of 85 trees to be planted

in the Trees for Life World Interfaith Harmony Grove at Dundreggon. The dedication message was "To provide a place of solace for the families and friends of the people of Skye who lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic." To see the World Interfaith Harmony Grove go to

<https://treesforlife.org.uk/groves/g8922>

**Pat McNicol, Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh**

## East Renfrewshire Faith Forum

On receiving a grant from the Scottish Government, East Renfrewshire Faith Forum joined a local partnership involving Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire, Neilston Development Trust, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, East Renfrewshire Good Causes, IncludeMe2 and Barrhead Rotary in providing volunteers and/or funding to purchase 100% cotton fabric, elastic and threads to make face masks for families living in the Levern Valley area of East Renfrewshire.

A plan was put into action; fabric, elastic and thread was sourced from a Glasgow business, volunteer sewers were recruited locally, and volunteers were enlisted to do the fetching and carrying. The aim was to provide efficient, washable face masks which would be sold to local families who wished them for as little as 50p each. Families who are on low income and who can't afford even this modest cost can get them free of charge.

The face masks became available for sale from a central point in Barrhead's Main Street on 25 June (the James McGuire Building). The face masks are sold in a bag of two for £1. Included in the bag is a paper label saying which organisations are involved in the project. It has been a privilege to assist in such a worthwhile project.

## Fife Interfaith Group

Interfaith Scotland invited the group to apply for a Scottish Government grant to support those affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. On receiving the funds, the group purchased a Zoom account which has helped the committee coordinate their efforts, develop and expand group relationships, and support the faith groups as they reach out into their own faith communities especially. Fife Interfaith Group (FIG) now meets weekly via a brief Zoom call and has also been able to hold their AGM on Zoom for their members. One committee member uses the account to help their community to organise and run a Bible study class that would otherwise have been cancelled.

The committee decided that the majority of the grant should go towards making a small difference to many lives by supporting the charities and good causes already in place in Fife. They made a donation to a company based in Fife which has been producing PPE for health workers and this added 150 masks into the system. Fife Interfaith Group are happy to be

involved in a small way to help protect NHS staff and other key workers.

Last year the Kirkcaldy food bank gave a presentation to the Fife Interfaith Group and group members promised to publicise their efforts in their respective faith communities. This food bank is independently run by unpaid volunteers and FIG was able to give them a donation towards supporting people during Covid-19.

The group West Fife Support for the Vulnerable (S.H.I.E.L.D) has been using the LDS church building in Dunfermline. A number of members of that congregation help in the sorting, packing, and distribution of the donations. Fife Interfaith Group decided to donate to their cause. Sarah Keeble from the group was genuinely touched by the donation and said, "Thank you so much, every donation helps us support someone who is isolated or vulnerable".



After some consideration the groups decided that they should identify a good cause in the East Neuk of Fife because the two donations mentioned previously supported people in west and central Fife. The East Neuk Frail Elderly Forum was identified and a donation was made.

## East Kilbride Interfaith Forum

The East Kilbride Interfaith Forum has met twice on Zoom during the lockdown period. We are a small group of people mostly from the Baha'i and Christian communities. Our style of meeting in the past has often been to share readings from different faith traditions, or world figures, on a particular theme and so this format has transferred quite well to Zoom. Our first theme, earlier in lockdown, was on the theme of Peace. We recognised that our faith traditions and words of scripture or holy texts are a great source of comfort and resilience to us in times of personal and societal crisis. We were pleased to be joined by Dr Lisa Cameron MP, who is a regular attendee at our interfaith events. Lisa shared a Psalm with us and spoke of how it has brought comfort and strength in her own faith journey.

Our second meeting was entitled 'One Race, the Human Race' in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. We shared readings from faith traditions and world figures which highlighted the oneness of humanity. Another regular supporter of our group is Ms. Linda Fabiani MSP, and she reflected on the Black Lives Matter debate in the Scottish Parliament and offered her own thoughts on the continuing commitment we must make against racism.

We have enjoyed our two meetings on Zoom. They have enabled people to participate who perhaps might not have been able to make a physical meeting, although we have missed the opportunity to share tea and cake together and look forward to being able to meet in person again.

## Soul Space online

For several years members of Central Scotland Interfaith (CSI) have taken part in Soul Space roughly every six weeks. The group meets at 6.30pm on a Sunday evening in the hall of Stirling Methodist Church bringing some food to put on a 'bring and share' buffet. After eating and chatting together we move into a smaller more comfortable room and share reflections on a previously arranged theme. Since the start of lock-down we have kept the reflection part going, but through Zoom, and have increased the frequency to monthly.

The theme we had arranged at our last physical meeting was appropriately to be 'technology' and so we shared thoughts on this when we zoomed on the last Sunday in April. A month later we turned our attention to 'rhythm and music', and in June to 'normality' and in July to 'time'. After a participant has shared their reflection, which may be personal thoughts, poetry, music, readings from sacred or secular books, which range from really serious to light-hearted and humorous, we make a point of not entering into discussion, but to move on to another contributor. It's not compulsory to say anything, but most participants speak for one to five minutes. Finally, we spend about 5 minutes in silent meditation/prayer/reflection and then decide on the theme for the next Soul Space.

**Andrew Sarle,**  
Central Scotland Interfaith



## Bahá'í Community in Dumfries and Galloway

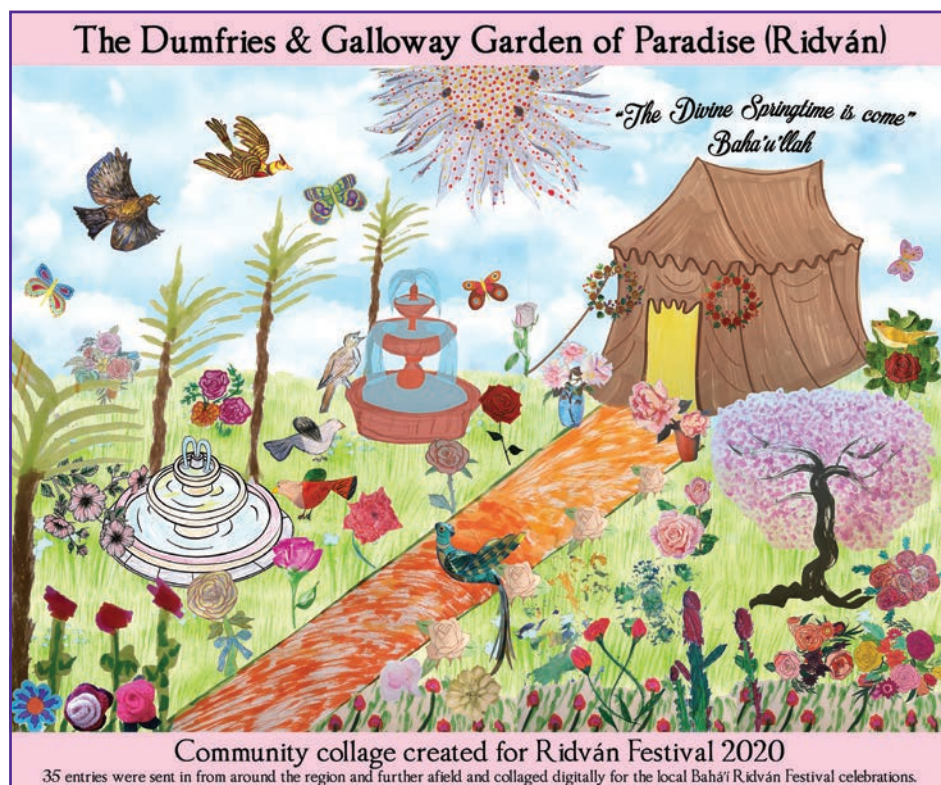
Across Dumfries and Galloway the Bahá'í community and their friends, neighbours and co-workers have been creating ways for isolated people to feel connected and celebrate this very special Springtime. From April 20th to May 1st across the world Bahá'ís celebrate the Festival of Ridván, which means Paradise in Arabic.

It celebrates a most important time in the Bahá'í calendar, when the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Baha'u'llah publicly declared His message of the unity of humanity and world peace. His declaration took place in the Garden of Ridván, on a green island within the Tigris river in Baghdad in April 1863.

Usually Bahá'ís will open their homes over the twelve days of the Ridván Festival and welcome friends and family, neighbours and co-workers for prayers, music, storytelling and festive food. This year the global health crisis and social distancing measures have encouraged the community to think creatively about how to celebrate together without actually being physically together.

With the initiative of local Bahá'í and community artist Kirsty Turpie the community has made a collective piece of art. A community collage has been created online which incorporates the contributions of over 35 people from diverse backgrounds and ages between 4 and 75. Before the First day of Ridván Kirsty sent out a brief to friends and young Peacemaker groups inviting their contributions:

"Please help us to create a beautiful Ridván Garden by drawing one part of the garden and sending in a photograph of your artwork to be added to the garden collage. There



are many items that make up the garden where Baha'u'llah shared His important message. You can choose to draw and colour in, paint or collage one of the following: a fountain, a beautiful plant pot, a tree, a rose, a rose bush, or a nightingale. Let your imagination run free and share what you create."

After the collage was completed Kirsty shared - "The efforts of everyone have been amazing! It is uplifting to receive so many pictures from people and to know that they dedicated their time and imagination to sharing in this celebration. We all want to transport ourselves to this garden of paradise. Imagination combined with spiritual impulses create such beauty!"

The Bahá'í Community of Dumfries and Galloway have also been holding regular devotionals which are open to people of all faiths and beliefs and have been attending by people from Dumfries and Galloway as well as other parts of the UK and

also internationally as the news is shared with others. Sometimes there is a theme from an online resource platform which provides discussion questions on themes such as race amity, wellness, compassion, and justice (see <https://www.bahai.org.uk/elevate>). The programmes have readings from all faiths and beliefs and participants are invited to share their own prayer or reading too, or just come with a smile. Many of the attendees now feel part of a friendly, welcoming community.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í faith, shared this beautiful statement about the essential unity of humanity: "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship....so powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth." As we emerge from these troubling times may our unity continue to shine through our words, actions and collective creativity.

# Glasgow Jewish Representative Council

**As we start to look towards an easing of lockdown in the weeks ahead, our community remains well placed for this; we are working closely with partner organisations, local authorities and government to ensure that we only start to open our communal buildings in line with guidance and advice that ensures that our community members, employees and volunteers are safe and cared for.**

Covid-19 has taken a toll on us all. Like the entire Glasgow community, we have lost a significant number of loved ones due to the virus. Families and loved ones have had to grieve in a socially distanced world. Many people have had to isolate from their friends and family at a distressing and difficult time. Some have faced job insecurity with potential redundancy and small business owners are insecure about the future viability of their businesses. Regardless of who you are, this virus has had an impact on at least an element of your life.

Now, we move into the phases of easing lockdown. Already the numbers being allowed to attend funerals has slightly increased and more people are getting out of their homes for limited activities. All of our synagogues have ongoing daily programmes available virtually on Zoom and they

welcome non-members to these; there is talk about synagogues reopening in the future and currently each synagogue is examining their own unique circumstances and doing what is possible and safe for them. We need to take a realistic and somewhat cautious approach to this and especially the upcoming high holy days in mid-September. It does seem likely that there will at least be severe limitations on attendance at these, with each synagogue possibly devising innovative ideas for "rationing" attendance while also being as inclusive as possible.

There are currently remote service offerings on Zoom provided by the Glasgow Reform Synagogue – which will continue to include the High Holy days, while the Orthodox synagogues have extensive online offerings that are largely excerpts or participatory

readings – not to mention a number of events through the week. Both these organisations will welcome non-members to these.

The "Pulling Together" volunteers continue to serve the community well and through the generosity of their members and a few philanthropists, have provided PPE free of charge to many people in the community – not just in Glasgow, but across Scotland. Our Care organisations have reached out to support the vulnerable in our community with vigour and kindness.

So, whilst Covid-19 has caused loss, distress and difficulties it has also brought out the best in our Jewish Community. We have come together to support one another at a difficult time and worked tirelessly to ensure we are inclusive and united in our approach. We are a community to be proud of.

## "Even at this time of social distancing we are still one heart"

**Since lockdown started in March the Jewish people have celebrated two of the three major pilgrimage festivals. The first of the pilgrimage festivals being Passover, the anniversary of the Jewish nation's miraculous exodus from Egyptian slavery more than 3,000 years ago.**

Passover is a time when families gather together to have their Seder meals – a feast that includes reading, drinking wine, telling stories, eating special foods, singing, and every family has its own special traditions. Usually we all have stories of previous Seder nights like the Passover that many glasses of wine were spilled over the table, or the Passover when there was no kosher milk, or even the Passover when the cat brought a mouse in to the house – this year Passover will



be remembered by many as the year that we could not gather together with family and friends and celebrate, this year was the year of lockdown and isolation.

Seven weeks after Passover we celebrated Shavuot the second pilgrimage festival – also known as the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. In the Bible, Shavuot marks the wheat harvest in the land of Israel and according to the Sages it is also the anniversary of the giving of the Torah to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai.

There are several traditions associated with Shavuot, one being spending the whole night learning, another being eating dairy foods only and yet another is decorating the synagogue with flowers and plants. This year, as the synagogues were shuttered, due to Covid-19, and no communal worship could take place and we were not going to be decorating the synagogue, the Rabbi and council of the synagogue organised a team of volunteers to deliver small plants and flowers to all members, bringing us all a touch of Shavuot to all our houses and reminding us all that we were all part of one family.

**Alan Kay**



# Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society (SABS)

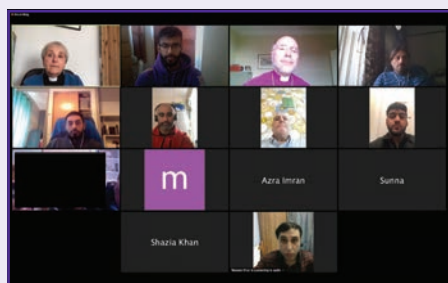
**A Scottish Eid Tribute to the NHS and all frontline workers from SABS**

In May 2020, The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society joined with 100 partners and associates across Scotland, on the blessed occasion of Eid Al Fitr, to pay tribute and extend our gratitude to the NHS and all frontline workers. Eid Al Fitr marks the end of the holy month of fasting; the Month of Ramadan – a time for charity, kindness and reflection. On the occasion this year, we paused to remember all those souls who departed during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. Our heartfelt condolences were paid to their

families, friends and colleagues. This Eid, a heartfelt note of appreciation from every organisation was sent to all NHS staff, emergency services, civil society organisations, faith community operations, support teams, carers, supermarket chains and independent grocers, and to all other frontline workers who have absolutely surpassed their



duties to our country as a whole, and to its communities, over the course of this pandemic. It was our collective stand in solidarity, thanksgiving and humanity. Shabir Beg OBE, Chairman of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society said, ***"With humility, I thank each and every one of you who have, on the auspicious occasion of Eid, paid tribute to all NHS and frontline workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic."***



## Service on The Fast and Prayer for Peace 2020

In March 2020, in an annual tradition, with a now virtual spin, members of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society and the Shi'a Community participated in a Zoom Blessing with the Revd Canon Marion Chatterley, Vice Provost St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, and The Rt Rev John Armes, Bishop of Edinburgh. Every year, during the final days of the Month of Ramadan, with great warmth and fraternity, the Scottish Episcopal Church allow us to convene at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh and share in a blessing and a prayer during the auspicious time.

## Edinburgh Theological Seminary Class Discussion 2020

In March 2020, Ali Hussnain from SABS, and member of the Board of Interfaith Scotland, was honoured to have spoken to students of Ministry at the Edinburgh Theological Seminary upon the gracious invitation of the Reverend Duncan Peters. SABS members spoke to future Ministers of the Free Church of Scotland about Shi'a Islam in an engaging class discussion that touched upon important points concerning both Islam and Christianity. Our thanks extend to the Reverend Duncan Peters for facilitating this for the fourth year running.



## Dispelling Divides – Shi'a and Sunni Belief

With an increase in sectarian tensions across campuses in the UK, an event at the University of Edinburgh was held in February 2020 entitled “Dispelling Divides” with the aim to bring harmony and dispel misinformation. The programme, organised by the Islamic Society of Edinburgh University and Jafaria Foundation Mosque, began with a personal conversation between two clerics, SABS Director General Imam Razawi and Shaykh Hassan Rabbani who discussed the differences and similarities of Shi’a and Sunni Belief. Many topics were touched on from the beginnings of Islam, to the development of sects after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). Jurisprudence and the intellectual heritage of Islam was also discussed. The event was a success, with a pledge of unity. This begins a potential journey across Scotland’s campuses to promote unity and peace.

## The Queen's New Year Honours List – Mr Shabir Beg OBE

Mr Shabir Beg received an OBE for services to interfaith relations in Glasgow in the Queen's New Year Honours List for 2020. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said, "The people of Scotland recognised in the Queen's New Year Honours have made exceptional contributions to communities the length and breadth of this country and beyond. Their service and dedication in fields ranging from the arts, education and sport to business, charity, community cohesion and science has helped to promote Scotland all over the world and benefited people throughout society".

Mr Shabir Beg OBE shared the following, "That my name sits alongside the names of some truly

exceptional people humbles me. I do not deem myself fit for this recognition, and so firstly extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Muslim communities across Scotland, and then to my family, friends, and colleagues, to all of whom this award truly belongs. A mandatory mention to Scotland's various faith communities and families: The journey of interfaith engagement requires all parties to be equally impassioned about it. And so thanks is owed to all who opened their



arms to Scotland's Muslim communities across denominations – we are loyal to the cause of peace-building, and work in fellowship with all who share that ideal. I pray that our communities would continue to innovative new approaches to improving interfaith relations as the challenges we face globally transform and become ever more complex. And I hope that the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society will continue to put its heart and soul into working on the frontlines".

## Salvation Army Sunday Morning Singalong

**One of the positive things about COVID-19 has been the opportunity it has given us to get to know our neighbours. Since Easter, we have been out every Sunday morning to do a 15-minute music slot outside our house.**

We are fortunate by the way our road is laid out as there is plenty of space for social distancing and about 40 people gather in family groups each week. We play a couple of tunes on our brass instruments to start and then do a selection of nursery rhymes and children's songs, ending with another song/hymn tune. We know that the people are not gathering for a church service, so we don't preach but we usually offer some kind of seed thought connected to the tunes we choose. In addition to the singalong we have given out about 15 children's activity packs which contained a Bible story and information about the Salvation Army. It is more about presence than proclamation; it is about offering a service to our community and building trust. Conversations with the people of the estate also happen outside of the Sunday timeslot. We now know a lot more people and a lot more people know us. They know where they can come for support, a listening ear or with their questions about life and



faith. It is a different kind of open-air ministry and it is a joy. A funny thing that happened was that one lady nominated us for a Community Spirit award. The sponsors were Edinburgh Gin and we won a prize of Raspberry Gin Fizz! We had to respectfully ask her to take down the posting



on Facebook [as the Salvation Army encourages an alcohol-free lifestyle], although we were delighted by 'the spirit' which led her to put us forward!

**Alan C. Young, Major Divisional Mission Enabler, The Salvation Army**



# Hindu Temple of Scotland, Rutherglen

**We have truly witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon this year - the transcontinental invasion by the Coronavirus! When the outbreak grew to pandemic proportions and Lockdown was announced in the UK, The Hindu Temple of Scotland shut its doors in compliance with government regulations. At this point of time, the need for spiritual solace was palpable as levels of anxiety spiralled, compounded by concerns about financial loss and economic hardship.**

Keeping the people's wellbeing at heart, the Temple Committee conferred on the best method to reach out and support devotees in mind and spirit in these difficult times. It was fortuitous that all four Honorary Priests at our Hindu Temple were tech savvy and chose Zoom as a platform for streaming the regular worship digitally. The first virtual Prayer Service for Universal Wellbeing was aptly zoomed on 25 March, the auspicious vedic Hindu New Year. We felt heartened by the positive feedback on the visual experience and sound quality. Then followed a steep learning curve for team working remotely across the globe - as one member was stationed in India! The service, conducted from the home of the presiding Priest, is about 40 minutes long, Zoomed regularly every Sunday at midday and additionally on special occasions. Details are advertised in advance on the devotees' WhatsApp group. An extra dimension is the addition of Devotional Song audios sent by the



children who take music lessons in the Temple.

In terms of practical steps that we decided to take once lockdown was

introduced, we prioritised the following areas: safety of the devotees, the priests and the committee members in the temple; increasing the floor space in the temple hall to accommodate devotees safely; reducing the maintenance work for volunteers and committee members; and continuing conducting the service online. When the Scottish Government guidelines for places of worship were published on 20 June we were very reassured that we had already introduced the majority of the good practices stated in the guidelines. As restrictions were eased in June, temple volunteers took part in a massive clean-up and decluttering operation. The cherry on the cake was when all our efforts culminated into an exemplary temple service that was conducted by one of our Priests and filmed by BBC Scotland showing all the guidelines in place!



**Sujata Sriram,  
Volunteer and Committee Member**

# Creativity In Crisis

At the start of the Covid-19 crisis Interfaith Scotland launched a 'Creativity in Crisis' project, encouraging faith communities and local interfaith groups to submit items on the theme for the Interfaith Scotland newsletter. The following is a selection of stories, poems and artwork reflecting on the crisis and what it has meant to people over the last few months.

## 99th Day of Lockdown

Cintia Stammers 29 June 2020,  
Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh

99th Day of Lockdown: if I didn't have a faith to hang on to I'd probably be suffering from acute depression. Some days are very difficult: extra effort is needed to get out of bed, then even more effort to start a short meditation. A little later, an enormous amount of endeavour is required to leave the house and continue the meditation among flowers and grasses and trees. I am very lucky to be surrounded by such beautiful fields, lochs, hills. Fortunately, gratitude comes forward without effort.

Then the day begins. And every time a seed of loneliness or despair appears, I make an effort to not let it sprout and take root. I think how grateful I am to be alive, to be able to communicate - at a distance - with family and friends. One day, a scare: a loved one may have the virus. Faith, prayer, meditation are the best solution. This time it was a false alarm. But it was close, so this was a good opportunity to remember that I need to be prepared for anything and be grateful for being alive. Today we are going into Phase Two. Will it bring any changes? I hope it brings changes for the better. This pandemic has made me more aware of the need to be conscious of God and to try to see His presence everywhere, as everything is a manifestation of God's energy. I am grateful that these 99 days of isolation have made me feel closer to God, and I hope I never forget Him.

## Build Back Better

Lois Cameron, May 2020,  
Central Scotland Interfaith Group

Our nation's success is measured in GDP  
Care, kindness, love do they appear?  
Why don't we count things important to me?

Now to shop local and be neighbourly  
Our nation's success is measured in GDP  
Time to stop loneliness being a great fear  
Making money is not all it's cracked up to be  
People feel redundant as they lose their career  
Why don't we count things important to me?

Can you see the butterflies, hear the bees?  
Listen to clean water tumble over the weir  
Our nation's success is measured in GDP

The change will be hard for all to agree  
But to 'build back better' we need to be clear  
Why don't we count things important to me?

Changing what matters is going to be key  
In this woman lead, make sure you hear  
Our nation's success is measured in GDP  
Why don't we count things important to me?



# Toilet Paper: a Symbol of Generic Panic

Debby Taylor, Jewish Community



I was due to go to Israel on 25 March for three weeks so my food cupboard was empty and household supplies had been used up and not replaced. The trip was cancelled and with lockdown imminent I found myself in a couple of supermarkets on 16 March looking for food and supplies. The shelves had been emptied and I had a wasted trip. I was both amazed and angry. Amazed because I was then told that people had been buying extra fridges and freezers to stockpile food and angry at the selfishness of people only thinking about themselves. So I produced a quilted wall hanging titled 'Toilet Paper: a Symbol of Generic Panic'. It included toilet rolls, a map and graphs of how far the

pandemic had spread on 27 March 2020 and the following words, "It's ridiculous", Ms Kelly said of the 'panic buying' behaviour - particularly of hoarding loo rolls. Another said, "We have become an uncaring and selfish society. It's all me, me, me".

The quilted wall hanging is funny but carries a serious message. It was hung in the window of a local shop and has instigated quite a bit of conversation. The local postie commented that it gave a new meaning to the term 'quilted toilet paper'.

# We're Locked Down but not Locked Up

Rumaisa Zubairi, Interfaith Scotland youth network

We're locked down but not locked up.  
We're holed in but not held up.  
We're all alone and far away, together.

Quarantine is taking its toll  
and we've been isolated.  
We're washing our hands,  
we're scared to go out.

We're scared of a tiny germ,  
a smaller than microscopic RNA  
strand, that cannot survive without us  
and we cannot live with it.

Do we realise now how we pollute the air so the trees  
struggle to breathe,  
how we poison the waters until even their tears dry up,  
how we've laid a crown of junk in our orbit so even the  
earth can't spin it off?

We're afraid to touch and we're scared to breathe.

We're locked down but not locked up.  
We're holed in but not held up.  
We're all alone and far away, together.

Quarantine is taking a toll on our destructive habits.  
And we've been isolated from our old prejudices.

We're washing our hands of old ways,  
cleaning our hearts and finding ways to embrace  
the new

We're scared to go out  
finding the small joys in the sound of birdsong at  
morning,  
the competitive family board games,  
the smell of homemaking if you can find the flour.

We're afraid to touch the truth and think  
but now with the slowed drip of time  
we find the space to breathe.  
We're scared to breathe too deep,  
scared of the selves we might discover  
but how else does new life grow  
but buried in the deep and lonely dark?

We're locked down but not locked up.  
We're holed in but not held up.

# Inside the Snow

Maggie Manvell, Faiths Together Skye  
and Lochalsh

Crystal flakes of Arctic storm  
descend, unique and pure-  
archetypes, ideal and true-  
exemplars of their cosmic form.

Beneath their cloak, in Arctic's keep,  
Inside their cave of cold  
Nestle, bear-like, threatened beasts,  
remote, but safe in Winter's deep.

Will they emerge from out this cave,  
this carapace in frozen time,  
crystal cocoon of transient cold?  
Will they survive this grave?

'Mid turbulence outside their lair;  
the crystals' tear-shaped, transient forms  
run fast away, perfection's gone -  
mortality of polar bear.

# The Earth is Calling us Back

Trish Rogers, Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh

The earth is calling us back  
Summoning us with hurricane winds  
Chiding us with torrential rain  
Pleading with us with melting ice  
Shouting at us with forest fires  
Challenging our disrespect with pandemic disease  
Locking us down  
Bringing us back to our senses  
Calling us to remember its balance, beauty and bounty  
Asking us to reflect on our place as guests  
Our duty as stewards.



# Camelia

'Camellia' by Natasha Atiwatjira (age 13)



"I come to Scotland from Thailand January 25 with my mum. She speak English but I not much. Soon I am stuck in house with Covid rules. At the window is big Camelia Bush filling third window. I like painting so I do a painting 'Pretty Flower' when not watching YouTube in Thai".

Dave MacFarlane, Natasha's stepfather explained, "Normally Natasha would have Thai chums of her own age here in Aberdeen but Covid stopped all socialising. She has long chats at weekends with her Gran back home. We are

lucky to have lots of country walks nearby. School lessons were live at first - she used her phone to translate. Later, they have been at home via Google Classroom. An unexpected advantage was that while one of her teachers had been difficult to understand, Natasha was able to slow the video playback, and then understand the lesson. In class she would have learned nothing! She does not seem much the worse for living through Covid.

# Solstice Walk 2020

Lysana Robinson,  
Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh

Not one car on the road.  
An unfamiliar mid-summer experience.  
Parking the car, the first to greet me, a lamb,  
stock still, seemingly taken by surprise.

A half mile gentle stroll passed  
a recently deserted croft house,  
reminds me of my first West Coast trip,  
water-colour painting 40 years ago.

A red corrugated tin-roofed ruin,  
typical of Skye in past times, now busy  
with memories of lives lived and lost.  
Nostalgia drags me out of Self-isolation.

Nature flourishing in the absence of humans.  
Wildflowers, in unkempt crowds by the track,  
delight hoverflies, beetles, bees  
and a Clouded Bordered moth.

A burn, running beside my path,  
freshwater yearning to mingle with salt.  
I too arrive at the shore, empty of people.  
A lone dog walker far away on a hill.

Welcoming Pink Thrift cushions  
decorate high tide salty mounds.  
Satiated, I sit and quietly rest a while  
taking in the overwhelming beauty.

The low tide enlarges the Bay  
exposing the wet sand carpeted  
with pattern-creating stranded seaweed.  
I feel strange in the unfamiliar vastness.

I'm so grateful I overcame my fear.  
I've achieved my first walk in 14 weeks.  
I've ventured forth from my cocoon,  
my safety in Covid-19 Lockdown,

Small intrepid steps have created  
a truly amazing, impromptu ritual.  
A celebration for the longest day  
of this far from normal year.

Not a car on the return drive.  
No evidence of human life,  
how unnervingly strange it feels,  
yet in a way, I'm rather relieved.

# Skyping Elijah

Ellen Galford, Jewish Community

So maybe don't come?  
Should you be out anyway, Eliahu  
wandering the world  
in search of seders?  
Someone born in the Bronze Age  
definitely falls into the at-risk category  
of Over-Seventies  
and are you sure your connections in high places  
protect you from any underlying health problems?

So you ask me "In that case what happens  
when they pour that cup of wine  
and open the door to welcome me in  
and the glassful set out for me  
does not as on all other Seder nights,  
mysteriously lose a smidgen of the volume  
as carefully measured in advance  
by eager children  
who will therefore be so disappointed...?"

And who will, no doubt,  
have enthusiastically handled it  
with their particularly infectious fingers.

So maybe this year, Eliahu, just stay home...

# Washing Up

Dr Maureen Sier, Interfaith Scotland

"That's it! No more washing up! There will be dirty  
dishes everywhere".

Jenny beheld the cracked fingers of her mum,  
clutching the empty bottle. Corona and climate crisis,  
nature's revenge, she mused, as she watched the  
last eco-unfriendly soapy bubble slurrup down the  
plug hole.





## Island of my Dreams

Chanterasorn MacFarlane

Covid-19 has its heroes, but the long-suffering housewives have to endure a houseful of demanding workspace, lessons, online time, food, attention, entertainment, sympathy,

and still cook, clean, clean up after, shop, etc. Here is a picture of the serene 'Island of my Dreams' amidst all this busyness.

## Truthink

This began as a show on Star Radio in the University, and is now an online interfaith platform encouraging curiosity, humility and compassion. The two students behind it write that, "We want to encourage people to think about the idea of 'truth' as a lens to question the underlying meaning behind what we think and to form a better understanding of the truths or worldviews we live our

**Students at the University of St Andrews have set up a new initiative called 'TruThink'.**

lives in accordance to. We want to encourage thinking in a way that informs loving, honest and inclusive action. We want to make polarisation and stereotyping a thing of the past." Recently they have asked members of the Chaplaincy team from different faiths to speak on a number of topics including:

- What motivates compassion during the lockdown?

- Does forgiving mean forgetting?
- How can we have peaceful dialogue over deeply emotive issues?

The students have created an excellent website that can be found at [www.truthink.co.uk](http://www.truthink.co.uk)

**Barbara Davey, Honorary Quaker Chaplain, University of St Andrews**



# Protecting Mother Earth

**On International Women's Day, Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network (RfP UKWFN) called upon all organisations and communities to lobby political leaders and governments to commit to a sustainable programme of tree planting within the next two years to significantly reduce carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere and to stop the deforestation of rainforests.**

A seminar was hosted by Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha at the Nishkam Centre, Birmingham. At the seminar Ravinder Kaur Nijjar from Scotland, presented a summary of the current climate crisis situation and the need for religious communities to get involved with the UN Climate Change Conference COP26 taking place in November 2020 in Glasgow. She highlighted that research shows that in order to capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere there needs to be a sustainable programme of planting trees by countries throughout the world.

Ruth Tetlow, Chair of 'Footsteps: Faiths for a Low Carbon Future' spoke from the Christian perspective on the environment and quoted from the New Testament of the Bible, "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, ...On either side of the river is the tree(s) of life...and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations". Revelation Chapter 22 verses 1-2

Dr Lakshmi Vyas, President of the Hindu Forum of Europe, explained

that particular trees and plants are considered very important in the Hindu Vedic Scriptures. She explained that from the Vedas the message is clear that the environment belongs to all living beings, so it needs protection by all, for the welfare of all.

Zarina Ahmad, Climate Change and Environment Officer at CEMVO Scotland, spoke of encouraging ethnic minority communities to get involved in environmental projects locally and nationally. Her presentation explained that humans are stewards on the Earth and through their actions need to protect it. According to the Hadith in Islam, "The Earth is green and

beautiful, and Allah has appointed you his stewards over it. The whole earth has been created a place of worship, pure and clean."

Ravinder then introduced the "Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees Project and the seminar concluded with the planting of a 'Tree of Peace' in the grounds of the Gurdwara in Birmingham.

A similar planting of a 'Tree of Peace' took place in Edinburgh led by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland the Rt Rev Colin Sinclair.

**Excerpt from report by Ravinder Kaur Nijjar**





# Women of Faith Pray for the Well Being of Humanity

**Women of faith from the UK and further afield gathered virtually for an evening of prayer and reflection for the health and well-being of humanity on 14 May. An Interfaith Service was organised by Interfaith Scotland and Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network.**

It was wonderful to have so many women from different faith communities and interfaith groups in Scotland and across the UK. They joined the call from His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, for a day of prayer to be observed on 14 May 2020.

The call was also taken up by Religions for Peace World Council, representing the world's diverse religious traditions who stated, "We call all peoples around the world, respectful of their own faith traditions, to do good deeds, observe fast, pray, and make devout supplications to the Sacred to rescue us all from this adversity, to inspire scientists to find a cure, and to nurture one another as we all face the diverse repercussions of this serious pandemic."

The women were welcomed by the Chair of Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network, Ravinder Kaur Nijjar and the Director of Interfaith Scotland, Dr Maureen Sier. The meeting was honoured to have Dr Nayla Tabbara attending from Lebanon. She began the service with a prayer for a deeper awakening of humanity to interconnect with each other during this time of crisis and to continue working together afterwards. The presenters in their prayers or reflections spoke of the need to let go of negativity and allow the positive vibrations to flourish and to remember that humanity will come through this difficult time, stronger and united. Dr Maureen Sier thanked the women for their insightful, wise prayers and reflections and urged participants present to continue to pray, meditate and reflect together to help humanity

through the COVID-19 crisis. The Chair thanked Interfaith Scotland staff for their support and help with the first UKWFN Zoom meeting.

Heartfelt thanks go to the following presenters: Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland (Baha'i); Dr Nayla Tabbara, Co-President of Religions for Peace International; Rev Bonnie Evans-Hill, priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church; Harsha Shukla, Vice President of the north sector of the Hindu Forum of Britain; Juliette Grassby-Lewis, member of SGI-UK Buddhist organisation; Julie Siddiqi from the Muslim faith and Founder of Sadaqa Day and Co-founder of Nisa-Nashim the Jewish and Muslim Women's Network; Karen Maxwell from the Jewish faith who is the Co-Chair and founding member of Nisa-Nashim; and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network and representing Sikhs on the Scottish Religious Leaders Forum. A special thanks to Meher Kaur Nijjar, age 7 and Prabhleen Kaur Nijjar age 5 for reciting prayers so beautifully.

## **Religions for Peace International Global Webinar on Interreligious Council Development**

On 16 June 2020, Religions for Peace (RfP) Global Interreligious Council (IRC) Development Webinar brought together over 200 leaders and representatives of national and regional IRCs, women of faith and



interfaith youth networks, as well as World Council, Honorary Presidents, Trustees and Ambassadors, from all regions of the world. The first Global Webinar set in motion an inclusive and participatory RfP movement-wide process of looking at the key elements of success and challenges for IRC development and adaptability. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network, spoke at the webinar on "What would be the key elements of an inclusive and participatory movement wide process of IRC development". The key elements highlighted from the Global webinar were that interreligious collaboration was possible because of the ability of people of faith to form friendships whilst recognising differences and because of love and a sense of responsibility towards one another, towards local, national and global society and communities. Women of Faith Networks and Interfaith Youth Networks must play an active role and have an equal voice in programme strategy and development of Interreligious Councils which must include intergenerational conversation.

**Ravinder Kaur Nijjar**

# Connections

**Louisa Turner from Fife Interfaith Group gave a talk at their AGM during lockdown and kindly shares it with us below.**

As we come here as strangers, we are connected by our faiths and hopefully leave as friends. Through our meeting together we gain joy, strength and inspiration from each other. Our faiths are partly formed by our holy words long preserved which we all hold dear and which are evidently put into practice by people who attend Fife Interfaith Group. The other week, we had a power cut, which lasted most of the day. As my husband and I are both working from home, we soon realised that we were unable to continue our work – no power, no internet. Argh! Ok then, let's have a coffee break instead. No power, no boiling kettle. Let's pop the TV on and amuse ourselves that way – no power, no TV. Let's go and visit someone to fill some time and get a cuppa – oh no, its lockdown and we are not allowed to go visiting and there are no coffee shops open. Without power, we felt powerless, in lots of ways. And that's how I am sure we all feel without our faith, we are powerless. We need that daily connection to our holy words. We also need that connection to like-minded people, to be encouraged



to keep on track with our faith, to keep practicing our faith in actions as well as self-nourishment. What an honour it is to be free to share our faith with others, in an environment where connections are there without question, as we all have a faith and are accepted as we are. The common connection of all faiths is surely love.

On my first visit to an Interfaith meeting, I was nervous to walk in the door. I didn't know anyone. I only knew a few people who practiced a different faith from my own Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Yet, I wanted to extend my horizons, look out the window and get to know my neighbour regardless of their faith or belief system. After several years of building up courage to attend my first meeting, I walked in the door. Connections made 25 years earlier at Playgroup were immediately generated and ignited again following a spark of recognition.

I relaxed, felt comfortable and by the end of the meeting knew that the Fife Interfaith group was cooking with gas, and I was going to return to make more new connections. The new connections which I have made have been really powerful to me on a spiritual level. I am learning about other faiths and beliefs and in turn I am sharing my new knowledge with friends and family, opening their minds to new ideas and breaking down their prejudgments and prejudices born from ignorance and fear. Through these connections I am reminded of the Peace Prayer of St Francis of Assisi:

***Make me a channel of your peace***

***Where there is hatred let me bring your love***

***Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord***

***And where there's doubt true faith in you.***

## A Volunteer's Journey

**My story started in 2009 when I had a message from Interfaith Scotland's development officer Frances Hume asking me if I would like to volunteer as she remembered me from the Iona Community.**

It was a chance to remind the world who I was if they did not know Fiona from Iona already! I write this remembering how I travelled to Interfaith Scotland's office in Pollokshields, occasionally meeting other Iona Community members on the way in the train or on the bus. It took time to get there on public transport and in the summer I enjoyed walking over to the office to work on

filing and typing out evaluation forms.

I enjoyed participating in conferences, sometimes as a participant and other times helping out at these events. I learnt how to use a PC in the office and have now been online for 10 years. I have also learnt how to be more inclusive in my faith. I am



still seeking connection with Interfaith Scotland despite the lockdown and have learnt to use Zoom to join their meetings although I prefer to meet in person. Thank you, Frances, for getting me involved with Interfaith Scotland over the past 10 years!

**Fiona Stack,  
Interfaith Scotland volunteer**



# An Interfaith Walk in the Park

## NICK'S THOUGHTS

I met Shabir some years ago now, it would have been at an interfaith event. Shabir is a big guy, solid, a gentle giant from Glasgow. His parents are from Pakistan, his brother worries about him because he's overweight. He's down to earth, grounded and most importantly a pure hearted fella and we've become pals. I guess over the years of interfaith engagement I've admired Shabir's audacity, courage and his gift of being able to network and bring people together regardless of what religion someone belongs to or doesn't for that matter. My observation is that he has a desire to bring people together in the pursuit of noble goals. I remember at one point being at a meeting in Parliament where Nicola Sturgeon said words to the effect that Shabir is one of the most outstanding networkers she'd ever had the pleasure to engage with.

Anyway suffice to say he's a good guy and we get on, and as a result of getting on we decided we'd get together once a week, get some



exercise, (we both need it) 'chew the fat' and as a result, you could say, whilst walking we're journeying into each other's lives. Shabir calls me his task master. This came about because

I was encouraging Shabir to walk a bit further. Queens Park is our venue, we start at the top of Vicky road, through the main gate turn right head around the pond up the hill. We get to the top and have a wee seat and contemplate life, the universe and everything in between. We often share our understanding of our respective scriptures (Baha'i and Muslim) on topics such as prayer and what this means to us – we both agreed it is a conversation with God. We also agreed that conversation is a two-way thing and that we have to empty ourselves in order to really listen to what God says to us too. Walking in the park surrounded by mature trees, greenery, observing conditions, life and its diversity, we feel truly blessed. We've shared thoughts on many topics and of course on the subject of 'black lives matter'. Racism and prejudice obviously go hand in hand. Prejudice is

often the prelude to racism. Prejudice is a disease and prejudice breeds prejudice; its foundation is firmly built on ignorance. Institutional prejudice is everywhere, on every level of society and dare I say we are all prejudiced in one way or another. I'd like to think that if you are reading this, you don't suffer from basic prejudice's such as the colour of skin, or that your unique diversity would not open the doors of prejudice in 'others'.

Like I said prejudice is a disease. In one sense it's a spiritual disease. Shabir and I often discuss this topic and agree it needs exploring in depth. For the growth of humanity and to raise the standard of the human race, the roots of prejudice which are fear and insecurity need to be dug out.

As I said Shabir and I have talked a great deal on the matter above and one of our conclusions is, that it is about not letting prejudice influence or determine our judgements, whilst exercising discernment in the pursuit of understanding and unravelling the mysteries of life. All this and more, whilst taking a walk in the park with a pal.

**Nick Sier**

## SHABIR'S THOUGHTS

As we endure these difficult times in our lives because of the spread of the Covid-19 Coronavirus, which has been a horrific experience for all of us, my dear friend Nick Sier and I decided we should meet up and go for a walk in Queens Park in Glasgow when restrictions were eased after lockdown.

It is here from this point that I would like to share with the readers of this article the unique perspective of our friendship and the journey we have made together. I was introduced to Nick by Maureen Sier (Director of Interfaith Scotland). My take on Nick

is that he is a very worthy guy to have as a mate, one can depend on him. We have been having our walk in the park for a good number of weeks now and I have really benefitted physically, mentally as well as spiritually by doing this walk along with Nick. The reason for this is that Nick has made sure that we stuck to doing a good work-out as I was always looking for excuses to sit down and Nick was having none of it. We have both managed to positively provoke deep thought and discuss so many topics about life including things that were personal to either of us about family life and faith and how important

it is to work for the betterment of society irrespective of whether you believe in a religion or not.

I am really privileged to have Nick as a friend and I know he has great respect for me, likewise I reciprocate that feeling. Throughout this article I have referred to Nick as a friend however with great humility and affection I know Nick is really part of my family more than a friend. Nick may this journey together continue forever, stay blessed and protected dear brother.

**Shabir Beg**



# Interfaith Scotland

**Making a Difference  
through Dialogue**

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