

Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Spring 2022: Issue 37

Making a Difference through Dialogue



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Turbulent Times:

Envisioning The Future

As we begin to emerge from the global pandemic, we can be rightly proud of how the faith communities and interfaith groups in Scotland arose and are still arising to support the most vulnerable in society.

A similar show of strength and solidarity was demonstrated during COP26 and we, at Interfaith Scotland, were indeed honoured to work with faith communities, local interfaith groups, religious leaders and diverse environmental organisations in the build up to and during the Climate Conference. This newsletter captures some of the profound engagements that took place during COP26 and Scottish Interfaith Week 2021.

But what now? Many people that we engage with have spoken of feeling 'flat' or 'anxious', others have said they feel unsure of 'next steps' or are scared about what the future might hold. It certainly feels as though society is in a liminal space - the space where we are between 'what was' and not knowing 'what will come'. The term liminality was first coined by French Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep to explain the transitional spaces created in rites of passage. The word comes from the Latin term 'limin' meaning threshold; it is literally the threshold separating one space from another.

And just as our newsletter was going to print, the terrible tragedy and spectre of war in Ukraine unfolded before our eyes. There was no time to write articles about the incredible response of the faith communities and people of Scotland but once again we are deeply moved by the compassion of ordinary people. At Interfaith Scotland we held a prayer meeting and supported local faith community practical action, alongside assisting Christian Aid to make its 'Appeal for Ukraine' a multi-faith appeal. We continue to hold the people of Ukraine in our hearts and prayers.

In the months and indeed years to come we look forward to working with all of you as we create a vision together, a vision motivated by the love, hope and justice that we see at the heart of our faith communities. The journey may be long and challenging but there is strength in being on this journey together. Perhaps I should end here with the theme of COP26 and the theme of Scottish Interfaith week and I pray that we will continue to be 'Together for our Planet'.

Dr Maureen Sier, Director



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

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Annual Interfaith Lecture 2021: Is the Climate Crisis a Human Rights Issue?

With 2021 being our 'Year of Climate Action' it seemed most appropriate that the Annual Interfaith Lecture should focus on one of the critical questions of the climate crisis 'Is the Climate Crisis a Human Rights issue'?



Father Benedict Ayodi

We were honoured to have speakers, Father Benedict Ayodi, Outreach Officer for Franciscans International (from Kenya) and Budi Tjahjono, the Asia Pacific Coordinator also with Franciscans International (from Indonesia). Both were powerful speakers and clearly demonstrated the link between the climate crisis and human rights. The full lecture/s can be found on our YouTube channel.



Budi Tjahjono

Networking Seminar for local interfaith groups workshop

Interfaith Scotland's annual networking seminar for local interfaith groups took place on 19th August 2021 on Zoom.

Our National Development Officer, Frances Hume, outlined the findings of the consultation undertaken with local interfaith groups earlier in the year. The aim of the consultation was to find out what was working well in terms of Interfaith Scotland's support for the groups and what we could be doing more of. One request was for Interfaith Scotland to set up an online forum for interfaith groups to be in touch with one another and engage in dialogue. Our Communications and Marketing Officer, Jill Stevens, gave an outline of ways that local groups could have a more active social media presence and presented a new Facebook Group that she has set up for local interfaith groups. The Facebook group offers a platform for members of local interfaith groups to start a dialogue, share stories and advertise upcoming events. The group is moderated by

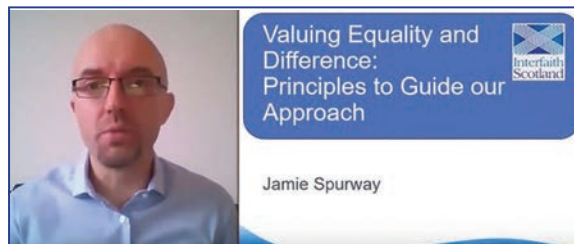
Interfaith Scotland staff and anyone in a local interfaith group can ask to join the group which can be found on Facebook at 'Local Interfaith Groups in Scotland'.

Jamie Spurway, our Equalities and Training Officer, then led a workshop exploring the impact of our inner narratives on our relationships. The Indian Philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti is quoted as saying 'the ability to observe without interpreting is the highest form of intelligence' and the discussion considered a similar idea. Jamie shared some examples from his own experience of when his inner storytelling has got in the way of his interactions, like the woman who sat shaking her head through the first half of training course on human trafficking. The 'story' he started to form was that this woman was disagreeing with him,

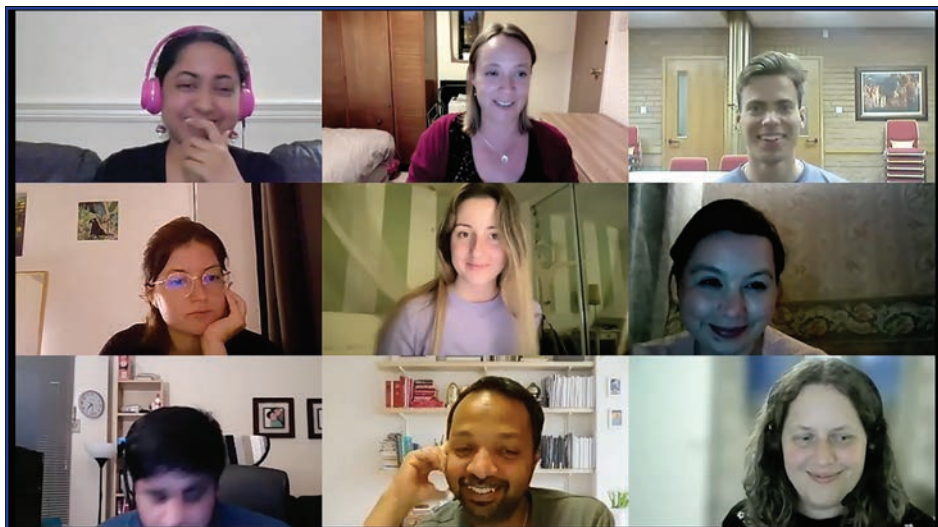
that connected to another interpretation that maybe she was some expert on human trafficking and his self-confidence started to crumble. Luckily for Jamie, the woman mentioned during the break that she realised that she'd been shaking her head during the presentation, it was just that 'everything that she was hearing was so awful!'. Her head shake was one of sympathy, rather than disagreement! Through these and some of the group's own experiences we explored the relationship between our own interpretations, our feelings and the actions we take. As the session came to a close Jamie shared some tools to become more conscious of our inner storytelling. If it sounds interesting for you, please drop an email to jamie@interfaithscotland.org and we can arrange providing the workshop as a public training course.

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

Over much of last year our training officer Jamie Spurway was supporting the important work of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS).



He delivered training to their executive team as well as to their HR and People Team, and he regularly contributes to their equality advisory group. SCTS was aware that it would not be possible for Jamie to deliver training to all of its staff, so they asked if he could make a recording of some of the key themes of his courses, and so a 10 minute film was created. While the film is intended for SCTS staff, many of the ideas are still relevant to others. If you have ever wondered what we cover in our popular training sessions you might like to watch the short film to get a feel for them: <https://tinyurl.com/IFStraining1>



Focus Group With Young People

Interfaith Scotland was invited to take the lead in consulting with young people of faith to inform the development of the Scottish Government's National Youth Work Strategy.

A meeting was held on Zoom and attended by volunteer youth workers who run youth clubs in local faith communities across Scotland from the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Quaker faiths, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The youth workers provided valuable insight on the topics that had been outlined for discussion -

youth work is inclusive and accessible for all, health and well-being, skills and achievement, funding and investment, workforce development, and communicating the benefits of youth work. All of their points were recorded and the report was presented to YouthLink Scotland.



Alan Meldrum

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

Interfaith Scotland supports the meetings of the Religion or Belief Cross Party Group.

In the October meeting we heard an excellent presentation from Alan Meldrum of the organisation Open Doors. Their focus is on providing support and advice for Christians who are experiencing persecution around the world. Tragically this is an increasing concern in many countries and Alan gave the group a very informative summary of their 'world watch list'; the countries where there is evidence of the worst levels of anti-Christian persecution.

We heard about evidence of discrimination and persecution in South and South East Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. His input focused on the experiences of Christians but very much recognised that in many of the countries described, other minority faith communities experience similar treatment. One striking theme was the denial of Covid treatment and vaccinations to Christians and other minorities. Over the coming year we expect to hear more presentations on threats to freedom of religion or belief around the world. If you are interested in attending future CPG events (which are likely to be a mix of both Zoom meetings and face to face) please drop an email to jamie@interfaithscotland.org

Year of Climate Action Updates

In light of Interfaith Scotland's Year of Climate Action, we launched a Facebook Live series 'Beyond Climate'. In September we engaged with a panel of young people - Jen Stout, Anish Subramaniam and Dr Alexandra Masako Goossens-Ishii, talking about the impact of the climate crisis on young people in 'The Climate Crisis: Beyond the Next Generation'. In October, Lucy Plummer, Valeriane Bernard and Dr Kumanga Andrahennadi talked about their hope for the future of climate action after COP26 in Glasgow in 'The Climate Crisis: Beyond COP26'.

The series came to a conclusion in November during Scottish Interfaith Week with an international panel - Maja Groff, International lawyer, The Hague and Convenor of the Climate Governance Commission; Professor Joe Goldblatt, Chair of Edinburgh Interfaith Association and Emeritus Professor; and Rev Bonnie Evans Hills, Convener of the Scottish Episcopal Church Interfaith Relations Committee, talking about the need for World Nations to unite in the

fight against Climate Crisis in 'The Climate Crisis: Beyond Nations'. All episodes have been recorded and can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/BeyondClimateCrisis>

Following on from Interfaith Scotland's Year of Climate Action we have had many opportunities to share thoughts about and experiences of COP26. On 7 February 2022, the World Congress of Faiths hosted an online discussion between Dr Maureen Sier of Interfaith Scotland and Lucy Plummer, a member

of the Religions for Peace Youth Network. Both had been involved in the COP26 climate conference in different ways, and reflected on their learning from the event and their thoughts some months on. This was followed by an interesting general discussion. Interfaith Scotland is committed to continuing to support faith-based climate dialogue and action in the years ahead. You can watch the interview and discussion at <https://tinyurl.com/ImpressionsCOP26>

Faith Community News Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society

The Scottish Arbaeen Peace Walk

Inspired by the annual Grand Pilgrimage currently undertaken by tens of millions of pilgrims between the Holy Cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society's Arbaeen Peace Walk was held in Edinburgh this year.

It follows on from the first Peace Walk organised in Glasgow last year. The Walk marks the 40th [lit. Arbaeen] day after the anniversary of Imam Hussain's martyrdom 1400 years ago. Imam Hussain – the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad – was killed along with his family and friends for opposing a tyrannical rule and upholding pristine and noble human values. The teachings of Imam Hussain inspire millions to this day, and we learn from his compassion, justice, and righteousness. SABS' Brother Ameer Versace brought the Arbaeen Walk to Scottish soil for the second year. This time, he found the opportunity to visit various friends and partners from other faith families and civic bodies in Edinburgh along the entire length of the walk. Collectively, we find our work aimed at promoting the unifying and transcendent message of Imam Hussain in common cause and with a shared will to establish social good in the nation and beyond.



SABS Commemoration 'Scottish Arbaeen Peace Walk, 2021' Reception, at the City Chambers - Hosted by the Rt. Hon. Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant of the City of Edinburgh, Councillor Frank Ross - 28 September 2021

Scottish Interfaith Week 2021

Scottish Interfaith Week in 2021 took place from 31 October to 7 November to coincide with the first week of COP26 in Glasgow. The theme of the week was 'Together for our Planet'. We developed an exciting programme of hybrid events, over 75 in total, and hosted our most successful launch event to date. The media coverage we received this year was exceptional, with over 20 news articles from publications around the world, and features in radio, blogs and film. Local interfaith groups, faith communities, local and international organisations, politicians, schools, youth groups, and chaplaincies all notably engaged with this year's Scottish Interfaith Week.

COP26 Vigil



We marked the start of COP26 and Scottish Interfaith Week by uniting with people of all faiths and none for Climate Justice with a Vigil in George Square, Glasgow on Sunday 31 October. This unique vigil was delivered in partnership by Interfaith Scotland, Interfaith Glasgow and with support from the Scottish Religious

Leaders' Forum, and brought together religious leaders on one stage in Glasgow's George Square as COP began. The religious leaders read the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration which can be found at <https://interfaithscotland.org/glasgow-multi-faith-declaration-for-cop26>.

Members of the Baha'i, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Brahma Kumaris and Pagan traditions stood side by side as prayers were offered from each tradition in turn, in a powerful demonstration of unity in diversity. Around 1000 people of all faiths and none participated – praying, meditating, and holding in their thoughts the COP26 negotiators and world leaders – that they might work together and make the commitments necessary to safeguard the future of humanity and all life on our planet. People joined online from all over the world including Kenya, India, South Africa, Italy, USA, Greece, Germany, Australia and New Zealand. Many were moved by this feeling of global connection, leaving comments such as "Thank you for making this act of solidarity possible on such an important occasion. Great to be able to join with those in Glasgow and others around the world." At time of print, the recording of the Vigil has been viewed nearly 5500 times. Watch it here and see for yourself!

www.tiny.cc/COP26VigilLive



Civic Reception



Following the Vigil in George Square, the Lord Provost Councillor Philip Braat and Glasgow City Council - together with Interfaith Glasgow and Interfaith Scotland - hosted a Civic Reception at the City Chambers to welcome the vigil participants, including many international visitors and pilgrims who had walked many miles to be in Glasgow as critical decisions for our planet's future were being made.



Talanoa Dialogue

Interfaith Scotland was invited to assist with the planning and delivery of the Talanoa Dialogue which took place on the first day of COP26. The event was hosted by the Interfaith Liaison Committee to the UNFCCC and aimed to serve as a platform for faith communities attending COP26 to share their initiatives, concerns and hopes in their work for climate justice. Talanoa dialogues are indigenous peoples from Fiji's way of solving problems in their communities, and the Fijian Presidency of COP 23 introduced the concept to work on the most challenging issues.

More than 200 people attended the event either online or in person at Garnethill Synagogue

in Glasgow. We were honoured to have Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of Orthodox Judaism and the Commonwealth, opening the event. We then heard from a number of panel speakers before going into small group dialogues on the following themes: Human Rights and the Climate, What is Loss and Damage, Young People Participation and Climate Negotiations, The Wisdom of Indigenous People, Advocacy and Climate Action, Climate Science, Gender Inclusive Climate Action, Finance for Climate Action, Building Strength and Resilience in the Face of the Climate Crisis, Global Governance and Climate Action, Engagement of Faith Groups in addressing the climate emergency,

Just Transition and Adaptation. Notes from the workshops were written on flipchart paper and displayed on the walls of the synagogue. Key themes were fed into a meeting at COP26.

The event concluded with an interfaith service that was co-ordinated by Interfaith Scotland. Members of the following faiths gave a reflection, reading, prayer, meditation, song or piece of music to those gathered: Jewish, Brahma Kumaris, Pagan, Christian (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Lutheran), Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Baha'i, Hindu and Quaker. You can read more about the Talanoa Dialogue at www.lutheranworld.org/news/cop26-together-across-faiths-climate-justice



Young Voices Calling for Climate Action

We can't talk about climate justice without including those who will be most affected by environmental change - young people! As part of the COP26 Vigil, Interfaith Glasgow created a series of short videos which brought the thoughts and ideas of young people to the fore. Working closely with young members of seven

different faiths who all played an active role in the Vigil, we listened as they shared their beliefs about environmental protection, climate justice and the power of people of all faiths and none coming together on these issues. The first two films feature a young Sikh (<http://tiny.cc/iq8muz>) and a young Christian climate activist

(<http://tiny.cc/jq8muz>). A third film was released on our social media the week after the vigil and features a further six young people from different faiths, offering their reflections on that momentous afternoon and their hopes for the future. Watch it here and let's work together to keep their hopes alive: <http://tiny.cc/hq8muz>

March for Climate Justice



On 6 November, faith and belief communities turned up in great numbers to support the climate justice march organised by the COP26 Coalition. Despite the biting cold and rain, this family friendly event attracted people of all ages from many parts of the world and walks of life, who walked from Kelvingrove Park to Glasgow Green via George Square. Interfaith Glasgow worked together with Interfaith Scotland to invite diverse religious leaders to walk together holding the banner 'Faith and Beliefs for Climate Justice' as part of the Faith and Belief bloc, alongside numerous community members and faith-based organisations.

Approximately 100,000 people joined the march, demonstrating the growing interest in climate justice –

a movement calling for the ethical dimensions of climate change to be addressed as we seek to decarbonise. Faith communities have much to contribute to the discussion about what climate justice means, and we will continue to work to make sure their voices are heard as part

of the growing, global climate justice movement.

Participants and volunteers from Interfaith Glasgow's Weekend Club joined the Anti-Racism and Migrant Justice bloc, marching in solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers in Glasgow and around the world.



Creative workshops for women



Interfaith Scotland hosted an online creative writing workshop for women and an art workshop in person with women from The Welcoming, a charity supporting refugees and migrants in Edinburgh. Through both events, we explored our journeys of faith and our relationship with the natural world.

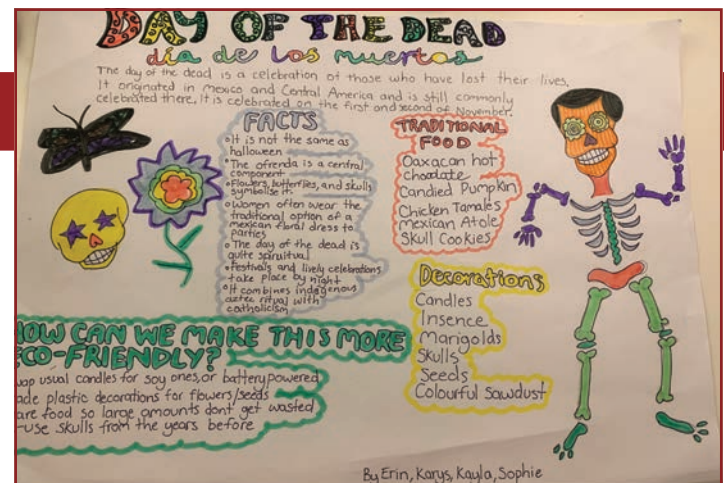
Interfaith education



Interfaith Scotland celebrated interfaith education at an event hosted by the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council where we were joined by speakers from the joint campus of St Clare's Primary (a Catholic school) and Calderwood Lodge (a Jewish school), and faith representatives. An amazing event to finish Scottish Interfaith Week – a look to the future of interfaith dialogue.

Art Competition

The theme of Interfaith Scotland's Scottish Interfaith Week art competition was exploring ways of making religious festivals more eco-friendly. We would like to say a special thank you to Kyle Academy, Greenfaulds High School and 5th Giffnock Guides for their wonderful competition entries.



'Sowing Seeds of Hope – Action for Climate Justice'

At COP26, Soka Gakkai International and the Centre for Applied Buddhism organised a series of panel discussions. Interfaith Scotland's Director, Dr Maureen Sier, and Development Officer Aparna Ramesh were asked to speak at the panels titled 'Climate Justice: The power of faith communities acting together' and 'Beyond Rhetoric - Youth Leadership for Climate Action' respectively. You can view the panel discussions at the following links:

<https://tinyurl.com/SGIpanel1>

<https://tinyurl.com/SGIpanel2>

Local Interfaith Groups Celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week

Central Scotland Activities



Rev Peter Gill, former minister at Wallneuk North Church of Scotland in Paisley and founder of the Renfrewshire Interfaith Group, recently took up a position as minister at Allan Church in Bannockburn and Cowie and Plean Parish Church. Taking his passion for interfaith dialogue with him, he hosted an interfaith event in Bannockburn during Scottish Interfaith Week. It

began with an interfaith service at Allan Church with a talk by Frances Hume on the importance of interfaith dialogue, a demonstration of tying a sari by Aparna Ramesh and then Peter, who hails from Pakistan, taught a children's song in Urdu along with members of his family. The celebrations then moved to the Bannockburn and Eastern Villages Sports Hub where

around 50 people gathered for speeches from the Lord Provost and from Advocat Z Mubasher Sahib. Then all enjoyed a delicious curry and cultural sharing including Scottish dancing and Urdu poetry. Peter has continued to host interfaith events including charity dinners at the Nawab Restaurant on Stirling raising money for Christian and Muslim charities.

Dumfries and Galloway Celebrates Scottish Interfaith Week

Dumfries and Galloway College

Dumfries and Galloway College has been working on encouraging staff and students to build on our campus culture so that everyone feels part of our College family, and this includes feeling comfortable to share one's faith. To celebrate

Scottish Interfaith Week, the College joined with national charity Nil By Mouth to hold online events for staff and students which promoted tolerance and advised on how to combat sectarianism. Founder Dave Scott hosted these interactive

sessions which emphasised that faith is something to be proud of, and that we can address sectarianism when it threatens to come between communities and individuals.

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

The Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group hosted a 'sell-out' showing of the film 'Thank You for the Rain' at the Stove Cafe in Dumfries on Wednesday 3 November 2021. Venus Carew of the Interfaith Group introduced the evening, highlighting that the theme of this year's Scottish Interfaith Week

supported COP 26, and the materials that were available for attendees to read and share. This included an 'environment' version of the 'Golden Rule' highlighting that all faiths embrace the concept of stewardship of our planet. After the moving film, the Stove's 'Reel to Reel' officer Katie

Anderson led a discussion and we enjoyed Fairtrade refreshments. An article about the film, 'Thank You For The Rain', is shared by Caitlin Wallace, an Inspire Graduate at Dumfries and Galloway Council, and an abridged version appears below.

'Thank You For The Rain'?

Norwegian filmmaker Julia Dahr's 'Thank You For The Rain' (2017) begins in the village of Mutomo in Southeast Kenya as the community faces its worst drought in living memory and has come together to pray for rain. "Our problem here is climate change," exclaims Musya, one of the village's local farmers. Fervently, he outlines the solution to his community, preaching with extensive knowledge the benefits of planting more trees and incorporating intercropping into their farming practises. But Musya's passion and drive to combat the climate crisis that his community is facing is met with disinterest.

Dahl gives Musya a camera so that he can document the impact of climate change first-hand through the eyes of a man living with the direct consequences. We watch Musya's video diaries of his family's suffering at the hands of the drought. Despite their hardships, they remain hopeful. There are clouds in the sky and the rain will come soon. And so, it does. First only a drizzle, and then comes a shower. Musya's children abandon collecting the water in buckets, wanting to splash and play in the puddles. There is joy and laughter. But this is short-lived. The



rain turns torrential, wreaking havoc on the landscape and blowing the roof off Musya's family home. He shares, "We were crying 'no rain, no rain' - now we are talking flood. Everything is being contradicted."

But this obstacle only spurs Musya further into his mission to educate his community on the problem of climate change and to 'promote the spirit of tree planting'. And this time, they listen to him and work together to make their land more resilient to extreme weather by planting trees around their local village.

Musya is invited to take his story to the global stage at the COP21 Climate Conference in Paris. Despite his initial enthusiasm at the onset of the conference, Musya becomes more and more frustrated faced with the

inertia of the world leaders. Tensions are high, and the inability of the world leaders to come to a consensus, leads to an agreement that dissatisfies the room of climate activists. Feeling defeated, Musya laments that his role at the conference was simply "to be seen and not heard."

As we watch Musya transform his local community through a series of simple minor changes, it becomes clear that the answer to the climate crisis will not be found through a roundtable discussion of world leaders within an ivory tower but, instead, through a bottom-up, grassroots, community-led approach. Musya was not a world leader, but a husband, a father, a worker who became a force of positive change through his innovative thinking and drive to tackle the erratic weather affecting his farm, family and local community. He tells us that 'failing to do something that needs to be done is a weakness' and that 'unity, tolerance and patience bears fruit'. The burden of solving the climate crisis sits on our shoulders and we too, like Musya, must become a positive force of change in our local communities if we want to see things improve.

Caitlin Wallace



Aberdeen Interfaith Group

The third annual Aberdeen Interfaith Forum took place on the afternoon of Saturday 30 October 2021. The forum was organised in partnership between Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC) and Aberdeen Interfaith group. More than 60 people attended the event from at least 13 different faith and belief group. 39 people joined us via Zoom and 22 in person at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Aberdeen. The theme was 'Together For Our Planet' outlined by Scottish Interfaith Week

and COP26. The sub-theme was "How Can We Play Our Part?" to try to address some tangible actions that participants and the local interfaith community can take forward.

Scott Herrett, a local Just Transition Organiser for Friends of the Earth Scotland, gave some context around COP26, and what Just Transition can look like in a city like Aberdeen, which is so synonymous with fossil fuels. Christine Meyer from Kintore Church spoke about youth representation

and local climate action. Charlie Meiklejohn from Christian Aid joined via Zoom from COP26 to talk about the impact of climate change in the global South and interfaith projects to take and promote action there. This was followed by small group discussions to talk more about turning the learning into local action; how can we play our part?! Finally, there were four excellent, hopeful presentations from young members of the local Hindu community; a lovely positive note to end on.

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group



The Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group is a safe, organic, open and informal group, welcoming women of all faiths and none. We are women who are committed to fostering friendship and understanding between ourselves and our local communities by providing a safe space for women - from a variety of cultures, to learn more about each other.

On Saturday 6 November 2021, Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group hosted a talk and presentation on the theme of 'Together for our Planet' at the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh as part of the Scottish Interfaith Week. A student from the University of Edinburgh provided a presentation on climate change and a discussion on how to save our Mother Earth. A member of Edinburgh

and Lothians Racial Equality Council provided a workshop on how to up-cycle general waste into something beautiful. We are very grateful for Interfaith Scotland for providing financial support to organise this event and for their ongoing support and encouragement.

Nila Joshi

Cop 26 Pilgrims Welcomed to Edinburgh



It was a very special day when politicians, religious leaders and academics gathered at New College Edinburgh for a ceremony to welcome the pilgrims who had been walking from across the UK and Europe to COP26 to raise awareness of the climate crisis and to share their hopes for Climate Justice. We were also delighted to see the New College interfaith 'Care for Creation' banners.

After the ceremony, the Edinburgh Interfaith Association took those gathered on a mini pilgrimage of Edinburgh visiting various places of worship and concluding with a short service and langar at the Sikh Gurdwara.

The COP26 Walk symbolised the tartan spirit of Scottish faith organisations as pilgrims from all over walked in unison to promote through our faith the importance of climate change. The pilgrims walked and breathed as if we were one giant community of care seeking to support planet Earth, and we shall keep walking to inspire future generations to join us in our quest for a more sustainable world.

Iain Stewart, Executive Director of EIFA
Professor Joe Goldblatt, Chair of EIFA



Faith Communities and Scottish Interfaith Week

Craigsbank/East Craigs Parish Church

Craigsbank / East Craigs Parish Church is dedicated to playing its part in protecting the environment. Our Prayer Group have been meeting week by week to pray for God's Creation and prayers are said for the many corners of the world where so much support is required. On 10 October our service at Craigsbank looked at caring for Creation and was led by Rev David Coleman, Chaplain to Eco Congregation Scotland. The

service is available to view on the Craigsbank Parish Church YouTube channel. Forest Church meets in months where there are five Sundays. On 31 October we focussed on COP26 and the regeneration of nature through biodiversity.

The Eco Group of Craigsbank Parish Church created one of the panels for the banners for COP26.



At ECO Church, we planted seeds in old boots as a token of commitment to a new, sustainable, green future. In doing so we honour the past which has served us well, but which has outlived its usefulness and is now causing damage. We had two little boys to help us plant the seeds. They will grow up watching their trees grow. We can watch our 'Boot' trees growing as they hang on the fence round the garden of East Craigs Church.

The children of East Craigs Primary School had a display on the boundary fence of the school on the subject of Climate Change. Primary 2 and 3 pupils discussed climate change and talked about ways they could help the planet. The children wanted their COP26 art piece to convey a positive message that we can all help by

making changes for a greener future. It features a world map showing the transition from a polluted, littered and endangered planet to a green and healthy one.

During the two weeks preceding COP26 members of the congregation joined the pilgrims of YCCN (Young Christian Climate Network) on their walk from Cornwall to Glasgow. We met up at Musselburgh for the walk along the John Muir Way into Edinburgh.

This particular group had walked from Newcastle carrying very large, weighty packs, and it was obvious from the start that one of the group, Stephan, was struggling as he limped along haltingly. One look at Stephan's boots told the whole story! They were old,





torn and tattered, with gaping holes, soles flapping and just held together by the laces!

Stephan was very fond of his old boots. He had walked in them for 20 years and had completed three pilgrimages including the Camino de

Santiago, and he was loath to part with them, even though he knew they were causing him pain. I suggested what when he got home he might use his old boots as planters for tree seeds gathered on the route to Glasgow. It was as difficult for Stephan to change his old boots as it will be for

us all to change our ways, ways that have served us well in the past, but which now are damaging the planet. In planting tree seeds he would be committing to the future, and trees planted now will outlive us all.

Anne Currie

The Loving Earth Project at Gorbals Parish Church

In September 2021, the organiser of the 'Loving Earth Project' made contact with Gorbals Parish Church, asking if we might be a host venue for an exhibition of 50 textile panels, celebrating aspects of the natural world which we love and yet are also endangered by climate change and human activity.

The 50 beautiful panels we received and displayed as a public exhibition during COP26, were just some of the

many more panels created all over the UK by individuals and groups in the run up to COP26. Gorbals Church was one of four 'host' venues in Glasgow in November - and the batches of panels continue to travel and be put on show across the country. More details can be found at www.lovingearth-project.uk It was a lot of work but a huge privilege for us at Gorbals, to welcome visitors and witness reactions as they took in each depiction of the

beauty of our world and the damage that is going on. Every panel was accompanied by a 'storyboard' - a few paragraphs written by the maker of the panel, saying why they had chosen their design and what they are trying to do to be actively helping the planet. We also held two workshops where we created our own panels, two of which have been added to the travelling exhibition.

Jo Love



The storyboard under the third image read as follows: My little children (4 and six months) inspired this vision of a rewilded future... We take too much from the Earth and are impoverishing the world our children are to inherit. I choose to act for the future I want for my children by rewilding a few acres of land, by not flying, by minimising my consumption of 'stuff', by eating ethically sourced vegan food, by nourishing our connection with Nature, and by appreciating simple pleasures. There's no deprivation in living sustainably - in community with each other and Nature.

Spiritualism shares light, nature and truth for SIFW

With COP26 taking place in Glasgow, the Spiritualists' National Union launched a 'Year of the Environment' in 2021. The year was used to start and continue conversations and long-lasting actions within Spiritualism that would address climate change and the many crises that the environment faces on our doorsteps and around the world. Naturally, our spirituality was the starting point for our contribution to SIFW, and our philosophy supports the bonds of community and encourages our care for the world around us, along with the life we share it with. Spiritualist Pioneer, Lizzie Doten, wrote the words to one of our much-loved hymns, which say, "The mighty tide of being flows through all Thy creatures back to Thee." The words impress upon us the interconnectedness of all life and the opportunity to find God in a better relationship with the planet.

Knowing that Spiritualist thinking provides a rich seam of inspiration to care for the environment, we set to work on organising a service that would collect some of these thoughts. At the service there were representatives from all areas of Scotland, as well as members of our Ministry and participants from other faiths who attended were able to hear a wide range of voices from our community and look at the climate crisis through the lens of Spiritualism. We began with the emblem of our



religion, which contains the words light, nature and truth, and places our responsibility to protect our environment at the heart of our identity as Spiritualists. From there we explored together the aspects of today's pressing issues that were also being discussed at the same time at COP26 in Glasgow. The scientific basis that supports the urgent need to halt and reverse environmental damage is well-known, even if not well-acted upon. The spiritual basis that urges people of all faiths to act needs to reach a wider audience and the opportunities to do this that SIFW brings are incredibly valuable.

Our service was interactive, and gave everyone present the opportunity to give voice to their thoughts and ideas. We heard and discussed a range of practical actions that were committed to: Churches pledging to plant for pollinators in their grounds, to shop local, and reduce plastic. Individuals pledging to eat more plant-based food, change energy suppliers, buy less and reuse more. A service is a starting point, and what matters are the changes that flow

from it; spiritual, philosophical, and practical. Faith in change is vital!

COP26 was about the change that is needed to safeguard all of our futures. While we explored the need to hold vast industries and governments to account, we embraced the power of personal responsibility, which is one of the Seven Principles of Spiritualism. It is this that encourages Spiritualists to take positive actions and to know that these make a difference. Thinking about this during SIFW also reminded us of the power that faith communities have to make a positive difference too. Together we are all stronger and if all of our congregations are encouraged and supported to create these actions, then a powerful tide of change will flow from the interfaith community.

After our service, we shared the recording on social media, and our YouTube Channel, SNUfilm. It was good to capture the ideas, and keep them as a resource for others to think about. SIFW is once a year, but we need to keep building the bridges of community and inspiring action every day. We continue to face a climate crisis, and we have never had more in common than we do now. Let's work together for change.

Scottish SNU Spiritualists



Tackling Hate Together

A blog for National Hate Crime Awareness Week

‘Tackling Hate Together’ seems like an odd title for a blog by an interfaith activist, but there is no doubt in my mind that by building good relations between the diverse faith traditions of Scotland we are effectively creating a culture of inclusivity and peace.

A fair percentage of the work of Interfaith Scotland is bringing communities and individuals together to talk, take action and build bonds of friendship and understanding. However, there is another aspect of good interfaith work that often goes unseen but is equally critical. This is the behind the scenes work of standing together in solidarity when there are societal tensions, when relationships are strained, when hateful things are being done to communities or are being said about communities. What sort of response did a local interfaith group show when a rural Muslim community arrived at their mosque to see obscene graffiti plastered on the walls? They went immediately to the Mosque, met the President, reassured the community of solidarity with them and offered continued support if needed.

What sort of response did National Religious Leaders show when a faith community was targeted by terrorists? The Scottish Religious Leaders Forum met together at Glasgow Central Mosque and collectively sent a powerful message of sympathy and support to the Christian Community at the time of the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka.

What sort of response was shown when young people verbally abused visibly religious community representatives? Members of the Jewish community targeted in this way engaged directly with the young people through contacting and visiting the perpetrators’ school, speaking directly to them and using education as the tool for change.



And what took place when there were community tensions in Scotland because of the Israel/Palestine conflict earlier this year? Over a hundred representatives from faith communities directly impacted by the conflict met regularly to ‘Pray for Peace in the Holy Land’ over a number of weeks. In addition women from the Jewish and Muslim Community met together to discuss how to find ways to keep the dialogue and engagement open between their communities.

These are all actions of interfaith and faith communities’ responses to hate and prejudice and there are countless other stories from across the length and breadth of Scotland. Tackling hate however needs more than just individual and community action, it requires Government programmes, changes in the law, educational activities and resources, training programmes and positive well facilitated dialogue that creates safe spaces for communities to talk about issues that concern them. On that note, we welcome the progress that

has been made since the publication of the Tackling Prejudice and Building Connected Communities Action Plan and the development of a new hate crime strategy, which will support implementation of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. More details on the Scottish Government response to tackling prejudice and building connected communities can be found on the Scottish Government website at the following link:

<https://tinyurl.com/TacklingPrejudice>

Hate Crime Awareness Week is critical to shine a lens on what hate crime is and how to tackle it and festivals such as Refugee Festival Scotland and Scottish Interfaith Week are able to show clearly the positive contribution that diverse communities make to building a connected, cohesive Scotland – this is critical to overcoming the fear and prejudice that disconnection evokes.

**Dr Maureen Sier,
Interfaith Scotland**

Holocaust Memorial Day 2022

‘One Day’

Interfaith Scotland

For a decade now Interfaith Scotland has been honoured to organise and host the National Holocaust Memorial Day for Scotland and to host additional events during the week of HMD. The growth and success of Holocaust Memorial Day in Scotland is something that we feel proud of and are totally committed to supporting going forward. Having undertaken this important work for a decade we felt it was time to pass the baton and in January this year Edinburgh Interfaith Association took up that baton and ran with it and what a wonderful job they did of hosting the National Holocaust Memorial Day for Scotland 2022.

Instead of hosting the National event we decided to support, and distribute funds, to a number of local Holocaust Memorial Day initiatives and you can read about these local events on the next pages. In addition, we also held an intimate in-person and online (hybrid) event in the Interfaith Dialogue Centre.



The theme of HMD 2022 was One Day. It is a theme chosen by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and one that was reflected intimately in our in-person event. On 27 January the Interfaith Scotland Dialogue Centre was packed with people from diverse faith traditions and together we watched the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust National Memorial on the large screen. This was followed by a moving ceremony where individuals

came forward and lit a candle in memory of the victims of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. They then shared their vision for ‘One Day....’. The Rt Hon Lord Wallace of Tankerness, QC and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland lit the first candle and this was followed by representatives of diverse faiths sharing their hopes for the future.



Edinburgh Interfaith Association

It was an honour for the Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA) to be selected as the producer of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day Programme for Scotland following in the footsteps of Interfaith Scotland.

My wife, as many of you know, is a survivor of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. And I know that in raising our two daughters at one point I am going to have to explain to them what happened to their granny and their mum's uncles and aunties who were all counted amongst the millions of innocent victims of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. As with the victims of all genocides it brings it home that they are not just numbers or statistics; they are peoples' grans and grandads, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. We owe it to future generations to do what we can to try to prevent genocides ever occurring again. As my wife says 'we must not be slaves to our past, we must learn from it'. 'One Day', we hope in line with the theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day, fathers and mothers will no longer have the need to explain to their children why they don't have a gran or grandad or other family members lost to a genocide. That 'One Day', as the special song we had commissioned says, we can all learn to live in harmony. For these reasons I was honoured that the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and Scottish Government selected EIFA to organise and produce this year's Holocaust Memorial Day event.



The programme included the inspiring testimonies of Holocaust survivor Henry Wuga and Rwandan genocide survivor against the Tutsi Eric Eugene Murangwa. Both told their remarkable stories of journeys to survival in the UK; Henry through the kinder transport, and Eric for whom his career as a footballer for Rayon sports and International goalkeeper for Rwanda has played such a key part in his story. Both have also dedicated their lives to sharing their stories in order to teach others the lessons of the past.

Rahela Cirpaci (project coordinator of Romano Lav) and music from Sonia and family helped us to remember the Roma family and many other communities who were victims of the Holocaust.

Young people are our hope, as the future generation, to prevent genocide and it was great to have eight schools involved with this programme with discussions between secondary school students in Rwanda and across Scotland from Orkney to Edinburgh and the wonderful artwork and musical contributions which all helped us to pause and reflect and imagine 'One Day' a world without genocide.

We had a very supportive steering group however an extra special thanks goes to Mike Delaitre, the wonderful filmmaker and musician, who made this wonderful programme, which I would call a documentary, with stunning visuals, original pieces of



Henry Wuga MBE

music he composed and so sensitively put together.

The programme ended with an original song by International Rwandan star Mani Martin called, 'One Day' which I was privileged to co-write. Please take your small step to educate against genocide and hate by sharing the video of Scotland's Holocaust Memorial Day programme for 2022 and help us to make that 'One Day' free of hate and genocide possible: <https://tinyurl.com/ScotlandHMD2022>



Eric Eugene Murangwa

On the bottom left of this page is the exhibition of the artwork from Longstone Primary School at the Edinburgh Interfaith Civic Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day which included passionate speeches from the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and Angus Robertson Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. The ceremony helped to launch Scotland's Holocaust Memorial Day Programme.

Iain Stewart,
Executive Director of EIFA

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group



On Saturday 22 January Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) organised an event on Holocaust Memorial Day on the theme of "One Day" at the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh. The event provided an opportunity for local women to get together and promote cooperation,

understanding and connection between diverse religious communities. After a short talk from Miriam who was our guest speaker from the Salisbury synagogue, women shared their experiences, lit a candle and said prayers for peace. This was the first time that EWIG had held a Holocaust

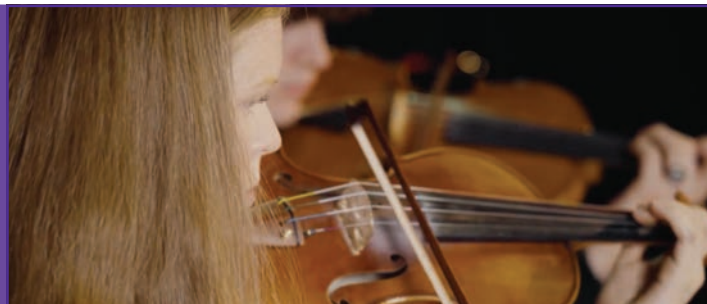
Memorial event. It helped us to have a better understanding of our Jewish community which will in turn strengthen good relations within the wider community. All in all it was a wonderful and spiritually uplifting afternoon.

Nila Joshi

Russian Cultural Centre, Glasgow

An innovative international musical project, featuring young people from three cities was initiated by Julia Atlas, Director of the Russian Cultural Centre, and Lev Atlas from the Royal Conservatoire Scotland. It is an international project featuring young musicians from Glasgow, Turin in Italy and Rostov-on-Don in Russia. These fine young musicians are dedicating their music, some of it specially created by composer and violinist, Oleg Ponomarev, to all the victims of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides.

The young people in each city were filmed during their performances, each playing a section of Oleg Ponomarev's specially created work. A short film is the project's final result, and was shown during Holocaust Memorial Week in January 2022. In Glasgow, the film was shown as part of the digital Holocaust Memorial Day presentation in the City Chambers; it was displayed at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; and was a key feature at



memorial events in Glasgow and East Dunbartonshire schools. The film has also been shown in the Twin Cities of Rostov and Turin and received a very positive response. The film can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/InternationalHMD2022>

Lev Atlas

Aberdeen Interfaith Group

To commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day, the Aberdeen Interfaith Group held a book discussion on Zoom on the book 'The Choice' by Edith Eger, a Holocaust Survivor. The group purchased 20 copies of the book second hand and Aberdeen library distributed the book to those

who registered for the event. The remaining copies were distributed at the Aberdeen wide event. 13 people took part in the book discussion, several who had not been involved in Holocaust Memorial or Interfaith events before. One Syrian lady said it was the first book she had read by a

Jewish author and now she has been introduced to a Jewish lady in the city. This meeting was so appreciated that another one is in the planning on the book 'Untamed' by Rwandan genocide survivor, Celine Uwineza.

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

The Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group held an online event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January. Venus Carew welcomed the attendees and talked about the background to Holocaust Memorial Day, that we set aside this day each year to come together to remember; to learn about the Holocaust and genocides of Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur; and to share our hope for a better future.

Venus shared about the work of the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group, in promoting good relationships and harmony through marking special events, and sharing thoughts between people of different faiths and none. She then thanked Interfaith Scotland for their financial support which had enabled the purchasing and lighting of special Holocaust Memorial Candles from a local company 'Caerlaverock Candles'. These candles were lit in places across the region, including at the Youth Centre, the Jane Haining Memorial at Dunscore and Lochside Park in Castle Douglas, where the Jewish Refugee Association had planted a tree to commemorate the place where Kindertransport children had resettled.



Liz Manson from Dumfries and Galloway City Council introduced a short film about the 10 stages of genocide and another short film about how Holocaust Memorial Day is marked across the country. Jan Lethbridge explained the background to the 2022 theme of 'One Day'. She read the moving poem 'The Diameter of the Bomb' by Yehuda Amichai and then shared a reflection, drawn from reading Neil MacGregor's 'Living with the Gods', about the relationship of light and religion. Light is a powerful image in many faiths. In synagogues, an eternal flame burns to remind worshippers of God's presence in and around them. Lamps in mosques symbolise the divine light. Diwali, observed by both Hindus and Sikhs is often referred to as the Festival of Light. In Christianity, Jesus is called the 'Light of the World'. The lighting of Buddhist butter lamps is a profound ritual, familiar to many in this region who have visited the Samye Ling Monastery. Ancient rural communities have long celebrated the return of the light, after the longest and darkest night of the year, the winter solstice. Participants were then invited to light their candles, and to let them stand to represent our desires to live in a world free from fear and hatred. This was followed by a short period of silent reflection, concluding with the quotation 'It's better to light a candle than curse the darkness'.

Nathan Mesnikoff, Spiritual Care Lead for the NHS in Dumfries and Galloway, then spoke about his



journey and ministry as a Chaplain and how interfaith engagement has been central to all that he does. He shared, "A large part of chaplaincy is just being present to people in their suffering. I can't alleviate the physical pain, cure the cancer or postpone death, but I can be a companion during their journey. I can bear witness to their experience, and in that I can help them know that they are not alone and that what they are going through will not just be lost or forgotten. And bearing witness to suffering whether it be an individual, a family, or a group of victims like those from the Holocaust or any of the atrocities since is of tremendous importance. Bearing witness affirms the reality of their experience, especially in the face of those who would deny it, and keeps their memory alive so that it might inspire us to action to alleviate whatever suffering we can".

Venus closed the event with reflections on the messages we heard during the contributions and films; leaving us with the quotation from the Bahá'í writings: 'So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth'.



The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February

Pilgrimage to Places of Worship: Stories of Hope from Women of Faith

To celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week 2022, Interfaith Scotland partnered with two local interfaith groups that were set up by and for women: Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group and Women of Faith and Community (Glasgow) to organise a pilgrimage to places of worship in Glasgow on 3rd February. The local women's groups planned the event with Interfaith Scotland's staff team, and members of the groups chose the theme 'Stories of Hope from Women of Faith'.

For them it was important to learn not just about the key beliefs of different faiths, but about the things about people's faith that inspired them and gave them hope for the future,



especially during the difficult years of the pandemic.

Nearly 30 women gathered at the starting point of the pilgrimage, the impressive University of Glasgow

Chapel. The University Chaplain Rev Carolyn Kelly spoke movingly about the concept of hope in Christian and Jewish traditions, particularly in the light of the Holocaust.





Participants were then given the opportunity to get to know one another in small groups and talk about their hopes for the day. Before the group of pilgrims headed to the Hindu Mandir via Kelvingrove Park, they were given a presentation by Linda Haggerstone, the National Interfaith Officer for the Scottish Pagan Federation. Linda shared two poems that she had written for the festival of Imbolc (also known as the feast of St Brigid in Celtic Christian traditions) heralding the beginning of Spring.

At the Hindu Mandir, we were welcomed by Acharyaji (the head priest) and former Board member of Interfaith Scotland, Mrs Madhu Jain. She spoke to us about what it was like to move from India to Glasgow and finding the local Indian community. Building the temple and thus providing a place of worship for the Hindu community helped the transition and it is now an opportunity to teach the next generation about Hinduism and Indian culture.

We proceeded from there to the Central Gurdwara. We were welcomed by a young woman, Gursinder Kaur



and taken up to the main shrine. She led us through the history of women's empowerment in Sikhism and sang some prayer songs from their scripture about the equality and value of women. We were offered a generous lunch (langar).

A long uphill climb led us to our final destination of Garnethill Synagogue. We were welcomed by Fiona Brodie, Trustee of the Scottish Jewish Archives

Centre, who spoke to us about the many projects undertaken by the Jewish community to assist people during the pandemic. On this cheerful note of community spirit we dispersed, pleased to have been able to meet many friends old and new in person after a long time.

All the talks from the pilgrimage were recorded and are available to view on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel.



Protection of Mother Earth through Mindfulness and Prayer

For World Interfaith Harmony Week, an online event was organised in partnership with Mindfulness for Earth initiative, the United Nation's Environmental Programme's Faith for Earth initiative and Interfaith Scotland.

Mindfulness for Earth recognises the urgent need to tackle and prevent the climate crisis through the methods of mindfulness, prayer and spirituality.

The event focused on how people of all faiths can come together and use these methods to create a direct impact on protecting our Mother Earth. Faith leaders from across the world representing six faiths - Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Sikhism), Venerable U Dhammajiva and Ven Ringu Tulku Rinpoche (Buddhism), Sister Isabel Smyth (Christianity), Swami Gunatitananda Saraswati (Hinduism), Valeriane Bernard (Brahma Kumaris) and Ash-Sheikh Abdullah Mohideen (Islam), spoke on how mindfulness and prayer can be helpful towards protecting the environment, and how it could lead to preventing further climate crises.

Encouraging us to reconnect with ourselves and our Mother Earth, each faith leader also shared a short meditation practice or a prayer. A video of the event can be found at:

<https://tinyurl.com/WIHWProtectingEarth>

Protection of Mother Earth through Mindfulness & Prayer

LIVE WEBINAR: 1st of February 2022 from 12.30 pm - 2.45 pm GMT

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

FEATURED SPEAKERS

- Ven. Dhammajiva Thero, Sri Lanka**
- Swami Gunatitananda Saraswati, Sri Lanka**
- Ven. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, India**
- Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Scotland, UK**
- Sister Isabel Smyth, Scotland, UK**
- Valeriane Bernard, Switzerland**
- Ash Sheikh Abdullah Mohideen, Sri Lanka**

REGISTER NOW: Contact@Mindfulness4Earth.org

INTERNATIONAL LIVE WEBINAR SCHEDULE

- 12.30 - 12.40 pm: Welcome, background & introduction to speakers**
- 12.40 - 1.10 pm: Speakers from three faiths**
- 1.10 - 1.25 pm: Panel Q&A**
- 1.25 - 1.35 pm: Break**
- 1.35 - 1.40 pm: Introduction to the second session and speakers**
- 1.40 - 2.20 pm: Speakers from four faiths**
- 2.20 - 2.35 pm: Panel Q&A**
- 2.35 - 2.45 pm: Summary of event, way forward & vote of thanks**

MODERATED BY

- Dr. Kumanga Andrahennadi, CALM**
- Dr. Tara De Mel, Mindful Educators**
- Frances Hume, Interfaith Scotland**
- Dr. Iyad Moghli, Faith4Earth, UNEP**

This event is co-organised by Mindfulness for Earth and Faith for Earth in partnership with Interfaith Scotland.

Local Interfaith Groups News

Interfaith Glasgow News

Over the past two years, Interfaith Glasgow (IG) has been working with faith communities and faith-based organisations to send out a unified message on the need for Climate Justice, both in the run up to - and during - the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26). We have been working with Scottish, UK and international networks to try and ensure a strong interfaith voice that is linked up with the broader civil society climate movement. The presence of faith and belief communities was undeniable throughout the two weeks of this important summit, with a multitude of events and demonstrations sending out an urgent message for climate justice. We hosted a number of events during COP26 in partnership with Interfaith Scotland which can be found in the Scottish Interfaith Week section of the newsletter.

An Autumn Renga – Interfaith Glasgow's Weekend Club

Interfaith Glasgow's Weekend Club hosts fun, free, family-friendly events at the weekend for people who are new to Glasgow, especially refugees and asylum seekers (and those who want to welcome them). After almost a year and a half of hosting all our events online, we were delighted to hold our first in-person event of 2021 on 18 September in Glasgow's

Botanic Gardens. In this third event in our series leading up to COP26, we collaborated with St Mungo's Mirrorball, a local poetry group. With funding from the Scottish Book Trust, we hosted a renga – a Japanese approach to collaborative poetry writing – facilitated by Scottish poet Gerry Loose. Gerry led participants, volunteers and staff through writing lines of poetry to set themes (Autumn, Autumn Garden, Winter, Love) and the group jointly selected the best lines to be added to a collaborative poem. The poem explored our environment and changing seasons. Meanwhile, the

children went foraging in the gardens and did a writing exercise about their hopes for the future. Freya Aitchison from climate campaign group Time for Change Argyll and Bute attended the event to film some participants for the group's Hopes for the Future film. It was screened in the Green Zone at COP26 and can be viewed here: <https://tinyurl.com/HopesforFuture>

Both participants and the staff and volunteer team were thrilled to see each other in person again, or – as was the case for many – meet for the first time!



Renfrewshire / East Renfrewshire

On Sunday 16 October the joint Renfrewshire Interfaith Group/East Renfrewshire Faith Forum hosted an event at the United Reformed Church hall in Barrhead to discuss strategies for coping during the pandemic. We were pleased to hear contributions from Rabbi Pete Tobias, Roman Catholic Bishop Brian McGhee,

Linda Haggerstone (Pagan), Mandeep Khurmi (a Sikh TV journalist), Imam Arif Khan, Dr Mridula Chakraborty (Hindu) and Douglas Yates (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) who also acted as compere for the evening and provided musical items with John Rankin.

On Remembrance Sunday 14 November, we held an event in the walled Peace Garden within Barshaw Park, Paisley, courtesy of Renfrewshire Council and Friends of Barshaw Park. Assembling near the cafe in the park, those attending walked together to the Peace Garden, each holding battery candles. The theme was

'Peace' and speakers on this occasion were Fr. John Eagers, Rev Philip Wallace (Church of Scotland), Martin Mansell (Quaker), Arthur West (Peace Federation), Claire Singerman (Jewish), and Margaret Forbes (Buddhist). Mr Willie Gibson recited "A Man's A Man for A' That", and Mr John Rankin sang "The Universal Soldier" accompanying himself on guitar. Afterwards, those who attended were invited back to the cafe in the park for some welcoming hot soup.

On Sunday 21 November we hosted an event "Together for our Planet: what can we do to help?" at St Andrew's Church of Scotland, Barrhead. Our speakers were Bishop John Keenan (Roman Catholic), Rev Tim Mineard



(Church of Scotland), May Badee (Baha'i), Claire Singerman (Jewish), Acharyaji Mishra (Hindu) and Kirsten Oswald MP. The event was conducted by Douglas Yates with music provided

by John Rankin and a video clip introducing the event compiled by Nicki McGowan. Refreshments were provided after the event.

Aberdeen Interfaith Group News

Members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group met for a beautiful evening of creative writing led by Alison Bell at the Brahma Kumaris Centre in Aberdeen while others joined us on Zoom. Alison asked us to reflect on what the word 'Togetherness' means to us. We thought of the words: deep connection, unity and harmony, respect, being in the moment, communication, companionable silence, communion, bridges, beyond dialogue, peace.

Alison asked us to choose two or three words from the list and write for four minutes, and then share our writing if we wanted to.



After some more reflective writing we were encouraged to write a poem together as a group.

Together by Aberdeen Interfaith Group

A moment in the hustle of life
We are all a collar of jasmine
We live together and wither together

We breathe

We sit, we talk together
We enhance our lives
By sharing them

A bridge is a beautiful thing
Built from respect, from our words
Our singing, our eating

Alone in crossing the bridge
We come together and become one
In this time we have

Our years are the bridge

Here is a piece created by Astrid Benomir:

*Sitting on the veranda
I feel the warm rays of the sun
In the gentleness of a fading afternoon
The air is still and warm
I feel at peace, united, whole, in communion with the Divine
We are two but one in the bond of eternity
The soul's heart intertwined with the One
Full of love, overflows, sharing the gentleness
Sweetness and Light of the Divine with the world.*

Dumfries and Galloway: United Nations International Day of Peace 2021



A joint initiative between Allanton Peace Sanctuary, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group brought over 40 people to an event at Allanton, marking the UN International Day of Peace in September. Allanton is the European home of 'May Peace Prevail on Earth International', formerly the World Peace Prayer Society.

We gathered in a marquee in the walled garden to hear an introduction from the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group which described the establishment of the Day of Peace by the United Nations 40 years ago. The theme was 'Recovering Better for a Sustainable and Equitable World'. We heard how this might be achieved in terms of a prevailing disposition of compassion, kindness and hope among and between us all. We were also reminded that, like flowers in a garden, we all belong to one human family, and our wonderful differences add beauty and joy to the amazing garden of humanity.

All of the world's major faiths speak of the ideal of peace, and we heard quotations from several faiths expressing this, including Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Baha'i. We concluded with a quote by American interfaith activist Rev Steven Greenbaum, "A hungry child or a homeless person of any race, on any continent, from whatever background, diminishes us all. We are not defined by our beliefs. Rather, we are defined by how we act, and who we help."

We then took a walk through the grounds of Allanton to 'The Henge', where stands a circle of peace poles, one for each country on Earth. Here, by the wonders of modern technology, we were joined by others of several faiths, from all over the world! The prayer, "May peace prevail on earth" was intoned and every country on the planet named. Back in the walled garden, our afternoon concluded with delicious refreshments, sourced from a recently arrived Syrian resident of Dumfries.

Jan Lethbridge



Interfaith Scotland

**Making a Difference
through Dialogue**

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