

Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Autumn 2021: Issue 36

Making a Difference through Dialogue



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A Time of Transition

Once again, we at Interfaith Scotland have been honoured to work with all of you at this time of crisis and transition. The newsletter highlights the great work that you are all doing and the stories fill us with hope. It is good to read that many faith communities and local interfaith groups are now able to meet in person and are continuing to connect in deeply meaningful ways.

As humanity continues to struggle with a global pandemic and the increasing impacts of the climate crisis it is with a sombre heart that I want to share with you an excerpt from a climate activist, Yeb Sano, from the Philippines. Yeb highlights very poignantly that both the pandemic and the climate crisis have a disproportionate impact on those living in poverty in the global south.

..... with deep regret, we are cancelling all plans for our pilgrimage for COP26. The world has been profoundly impacted by the pandemic, and in our country and neighbouring countries, the impact has been severeThe Philippines, like many developing countries, are finding it very difficult to cope, only 2% of our population is fully vaccinated (with the Sinovac vaccine)..... and the Schengen Visa information says that the EU Covid19 Vaccination Passport was only being issued to people who received the approved vaccines by the EU (Moderna, Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Janssen). This makes it impossible for us to travel to the EU and the UK right now. Climate change already manifests the serious inequality in the world, and the vaccine situation represents an even more serious and deep inequality across the world....until vaccine access is made available for all....COP26 will be a gathering of the most powerful and wealthy countries only, and our pilgrimages will be meaningless. (Yeb Sano).

The stark inequalities and the dire warnings issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>) make this time of global transition perhaps the most important turning point humanity has ever faced.

This year the Scottish Interfaith Week theme is Together for our Planet and this summarises how we all feel - we are in this together! We are now over half way through our Year of Climate Action and I want to take this moment to thank all of you, not just for your stories but for your continued commitment to making a positive difference, for building good relations and for doing what you can to tackle the inequalities that continue to plague our planet.

Dr Maureen Sier, Director



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

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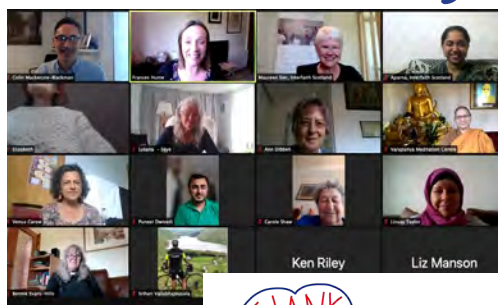
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Thank You Day

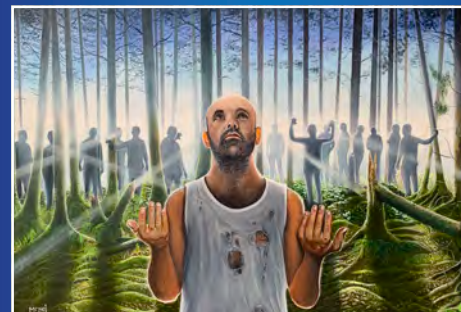
On Sunday 4 July, Interfaith Scotland hosted a 'Thank You Day' celebration.

Thank You Day is a UK initiative that invites communities to get together to say Thank You to everyone who has helped us throughout the pandemic. At our Thank You Day event we gave thanks for all the work undertaken by faith communities and local interfaith groups to support their communities during the pandemic. We remembered in particular 80 projects that were funded by the Scottish Government's Covid-19 Local Resilience Fund that was administered by Interfaith Scotland. We planted 80 trees to say thank you for these projects in the Trees for Life World Interfaith Harmony Grove with funding from Virgin Media 02. Colin MacKenzie-Blackman from Trees for Life joined us at the event and shared more about their projects and the positive impact on communities and the environment of engaging together in tree planting. We then shared in small groups about things we were thankful for coming out of the pandemic and ways that we could support a sustainable future for the environment through our actions. Our Thank You Day celebration is available to watch on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel at <https://tinyurl.com/ThankYouDayRecording>



Voices from Srebrenica: Book Launch and Memorial

Interfaith Scotland hosted a book launch and memorial for Srebrenica on 8 July.



'Blinded by the Light' (Robert McNeill, MBE)

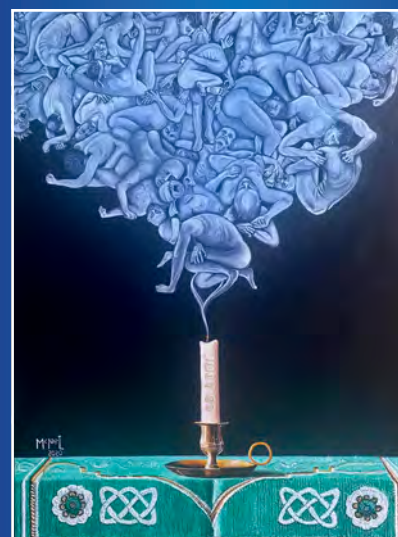
The event was a deeply moving one that featured; genocide survivor Hasan Hasanovic; Dr Ann Petrila, from the University of Denver and co-author (with Hasan) of 'Voices from Srebrenica'; and Robert McNeill, MBE. Robert is the FAAPT (Hon) Ambassador of Remembering Srebrenica UK, UNESCO RILA affiliate artist and the forensic expert sent to Srebrenica in the aftermath of the massacre. Both Hasan and Robert shared personal stories and testimonies from Srebrenica and Robert also shared the artwork he has created as a result of his experiences in Srebrenica. Ann was able to talk about the process of writing 'Voices from Srebrenica' with Hasan and of her commitment to educational visits from her University to Bosnia (she has taken over 300 students there). After the presentations there was a short and meaningful memorial service. A recording of the talks can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/RememberingSrebrenica2021>



Scottish Refugee Week: Tears of Gold Exhibition

Interfaith Scotland was honoured to team up with Glasgow University Chaplaincy, UNESCO RILA, The Dear Green Bothy and renowned artist Hannah Rose Thomas to host her moving portraits of refugees from across the world.

The exhibition was displayed in the Chapel at Glasgow University and was open to the public for six days in June. Two events accompanied the exhibition – a launch event which featured guest speakers Carolyn Kelly (University Chaplain), Professor Alison Phipps (UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow and Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies), Hannah Rose Thomas (artist) and Dr Maureen Sier (Director of Interfaith Scotland); and an additional silent meditative and contemplative event was held in the presence of the portraits.



'Remembering Srebrenica' (Robert McNeill, MBE)



Prayers for Peace in the Holy Land

We at Interfaith Scotland were delighted to partner with The Catholic Bishops Committee for Inter-Religious Dialogue to host three Prayers for Peace in the Holy Land events during the period of the conflict there. Participants from the four Abrahamic Faiths that see the Holy Land as sacred (Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Baha'i) shared prayers from their respective traditions as well as an interfaith prayer. Well over 100 people joined the prayers to reflect together and to pray that there would, one day soon, be peace in the Holy Land.

Interfaith Group Focus Groups

Interfaith Scotland conducted focus groups with 14 interfaith groups from across Scotland as part of a wider constitutional review of the organisation.

Attendees at the focus groups were asked what they thought was working well in terms of Interfaith Scotland's support for interfaith groups, what could be improved and what could Interfaith Scotland be doing more of to support groups. It was reassuring to hear that groups have felt well supported by the organisation, from helping to establish new groups, to attending or speaking at events, providing external speakers or working in partnership on events. Support for Scottish Interfaith Week

was appreciated including providing ideas and funding for events. Interfaith groups have also appreciated the opportunity to attend Interfaith Scotland's national events, particularly the online events during the pandemic, which in turn inspired groups to hold their own online events.

In terms of additional support requested, several groups sought advice on how to reach out to a wider circle of people in the area to widen the network of people who

want to be engaged with interfaith. In particular they were keen to look at ways in which they could attract a greater diversity of faiths to meetings and get more young people involved in interfaith. They were keen to get support in identifying trusts and organisations that they could apply to for funding. There was also a request to set up an online forum for interfaith groups to be in touch with each other and engage in dialogue. A new Facebook group is being set up for that purpose.

Interfaith Buddies

At each event participants were partnered with a person from a tradition other than their own for a 30-minute conversation in breakout rooms. At the April event participants were asked to reflect on the theme of 'hope' and to reflect on what their faith or belief had to say about caring for the environment. The June event was hosted as part of The Great Get Together in memory of Jo Cox and participants were asked to reflect upon how their faith or belief inspires them to make a positive difference in society.

By popular request, Interfaith Scotland continued its regular online 'Interfaith Buddies' programme in April and June.



Volunteers Training Event

On 27 April we ran a Volunteers Training for five prospective or current volunteers.

We asked them to reflect on what interfaith means to them using 'virtual' sticky notes and we were inspired by their answers. We look forward to meeting our volunteers in person and giving them the opportunity to actively engage in our live events rather than just online!



What does Interfaith mean to you ?



The Welcoming Association workshops

Interfaith Scotland was invited to run a series of workshops at The Welcoming Association, an Edinburgh-based organisation that runs multicultural workshops for people of different faiths and cultures.

Frances Hume, our National Development Officer, ran three sessions with their women's groups on Zoom. The first session was with a multicultural women's group looking at interfaith and why it is important. Participants shared fascinating insights into their life and faith journeys and in particular the positive things they have learnt from mixing with people from different faiths both in their home countries and in Scotland. The second session was with an Arabic/Syrian

women's group and as the session fell on the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, we had a discussion about Ramadan and Eid, what it involves and why it is important from the perspective of participants who were from a Muslim background. The final session was with the multicultural women's group looking in more depth at things different faiths share in common



and discussing the value of faith in society today. The sessions were a great success and many thanks to Lizzie Ashworth from the Welcoming Association for making them possible and helping to facilitate them so beautifully.

Interfaith Quiz

Interfaith Scotland organised an Interfaith Quiz in May on Zoom. Participants were invited to sign up as teams of 3-4 people or alternatively they could sign up as individuals who would be placed into teams at the event.



On the night we had four teams - Fife Interfaith group, Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith group, Interfaith Scotland Board and Volunteers, and a team of individuals. In the first round, teams were sent to breakout rooms where they were given a list of quotes about the Golden Rule from six different religions and asked to match them to the correct one. Round two was general knowledge, including

questions on 'the Environment and Faith' as it is Interfaith Scotland's Year of Climate Action. Round three was an interactive game of 'Taboo'. It was great fun and sparked a lot of discussion. The final round was 'Pictionary' where each volunteer from a team had to draw a religious symbol or object on the white board for the team members to guess. With the completion of the final round the

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group emerged victorious. The participants all said they enjoyed the quiz and having the different rounds. The event took a lot of planning, especially in developing the quiz into an online format. I hope to organise another Interfaith Quiz again, hopefully in person next time!

Training sessions

Scottish Youth Parliament

The Scottish Youth Parliament gives young people the chance to experience many elements of how the national parliaments are run. To help them in drafting a motion around religious discrimination they asked us to provide a presentation around the

patterns of discrimination – especially focusing on what is experienced by Jewish and Muslim people. The session explored the differences and similarities in the treatment of different faith groups and how it even affects those who are wrongly identified as

part of the targeted community. The very diverse group of young people shared some of their own challenging experiences of prejudice and discrimination and the session closed with suggestions about organisations and other sources of support.



Public courses

Although we have continued to deliver many training sessions directly to single organisations over the recent period, our public courses have received fewer bookings than usual. Thinking that one factor may be that people are feeling they don't have the time to commit to our usual half-day sessions, we recently began some short but sweet courses online. One of the courses considers religion and belief

diversity – considering the beliefs and cultural practices of Islam, Judaism and Sikhism especially. We have also provided a session looking at the very stubborn pattern of 'invisible advantage'. This is how we summarise the tendency where people are very familiar with the prejudice or barriers that they themselves experience but tend to find it much harder to recognise, or understand, or remember

the challenges experienced by other groups. It is a really important factor in understanding why organisations and groups often unintentionally create obstacles that prevent some people from getting the support they need. We have also offered courses in intention versus impact in communication; tackling unconscious bias; and cross-cultural communication.



Scottish Interfaith Week 2021: Together for Our Planet

Thank you all for your support with Scottish Interfaith Week last year. We overcame many challenges to organise an entirely online festival, and we could not have done it without you.

This year we will be running Scottish Interfaith Week as a hybrid festival, with online and in-person events being held across the country.

We are excited to announce that this year's theme is Together for Our Planet, and we are encouraging individuals, faith communities and organisations across Scotland to host climate-related events. The theme ties in with COP26 (United Nations Climate Change Conference 2021) which is being held in Glasgow in November. Scottish Interfaith Week will take place alongside the conference, launching on Sunday 31st October and running until Sunday 7th November.

We believe climate action is important for people of all backgrounds, faiths and cultures to get involved in, and that the work being done to spread climate awareness is key to the survival of our planet. We know that many of



you, in your interfaith groups and faith communities, are doing incredible work to address climate change and we want to celebrate this through Scottish Interfaith Week.

With only a few weeks to go until the festival begins, it's time to start brainstorming for your climate-themed events. Our event planning resources on the Scottish Interfaith Week website are perfect for discovering exciting ways for you to take climate action. We have also recently produced a Digital Toolkit for event organisers and supporters of Scottish Interfaith Week who want to spread the word about the festival. The toolkit contains draft social media posts, links to downloadable social media graphics, and some useful tips to make promoting your events easier and more effective. Both the event planning resources and the



digital toolkit can be found at www.scottishinterfaithweek.org/resources

Aberdeen Interfaith Group and Faiths Action Skye and Lochalsh shared with us their plans for Scottish Interfaith Week and ways they have been taking climate action. You can find out about their activities and those of other organisations at www.scottishinterfaithweek.org/sifw-news. We would love to hear from more local interfaith groups and local faith communities across Scotland. How have you been taking climate action? What are your plans for Scottish Interfaith Week? Get in touch at info@scottishinterfaithweek.org. Remember you can follow Scottish Interfaith Week on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram!

#TogetherForOurPlanet

Interfaith Scotland Year of Climate Action Continued

Interfaith Scotland has continued its Year of Climate Action in the build up to COP26 in Glasgow. We have hosted a number of events on environmental themes. We have created climate action resources with activities, campaigns, videos and more which are available on our website. We have also been actively involved in a collaborative process of creating declarations and manifestos on our response to the climate crisis from a faith and belief perspective.



The COP: what's it all about?

COP26, the UN climate conference, is coming to Glasgow, travel restrictions allowing, in November 2021. It's a huge event, one of the biggest ever to take place in the city, bringing together diplomats from around the world. The debates and the language of the COP can be baffling so here is quick guide to words you might be hearing a lot about: **mitigation**, **adaptation** and **loss and damage**.

Mitigation is what we can do to reduce our contribution to climate change by burning less oil, coal and gas, or reducing emissions from agriculture and by taking greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere by planting trees or other means. This

raises a number of challenges, for example replacing diesel and petrol vehicles with electric, and changing the way we heat buildings but we need to make such changes and many others as a matter of urgency if we are to reduce our carbon footprint.

Adaptation is more straightforward. We know climate change is happening so we need to respond to its consequences. In Scotland climate change means more winter rain, heavier rain and an increased risk of flooding which we have to deal with but in other parts of the world the implications can be very serious leading to potentially huge loss and damage.

Loss and Damage: the inequality of climate change is such that places that have contributed least often suffer worst with countries in the tropics overheating, suffering desertification or losing land and property to rising sea levels. Developing countries protest that the cost of the loss and damage they suffer is a direct consequence of rich countries use of fossil fuels and that rich countries should pay up. The UN estimates the cost to be \$100 billion a year and the UK and other governments are naturally cautious about making commitments on this scale. Nor will governments quickly accept the concept of climate refugees even though climate change is now recognised as one of the main drivers of migration.

Climate Resources for Getting Involved

Interfaith Scotland has collected resources for our Year of Climate action which can be found on our website at <https://interfaithscotland.org/climate-action-resources>. We have created a handy briefing

paper where you can find out more about COP26 and how you can get involved through activities and campaigns. You can find it on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/BriefingPaperCOP26>

With the theme of Scottish Interfaith Week being 'Together for Our Planet', we have created a resource with ideas of activities at www.scottishinterfaithweek.org/resources in the 'Event Planning' section.

Facebook Live Series: Beyond Climate Crisis

In light of Interfaith Scotland's Year of Climate Action, we launched a Facebook Live series during World Interfaith Harmony Week in February. Five episodes have been held –

- The Climate Crisis: Beyond Politics
- The Climate Crisis: Beyond Religion
- The Climate Crisis: Beyond Science
- The Climate Crisis: Beyond the Economy
- The Climate Crisis: Beyond Borders.

With a strong start featuring Ross Greer Green Party MSP, Kat Jones from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar from Religions for Peace Women of Faith UK Network, three panelists who are specialists in their field were invited to talk about how Climate Crisis and the field are linked.

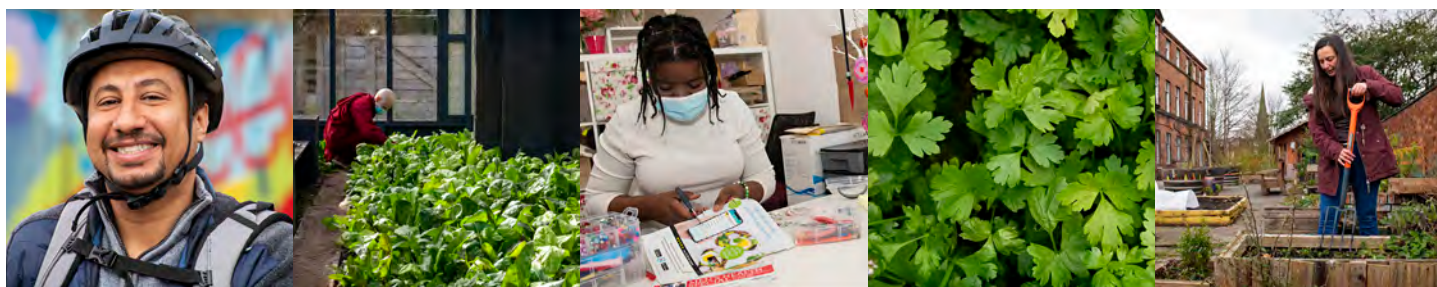
With well over 2.4K views our second episode featured: the Rt. Rev Dr. Martin Fair, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Linsay Taylor from the

Muslim Council of Scotland and Fraser Sutherland, CEO of the Humanist Society. Having developed a regular audience, our third episode featured: Dr Zain Hussain, Founding President of Edinburgh Coexistence Initiative and Board Member of Edinburgh Interfaith Association; Dr. Nigel Dower, Chair of the Food Ethics Council and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Aberdeen; and Ilona Kater, PhD student in Arctic Ecosystems, Durham University who discussed the Climate Crisis from a Science perspective. Delving into high-brow topics, in the month of May, Ruth Harvey, Co-Convener of Scotland's Climate Assembly and Leader of the Iona Community; Dr Sreevas Sahasranamam, Faculty at Strathclyde Business school; and Sally Foster-Fulton, Head of Christian Aid Scotland discussed the impact of Climate Crisis on the economy and communities.

For Refugee Week Scotland 2021 one of the panelists was H.E. Ms. Doreen

Debrum, Permanent Representative of the Marshall Islands at the UN in Geneva with a particularly moving talk about the effects of Climate Crisis on the growing number of refugees and the plight of the islanders. Cornell Hanxomphou, Climate Change and Environmental specialist from CEMVO Scotland, and Prof Alison Phipps, Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and Arts, spoke in detail about the experiences of small country populations living through Climate disasters.

With more and more knowledgeable speakers talking in detail about their experiences and research, with this Facebook Live series we hope to bring forth varied perspectives on the effects of Climate Change. All episodes have been recorded and can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/BeyondClimateCrisis>



Women's Voices in Climate Action

To mark International Women's Day, Interfaith Scotland hosted an event entitled 'Women's Voices in Climate Action' on 10 March. 60 women signed up to attend what was a truly inspiring event. Our National Development Officer, Frances Hume, welcomed those gathered. Zarina Ahmad, Climate Change Communicator, set the scene giving an overview of climate change. Frances Hume gave a talk on the ethical imperative to protect the environment summarising the key beliefs of the major world religions. The talk can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/WorldFaithsEnvironment>.

Fiona Buchanan, Campaigns and Advocacy Coordinator at Christian Aid, outlined the disproportionate affects that climate change has on women and the inspiring action by women to counteract climate change internationally. She also gave an outline of COP26 and how we can be involved, especially at a local level in Scotland. Zarina Ahmad then shared inspiring actions that women were taking to counteract climate change nationally. Bringing it to the personal level, she asked participants to think about what actions they could take in their own lives to counteract climate change, unnecessary waste and

pollution which they discussed in small groups. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network, shared about projects that the group was taking forward in the light of COP26. She highlighted the 'Great Green Wall', an African-led movement to plant trees across the 5000 miles width of Africa to combat desertification and provide food security – see www.greatgreenwall.org

We have created a playlist of all the talks on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube Channel. The playlist can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/WomensVoicesClimateAction>

Together for Our Planet: How Faith Communities can engage with COP26

On 24 May, Interfaith Glasgow in partnership with Interfaith Scotland welcomed over 120 participants online from diverse faith communities from Scotland and beyond to learn about COP26.

Amongst the keynote speakers were Rae Bainteiti, Climate Activist in Fiji; Maria Zafar, Campaigns and Public Affairs Co-ordinator for Islamic Relief and Kat Jones from Stop Climate Chaos.

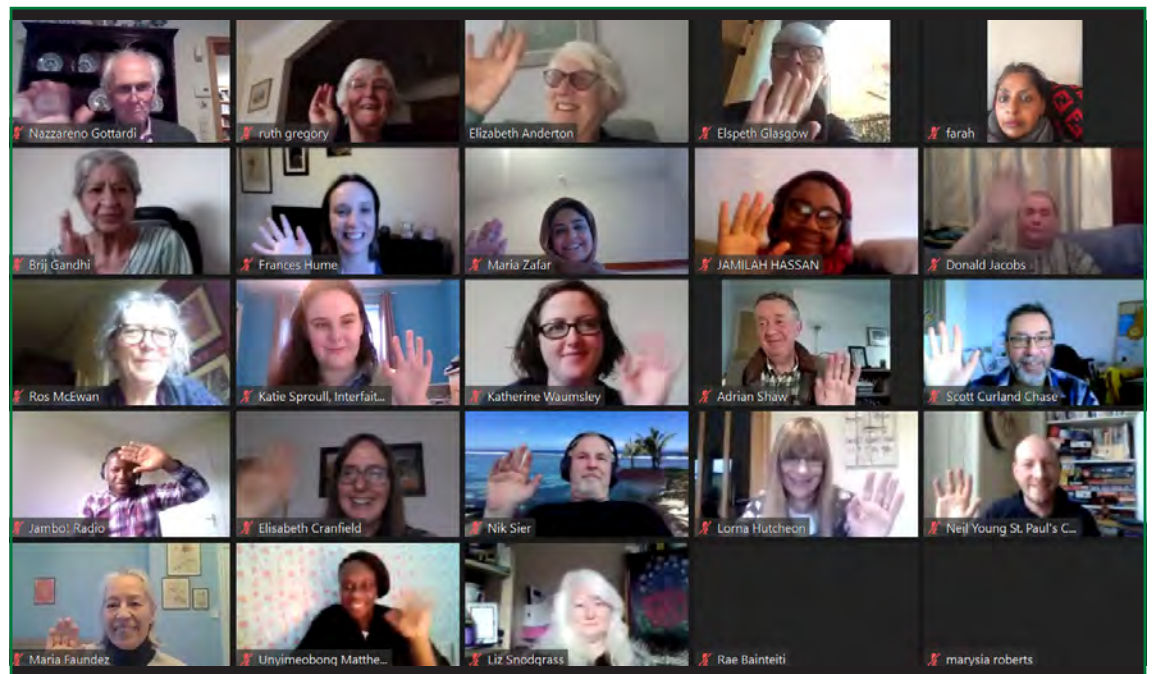
Rae spoke movingly about the tragic devastation of Banaba Island as a result of mining from the British Phosphate Company in the late nineteenth century and the resulting dislocation of his people to New Zealand and neighbouring islands. He spoke in very tangible terms about loss and damage and the disastrous impact of droughts on the island, highlighting the need for climate justice. Maria invited everyone to consider looking after the earth and its resources as part of their faith practise and as a form of worship. Kat Jones spoke very practically about the varied ways faith communities and individuals can apply their faith in local action together ahead of, during and beyond COP26.

Attendees heard from Dr Maureen Sier, director of Interfaith Scotland, who offered an overview of the various interfaith manifestations for COP 26 in Glasgow and Scotland. Jonathan Baxter, Artist in residence at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, spoke about the main COP 26 pilgrimage he is organising for the summit. To motivate participants into action, Sapna Argawal, a local activist based in Glasgow invited groups across the city to hold a Climate Conversation every month until COP26. Finally, Shanon

Shah, Director of Faith for the Climate encouraged faith communities to attend Make COP Count's next event as a follow up to the evening.

The event was recorded and later broadcast by Jambo Radio! Glasgow's African Caribbean radio station. It is also available to view on Interfaith Glasgow's YouTube Channel at <https://tinyurl.com/TogetherForOurPlanet>

The Interfaith Glasgow Team



Commitments, Declarations and Manifestos!

Interfaith Scotland has worked closely with the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum who crafted a beautiful 'Statement of Commitment' for COP26. The statement was launched in time for the Climate Ambition Summit and can be found on the Interfaith Scotland website at <https://interfaithscotland.org/climate-action-resources>

Following on from the 'Statement of

Commitment' members of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum, Interfaith Scotland Volunteer (Adrian Shaw) and representatives from Lambeth Palace then worked collaboratively together to write the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration which has been signed by both Scottish Religious Leaders and also Religious Leaders from across the UK. This Multi-Faith Declaration will be launched closer to COP26 and will be

publicly read on the first day of COP26 which is also the launch day of Scottish Interfaith Week 2021.

The COP26 Interfaith Working group in Scotland has also been able to go through a very creative process in order to write their 'Manifesto' for COP26. This Manifesto will be displayed on billboards in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow and can be read in full below.

Manifesto from Times of Crisis: An Interfaith Response to COP26 and the Climate Crisis

Our planet is in crisis. As people of faith, we believe that

- Everyone has a right to a healthy environment
- We must act right now at every level of our society
- We are part of nature, interconnected and dependent upon it
- Nature can regenerate itself if humans support this process

Our faiths demand we protect and preserve the earth's resources and ecosystems, respect all life on earth, and live simply, avoiding greed and over consumption.

We recognise that the climate crisis and injustice are inextricably linked. Inspired by faith and science we ask governments, businesses and all those in power to:

1. Learn from traditional ecological knowledge and the sustainable practices of indigenous communities; and to support Indigenous people's land rights
2. Stop investment in and subsidy of all fossil fuel energy sources, and to make an urgent and just transition to renewable energy
3. Transform unsustainable food systems to prioritise local food production, the environment, human health, and animal welfare over profit
4. Work with communities and civil society to ensure that new jobs are created in a green economy
5. Ensure COP26 agrees action that limits global warming to 1.5°C; and agrees a delivery plan for the \$100 billion promised annually to the countries experiencing the worst loss and damage due to climate change
6. Urgently accelerate our work towards zero carbon emissions globally. The obligation on the global north to reach zero carbon emissions quickly is greatest.
7. Protect and restore the biodiversity of the land and the ocean, and to cease our dumping of hazardous waste into sea, land or air
8. Protect and restore the world's forests and stop unnecessary deforestation

We hold ourselves to these standards and ask you to do likewise.

Local Interfaith Groups News

Aberdeen Interfaith Group

Interfaith Mindfulness Day on the theme of Nature

Aberdeen Interfaith Group held an Interfaith Mindfulness day in the green spaces of Varapunya Meditation Centre on Sunday 23rd May. There were over ten people representing many different faiths attending including Brahma Kumaris, Buddhists, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and Scottish Episcopal Church, Hindus, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Unitarian Church and Quakers. Ajahn Sujan gave an introduction to walking meditation through the community woodland at Varapunya, where the centre is in the midst of a reforestation effort. He encouraged everyone to see, feel and observe their mental state, observing what is going on in the mind and what their reaction to it is. The mindful walk was meant to foster a closer connection to nature and to ourselves.

After the refreshing walk through the woodland we sat down under a tent to hear the sound of singing birds and listened to each other's stories on what nature means to us as individuals on a personal level and for our respective faiths.

Astrid Bendomir led a meditation on Healing the World using a form practised by Brahma Kumaris, for peace and wellbeing and being at



one with the pure human soul. Nigel Dower talked of how humans are a part of nature and should not cause its destruction, but act as stewards and preserve the diversity of the natural world. Caroline Cormack shared some of her favourite poems from Mary Oliver on springtime and its beauty. We heard from Jayashree and Mr Regmi about the ancient Hindu teachings on the oneness of the universe, about how all things in the universe are made from the basic elements including us, so we cannot believe ourselves to be separate from it. Patricia Findlay shared a few lines from the late David Adam on "air". Ruth shared some personal reminiscences about taking urban

visitors from abroad to Shetland, and their sheer joy in experiencing the wild beauty Scotland has to offer. Ajahn Sujan and Thittadammo shared the importance of nature to the Buddhist way of life. David Briggs from the Varapunya Meditation Centre talked of how we should not take nature for granted, and how much we harm ourselves by being so exploitative. After some more pleasant conversations over a cuppa and receiving a Unitarian then Buddhist blessing, we parted ways with plans to meet again.

Ajahn Sujan, Varapunya Meditation Centre



Interfaith Visit to Aberdeen Gurdwara

Following the recent opening of UK's most northerly Sikh Temple in Aberdeen, a visit was arranged to the Gurdwara by the Aberdeen Interfaith Group. The event was attended by numerous faiths and for some it was their first visit to a Sikh Temple. The visit was led by Suki Singh Pooni, a committee member of Aberdeen Interfaith Group. The visit started with introductions and refreshments in the outside courtyard.

This was followed by a mini experience of a typical Sikh congregation in the main Prayer (Diwan) hall. This included



a short reading and translation of the opening verses of the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Scriptures) and 'Kirtan' (singing of Hymns from Guru Granth Sahib) performed on a Harmonium and Tabla.

Afterwards the Granthi Ji (Priest) gave a short tour and explanations of the Sikh faith in the main prayer hall. This was followed by a sharing of a vegetarian meal together (Guru Ka Langar), which is an important part of all Gurdwaras where the congregation all sit together and eat a free provided meal.

The event was a great success, demonstrating the importance of interfaith cohesion and providing a great opportunity to learn about one another's faiths. The Sikh community immensely enjoyed hosting our Aberdeen Interfaith guests!

Suki Singh Pooni



Interfaith Football

A new interfaith initiative was launched in Aberdeen, with the inaugural match of 'Interfaith Football' which was played on Wednesday 14th July at the fields behind Aberdeen Gurdwara. Playing a team sport is a great and fun way to bring together the different faith communities. We hope for this project to grow and

attract local residents from the Seaton and Syrian communities to strengthen community cohesion under the banner of sporting fun! There is an open invite to all to join the weekly games on Wednesdays.

Suki Singh Pooni



When Reason Sleeps

A member of Aberdeen Interfaith Group, Audrey Mellard, has written the book 'When Reason Sleeps'. In the book Mehrangiz 'Mehri' Farzaneh-Moayyad tells the story of her husband, who was arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned and executed in Iran. She recounts her own imprisonment a year after her husband's execution, her dramatic escape across the Iranian desert on camelback with her young daughter to refuge in Pakistan and, at last, to her new home in Scotland. When Reason Sleeps is Mehri's story as told to Audrey Mellard, who has gathered the threads into a compelling narrative of the hope, spiritual strength, courage and faith of a family whose only crime was that they were Bahá'ís. The book is available to purchase at www.grbooks.com.

Shetland Interfaith Group

'Caring for Our World' - Scriptural Reasoning over Zoom

In May this year, Shetland Inter Faith took the plunge and hosted its first online event.

Looking ahead to the themes which will be explored during this year's Scottish Interfaith Week, and the forthcoming COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in November, we took as our theme 'Caring for Our World' and used the tool of Scriptural

Reasoning to help us explore together three sacred texts offered from among the participants.

A mix of old friends and new gathered in our virtual meeting space, listened to the texts offered for our contemplation, and together shared our thoughts and reflections about what these words – some familiar to each of us, but others new to our eyes and ears – opened up

in our minds about this wonderful world in which we live.

It was a new and interesting experience in a whole variety of ways, as the use of Scriptural Reasoning to explore texts from a variety of faith traditions was in itself something new for many of us. We spent an enjoyable, thoughtful and reflective hour together and left with our minds stimulated and our spirits refreshed.



Central Scotland Interfaith Group

Central Scotland Interfaith (CSI) has been somewhat inactive for a number of years, but the pandemic has meant that our online presence has actually increased. We started a Facebook page and fairly frequent posts are made. Check it out at

www.facebook.com/CentScotIF
and please feel free to like and/or follow us.

Our monthly 'Soul Space' event moved online and has attracted some participants from further afield. We were delighted to host our August meeting in the garden of one of our members and we hope to be able to host more meetings in person as restrictions are eased. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for details.

And finally, our founding convener, Dr Satwant Singh Multani has decided that it is time to step down from a number of commitments, including being our convener. We thank him for all he did in the past and wish him a long, healthy and happy retirement.

Edinburgh Interfaith Association

In May 2020, The Edinburgh Interfaith Association rapidly adapted to the circumstances of the pandemic by connecting our communities through Facebook Live shows, 'Interfaith Insights'. Our shows regularly reach over 3000 viewers. Due to their overwhelming success, we have secured multiple rounds of funding to keep the project running, and in 2021 have been organising weekly live shows from February to the end of July. Our audiences have been inspired by the breadth and depth of our shows, the challenging topics we tackle, and the warmth and friendship between our interfaith hosts and guests.

We have held Future of Faith episodes with panels of young people, the most memorable being led by three inspiring young women, Abi, Lindiwe and Estifa'a, answering thought provoking questions on race from High School students in Edinburgh. This can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/QuestionsOnRace>. Also among our many inspiring guests were peacebuilder Rabbi David Rosen and award winning Imam Qari Mohammad Asim. You can watch interviews with them on our Facebook page and the Edinburgh Interfaith Association's YouTube Channel.

Another talk, HOLY WATER! celebrated the significance of water to our traditions, and how this inspires us to climate action and protecting our oceans. We were delighted to be joined by Pavan Kaur Virdee, Marine Biologist; Amandeep Kaur of EcoSikh; and John Halstead, the co-author of the Pagan community statement for the environment. This show was one of many we have held relating to the climate emergency in our run up to COP26.

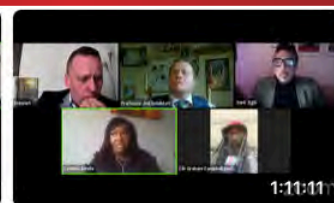
Our community dialogue series Reimagining continued with more thought-provoking topics. Among them was 'Reimagining a Healthier, Better



Materialism and the Future of Our Festivals
13 weeks ago · 878 views



Faith in Action
14 weeks ago · 630 views



Decolonising Education with Graham Campbell
15 weeks ago · 1.1K views

You' (pictured below) with Bridget Holtom, Quaker Local Development Worker and previously a Wellbeing Advisor for Forestry and Land Scotland running mental health training and workshops in the woods, and Mike Delaitre, a singer songwriter, musician, film maker, social worker and healer.

We have continued to ensure our diverse faith communities are represented in shaping public policy and the decisions that affect them, for example in the Empowered Edinburgh Equalities Steering Group and the Inclusive Programme Steering Group on the COVID-19 vaccine. Our activities have provided a platform for projects to be connected and for the sharing of best practice. For example, after a live show involving Dr Tamara Joffe, instrumental with the Vaxi Taxi initiative in London, our board member Prof Joe Goldblatt suggested the idea in steering groups which then inspired the vaccination roll out in buses in Glasgow.

To celebrate Pride Month 2021, we held an online event entitled Pride

2021: Interfaith Solidarity. LGBTQIA+ speakers and attendees, and allies, discussed barriers to inclusion. This was a safe space where we shared best practice for inclusive faith communities and creatively imagined avenues for interfaith solidarity and support. We are currently working on a document of recommendations for inclusive faith communities supportive of their LGBTQIA+ members, inspired by this event and the diversity of opinions and experiences represented.

We were delighted to welcome two new members of our team through the Kickstart scheme. With them, we are working on adapting our social media strategy, and community outreach, to the changing landscape of 2021. We are planning a virtual Peace Walk, with tailored content on TikTok, Facebook, Youtube and Instagram, to creatively reach new audiences with our message of #UnityinDiversity. We held our first in-person interfaith gathering on 31st July, a picnic with langar provided by Edinburgh Guru Nanak Gurdwara, and climate related "artist" activities.



Fife Interfaith Group

The Fife Interfaith Group held its annual General Meeting on 16 June via Zoom. Frank Bowness (secretary), a long-term member of the group and Evelyn Liston (Treasurer) reached their three-year term on service. Frank is now serving as assistant to the newly elected Secretary Jennifer Wilson. Evelyn was re-elected as treasurer and was also elected as membership secretary. Gordon Agnes was elected as the minutes secretary and Louisa Turner was elected as the events coordinator.

Volunteers at Plastic-free Dunfermline joined our group on 19th May 2021 to give a presentation about reducing plastic consumption. Their motto is 'Refuse Reduce Reuse Recycle'. Pamela Henderson joined the group with a presentation on Christians Against Poverty. Frank MacFarlane gave a fascinating talk about the history of Fife Interfaith Group. A write-

up of these talks are available on request. Please contact Interfaith Scotland for details. Four members of the Fife Interfaith group helped out at the Salvation Army open day in Kirkcaldy on 31st July running stalls and helping with the games. The event was very successful and we're happy that we've made good friends with this very important organisation. At our most recent committee meeting we talked about meeting face-to-face subject to government regulations. On 18th August we held an online Interfaith 'Buddies' event fashioned after the successful Interfaith Scotland events in recent months. We plan to host an interfaith picnic in September. It will be great to see everyone again in person.



The Fife Interfaith Group are embracing technology. We now have a twitter account and an Instagram account. We hope this will increase our visibility. Please see the details below:

Twitter: www.twitter.com/fig25500796

Instagram: @fifeinterfaith

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FifeInterfaith/

Interfaith Glasgow

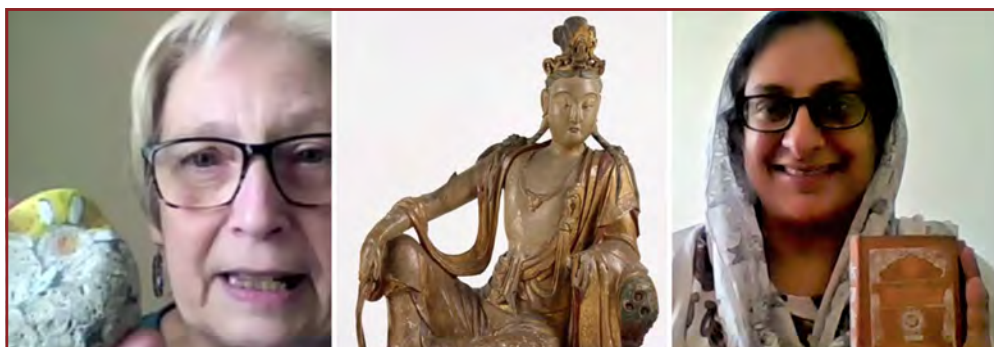
On the 17 June, 22 women from Pagan, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu traditions joined us on Zoom for an object-based dialogue. They came with sacred books, prayer beads, a spinning wheel, a prayer rug and more. Some said they felt nervous at first, but over the course of the afternoon they opened up to each other, especially when in small groups, about how prayer has seen them through good times and bad.

To get them started in their conversations, Noorah Al-Gailani, Curator of Islamic Civilisations at Glasgow Museums, gave a stimulating presentation with photos of objects from the museums' collections relating to prayer, including prayer beads from various religions – so many traditions use them! Noorah also shared a set of her own prayer beads from Syria. Each bead bears three of God's 99 Names – his attributes. These beads

help keep a tally when reciting prayers and meditating on the 99 Names.

Then, in small breakout rooms, the women shared powerful stories about how they use prayer on a daily basis for support. About her Bible, one woman said, "I meditate on it both day and night. It gives me peace and joy". One participant talked about how she says a prayer every time she sits in front of her computer to study. Another talked about praying for her unborn child whilst she was pregnant so that he or she could receive blessings. And what was to be gained from the experience? By the end of the

session the women exuded a sense of delight in each other's company. Some spoke about how much they had learned about other traditions, while others were struck by the "depth of commitment" and "passion" they encountered in their dialogue partners. They all expressed their gratitude to each other, some commenting that it was a "wonderful experience" and "a blessing" to have the chance to listen to each other's stories. As well as learning about others, we often find that people feel their own faith has been enriched or deepened through interfaith dialogue.



Dundee Interfaith Group

Dundee Interfaith Pilgrimage

I was delighted to attend my first in-person interfaith event since the start of lockdown on Saturday 17th July. Faith and Belief Dundee and Tayside (FaB) hosted an interfaith pilgrimage around the city. Picking up pilgrims along the way we had 18 in all spanning seven decades which made for lots of interesting conversations on the walk. We started our journey at the Central Mosque in Milne Street.

We then walked along to the University of Dundee's Chaplaincy Centre. Carrie Varjavandi outlined the various activities that take place in the centre and the space that is available there for interfaith meetings and events. We then paused at a bench that had been dedicated to the memory of a young Baha'i student who passed away 20 years ago. Carrie had prepared a bouquet of roses shaped like a heart and we were each offered a rose to wear to remember this sad loss. The beautiful roses also served to unite us as pilgrims on the journey.

We passed by the Hindu Mandir in Taylor's Lane before arriving at the Gate Church's Community Fridge. A focus of the pilgrimage was caring for the environment in the light of COP26 and Interfaith Scotland's Year of Climate Action. FaB Dundee had arranged for us to be given presentations by the organisers of inspiring faith-based community projects in the city that were playing their part in this. The Community Fridge operates in the open air in a beautiful space owned by the Council. The project obtains food from a wide range of supermarkets that otherwise would go to waste. Anyone can access this



food for free and over the two years of the project 133 tons of food has been saved. Although the focus is primarily on reducing waste, it has the dual purpose of helping those who need extra support with food during the week without stigma. A whole team of volunteers keep the project operating seven days per week. The Fridge is part of the Gate Church's Carbon Neutral Project which has been instrumental in establishing Dundee's Climate Action Network that is currently focusing on action leading up to COP26. We had the wonderful surprise of being provided with homemade pizza, humous and cake by the volunteers which helped us on our way.

Our next stop was the Community Garden that is run by the Yousaf Youth Initiative, a long-established Muslim charity in the city. As well as its work in schools, the charity runs a city-wide food bank called Taught by Muhammad which is a key part of the city's food insecurity network. The Community Garden in Blackness Road is a more recent addition to this project, but already the former bowling green is growing a significant amount of vegetables. The Community Garden



is open to anyone to volunteer and this project will become part of the Food Insecurity Network which will help establish an outlet for its produce.

The final stop on our journey was the Maggie's Centre that occupies a peaceful setting in the grounds of Ninewells Hospital. The centre provides free cancer support and information with a purpose-built labyrinth situated to the front and the beautiful Ninewells Community Garden just to the south. Labyrinths can be used for meditation or prayer and walking the labyrinth was a fitting way to end our pilgrimage journey together. It had been an inspiring and moving experience to have been able to finally meet in person again and many thanks to the members of Faith and Belief Dundee for their organisation of this special day.

Frances Hume



Aberdeen's New Sikh Temple Officially Opens its Doors

THE UK's newest and most northerly Sikh Temple (Gurdwara) has finally had a full ceremonial official opening in its permanent new home in Aberdeen. The small Aberdeen and North-east of Scotland Sikh community had to hold worship meetings in each other's homes for decades.

In 2018 the Aberdeen Sikh congregation (Sangat) purchased the former Timber Kinder Garden Nursery in St Ninian's Place, Seaton, just off King Street. Over the past two years it has undergone a major refurbishment. This included developing a prayer hall, a large community kitchen (Langar), an activity room for youngsters, and a residential facility for the priest (Gianni Ji).

To mark the ceremonial opening the Sikh Holy Book (Guru Granth Sahib) was brought north from Sikh Temple Dundee to be placed on a throne inside the Aberdeen Gurdwara. This is the final and most important step that officially signified the inauguration of the Gurdwara. Prior to the arrival of the Holy Book, the orange Sikh flag (Nishan Sahib), present in every Gurdwara around the world, was erected and flown.

The senior trustee of the Aberdeen Gurdwara and the Aberdeen Sikh Sangat Charity, Suki Singh Pooni, explained: "Our auspicious opening was marked with a joyous welcome of the Holy Book by our congregation - showering it with flowers and singing of hymns. This was followed by a full week of ceremonial activities, with the reading of the full scriptures of the Guru Granth Sahib, concluding with a final celebration of hymns and sermons". A number of guests from Scotland's three other Sikh Temples - in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee - travelled north for the final day's celebrations.

"A great deal of hard work has gone into making the project a reality over the last 10 years, with the congregation chipping in with fundraising and refurbishment activities. We finally have a place of worship - open to all and

not just the Sikh faith - which we hope present and future generations can use, cherish and serve as a charitable base to serve humanity in any way we can! Performing selfless services (Sewa) is a fundamental tenet of the Sikh faith, and, with a new base, there can now be greater efforts from the Aberdeen Sangat to engage, perhaps help fund and aid with community projects."

The Aberdeen Gurdwara draws its members from an area stretching from Dundee to Shetland and has a congregation of approaching 40 families. The Gurudwara maintains a daily morning and evening prayer schedule and generally a main congregation day on Sundays. Shortly it is planned to start up musical and Sikh language (Gurmukhi) classes for all ages of the congregation.



Inspirational Women

Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network have hosted a series of talks by inspirational women.

For the second in the series, we were delighted to be joined by Zara Mohammad, first female Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain; Umutesi Stewart, speaker, nurse and survivor of the Rwandan Genocide, and Sister Isabel Smyth OBE, founding director of Interfaith Scotland and the Catholic Bishops' Secretary for Inter-religious Dialogue. Expertly chaired by Karen Maxwell, Coordinating Committee Member of RfP UKWFN, this discussion took place on Zoom with over 50 registrants.

How does faith and culture both offer us obstacles to, and bring us the strength to fight for, equality? Our guests shared their life stories, how they started on their path, and what barriers they faced. Karen asked open questions such as "which women have inspired you on your path?". We

heard from Umutesi, on her incredibly moving story of watching the murder of her family, and how strong women in her community and on her path to safety inspired her, and showed her the strength of the human spirit. Zara told us about how she's endlessly inspired by her mother: her down to earth and practical attitude, combined with the motivation to create positive change. And Isabel told us all about the strong women of faith that she lives with, builds community and shares her spiritual path with, and how they are united by their common motivation to equality and justice.

It was an honour for all present to hear about the inspiring lives of these women, from three different generations, how they have overcome the barriers they have faced, and what advice they have for women to



overcome the barriers we face at the current time. The theme of our event was echoed by warm responses in the chat from audience members: "Thank you so very much. You are all such inspirations!"

Catch up on the recording at <https://youtu.be/nVTLxIx-xTs> and SUBSCRIBE on our YouTube channel at <https://tinyurl.com/RFPeace>

Dumfries and Galloway Baha'i Community

The Food for Soul devotionals, held every Sunday morning, started in March 2020 as an initiative of the Dumfries and Galloway Baha'i community.

Open to friends from all faiths and walks of life, they were to provide spiritual food, solace and comfort during the challenging days of the pandemic. Now over a year later, they are still continuing with regular and new participants from Dumfries and Galloway, other parts of Scotland, and many countries around the world, including Australia, India, Norway and Netherlands. Each week, we focus on a different deep and meaningful theme.

The inspiration for these gatherings is based on the Baha'i Writings. Through friends gathering together and reading from the Sacred Texts, 'doors of true knowledge will be opened' and we will feel our 'souls endowed with steadfastness and ... hearts filled with

radiant joy'. The short program involves music and readings about the theme. Then friends are invited to bring their own reading, prayer, song or story. We are very grateful for the amazing and beautiful range of contributions from many faiths and cultures. In recent weeks we have had the bounty of

live cello music from a professional musician based in Amsterdam. We would like to express our thanks to our interfaith friends from Scotland for supporting this local endeavour and to Interfaith Scotland for their continuing encouragement.



Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre opens in Glasgow

The Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre opened at Garnethill Synagogue, Glasgow on 27th July enabling new audiences to find out about the Category A listed building, unique archive collections and aspects of Scottish Jewish history and culture.

Visitors will discover the history and the experiences of Jewish people in Scotland over 200 years and learn how the development of Scotland has been impacted by Jewish immigration. According to Kerry Patterson, Manager of the Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre, "The Scottish Centre is an important resource for Scotland. By enabling greater access to the collections and encouraging an understanding of the history of Jewish immigration and the contributions of the Jewish community to Scottish life, we hope to contribute to furthering equality and diversity and promoting inclusion."

The Centre includes new interpretative displays, a study room housing a specialist reference library, digital research resources and a school visit facility. One of the displays explores the period from 1933 to the 1950s when

Scotland responded to events in Nazi Germany and took in a number of refugees. School students visiting will be working with interactive learning kits which follow the experiences of refugees who found a safe haven in Scotland before the outbreak of the Second World War. Students will be able to reflect on wider issues of citizenship, democracy, persecution and belonging, through the refugees' experiences.

Susan Hodgins, daughter of child refugee Dorrieth Sim (pictured) said, "The new Heritage Centre is about learning and understanding. My mother's raison d'être was to make sure that people never forgot about the experiences of the refugees. The displays are not just about Judaism, they are about people, about life." The new Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre website www.sjhc.org.uk has been launched featuring a short film showcasing the Centre and including details on how to book a guided tour of the building or organise a school visit. A weekend activities programme will offer a wide range of public events. The new Centre can be used for training, educational courses, seminars and workshops.

In addition to increasing visibility of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre's collections, the Centre will expand public access to the historic Garnethill



Synagogue through regular tours. Visitors will be able to appreciate its beautiful architecture and learn about its history.

Susan Siegel, Chair of Garnethill Synagogue Preservation Trust and board member of Interfaith Scotland shared, "Garnethill Synagogue is ideally placed for the new Centre. The synagogue is of great architectural interest and for the past thirty-five years it has also been the home of the Archives Centre. The Centre brings into focus fascinating stories about people associated with Garnethill Synagogue, who contributed so much towards the modern City of Glasgow."

