

# Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Autumn 2022: Issue 38

Making a Difference through Dialogue



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# Historical events and interfaith relations...

## Reflecting on the past and looking to the future

**As I write this foreword the country is in mourning for Queen Elizabeth II. As I reflect on her life, the words duty and service come quickly to mind - right up until a few days before her death Queen Elizabeth was undertaking her Royal duties and serving her country.**

I am also moved to reflect that Queen Elizabeth, even before her official coronation, recognised the power of diverse religions joining together in prayer. This is evident in her 1952 Christmas broadcast, when she asked people in Britain and the Commonwealth to remember her at the forthcoming coronation, and she stated "whatever your religion may be, pray for me on that day". She continued throughout her reign to promote good interfaith relations here and abroad. Our deepest condolences are offered to the Royal Family. There is now a new King and we wish King Charles III a long and successful reign.

Interfaith Scotland and members of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum, with Interfaith Chaplains and members of local interfaith groups travelled together to the historic Island of Iona on the very day Queen Elizabeth was laid to rest and the article on page 12 captures the incredible power of those few days together reflecting on the past and looking towards the future; a future in which we all envisaged ever closer interfaith working and collaboration for the common good of all of Scotland.

In November we will again be celebrating Scottish Interfaith Week (13 - 20 November) and I hope many of you will host or join events celebrating the power of Storytelling, the theme for 2022.

As we move towards a Winter of austerity and an ever-increasing poverty crisis the team at Interfaith Scotland will continue to do all that we can to support working together to face the impending challenges and wish you all strength for the time ahead.

**Dr Maureen Sier, Director**



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

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# Interfaith Picnic for Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee and Thank You Day



I am writing this during the period of mourning for Queen Elizabeth who passed away two days ago. It feels very poignant now as I consider the passing of an era. It also feels very apt that we could celebrate the Queen and have the nation thank her just a few months before her passing.

At Interfaith Scotland we decided to hold a 'Thank You Day' picnic and it was a day to remember. Around 80 people joined us in The Hidden Gardens in Pollokshields and shared food, music, stories and games together. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar from the UK Women of Faith Network (Religions for Peace) shared some thoughtful words on the themes of 'service and gratitude' and Frances Hume from Interfaith Scotland very aptly linked this to the lifelong service of Queen Elizabeth. We were joined at our picnic by friends from 'Freedom from Torture' and also from the 'Faith and Organ Donation NHS' team. The sun shone and it was really a glorious family interfaith occasion.



## Interfaith Inspirations

To celebrate Scotland's Year of Stories, our Development Officer, Aparna Ramesh has been inviting different people in interfaith fields from across Scotland to share their Interfaith Journey.

These videos have been published on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel as a series called 'Interfaith Inspirations'. The first video features two young people, David and Bethany, from the University of St Andrews who started an online interfaith talk show called TruThink. The most recent video features Scott Chase, the founder of the Glasgow LGBT+ Interfaith Network. It has been a great learning experience listening to stories of people who have been inspired to do interfaith work.



## National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board

The team at Interfaith Scotland is always looking for ways to increase youth engagement in interfaith. With this goal in mind, we have begun the process of setting up a youth advisory board.

Members of the National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board will have the opportunity to advise the organisation and be a part of youth consultations at a national level. This is an opportunity to meet people of diverse backgrounds and shape Scotland's political future.



# Annual Networking Seminar for Local Interfaith Groups



**Our annual networking seminar for local interfaith groups took place at our dialogue centre on 15 August.**

We were joined in person by members of Inverness, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group. Members of Skye and Lochalsh, Dundee and Tayside, Dumfries and Galloway and Borders Interfaith Group joined us via Zoom on the big screen. We invited the groups to share with one another about the vision that brought their group together,

successful and enjoyable interfaith activities they had hosted and their visions for the future. Participants shared movingly about what their interfaith group had meant to them, particularly the support they had received from group members during the pandemic. Patricia Findlay, former Chair of Aberdeen Interfaith Group, gave a very useful

presentation giving advice for local groups on ways to increase the diversity of their group, engage in community projects, network with other organisations and forming partnerships. A member of Aberdeen interfaith youth group, Anish Subramaniam, gave an inspiring presentation on interfaith and young people.

## Meeting with University Chaplains and Honorary Chaplains

**Interfaith Scotland hosted an event for University Chaplains and Honorary Chaplains at our dialogue centre on 18 May.**

Chaplains attended from Aberdeen, Glasgow, Caledonian, Edinburgh and Stirling Universities. The event offered the opportunity for Chaplains to share with one another the challenges of supporting staff and students throughout the pandemic and discussing ways in which Interfaith Scotland can support them and work with them in the future. The National Development Officer, Frances Hume, gave a summary of the research project undertaken

with University Chaplains throughout Scotland. This research can be found on Interfaith Scotland's website at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/UniversityChaplaincyResearch>

Aparna Ramesh, Development Officer, shared about an opportunity for students to join Interfaith Scotland's new National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board, and discussed the possibility of assisting Chaplains with establishing interfaith groups within universities.



An online event was held on 16 June for Chaplains unable to attend the May event in person and Chaplains attended the online event from Strathclyde, Aberdeen, Glasgow, St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities.

## Staff and Board Away Day

The staff and members of the board of Interfaith Scotland met at the Glazert Country House Hotel on 8 September for a day of taking stock of our work and envisaging the work of Interfaith Scotland into the future.



# Poetry Project with the Scottish Poetry Library

**Interfaith Scotland was approached by the Scottish Poetry Library to create a book of poems on the theme of 'The Gift'. People of all faiths and beliefs were invited to submit a poem.**

These poems are intended to be a gift for others, sharing ways in which people responded to the pandemic and what gave them support and inspiration during such a difficult time for many. Interfaith Scotland organised an online poetry writing workshop to inspire creativity which was ably led by writer and poet, Alison Bell, a creative writing tutor based in the north east of Scotland.

There was an overwhelming response to the task with 70 poems sent in

to Interfaith Scotland. Members of Interfaith Scotland's staff and board and a representative of the Scottish Poetry Library had a challenging task making the final selection for the anthology. 40 poems were selected and a variety of themes emerged from the process: nature, faith, culture, life, death and emerging from the pandemic.

An interesting title was chosen, 'The Courageous non-uniformity of Stones'. The title comes from a line of one



of the poems and it was felt that this beautifully reflected the work of interfaith engagement. It can take courage to embrace our differences and share our varied experiences of life and faith, especially in response to difficult life situations. The poems we received are truly shared from the heart and we hope they will be a gift to all who read them. The anthology will be launched during Scottish Interfaith Week.

## An Introduction to the UK Parliament



**Dame Eleanor Laing**

The Senior Education and Engagement Outreach Officer for the UK Parliament (Scotland) offered members of Interfaith Scotland a workshop giving an introduction to the UK Parliament and the House of Lords. The event took place online on 12 April. Participants found out the ways in which they can have their voices heard in Parliament. We were honoured to be joined by Madame Deputy Speaker, Dame Eleanor Laing who engaged in a Q and A with participants.

## Diversity Training for Cairngorms National Park Authority

**Mostly the organisations who request our training courses are either educational bodies, such as colleges or universities, or organisations that provide a direct service to the public, such as housing associations, so it has been a refreshing change to be working recently with staff (all the staff!) of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).**

The CNPA is the organisation that manages the rugged, mountainous area of the Cairngorms which is the UK's largest National Park. Interfaith Scotland was part of a successful bid to the park authority for delivery of a suite of training courses on equality, diversity and inclusion. For the project we are partnered with the respected Human Rights law centre, JustRight Scotland and with Inclusion Scotland, a leading disability charity. We have delivered five full-day training courses to the organisation so far, each time in



Grantown-On-Spey. The sessions have had excellent feedback, with delegates praising the approach of our trainer Jamie Spurway and his co-trainer, Jen

Ang, one of the directors for JustRight Scotland. A lot of the discussion in the sessions has considered how different groups of people would face difficulties in being able to access, explore and really enjoy the park facilities as others might. As usual, a key element we discussed

is the way that so often the barriers that other groups encounter tend to be hidden, even invisible, to those who are unaffected by them.





# Scottish Interfaith Week 2022: Storytelling

**Over five million people live in Scotland and we each have a story to tell. That's why this year we have chosen 'Storytelling' as our theme for Scottish Interfaith Week 2022.**

As Scotland's only interfaith festival we have the unique opportunity to explore how faith and belief impact our communities and offer resilience, connection and joy. Through storytelling we can step into each other's worlds for a moment – through a poem, a song or a photograph. Stories enable us to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and start important conversations.

This year's festival will be hybrid, with online and in-person events, and will run from Sunday 13 November to Sunday 20 November. Through exhibitions, conversations, and performances, we look forward to showcasing Scotland's diversity with the power of storytelling. Every year local people, faith groups and organisations hold events across the country for the festival. Could you host an event this year and share your stories?

Our event planning resources on the Scottish Interfaith Week website are perfect for brainstorming. We will also produce a Digital Toolkit for event organisers and for supporters of Scottish Interfaith Week who would like to spread the word about the festival. The toolkit will include draft social media posts, links to downloadable social media graphics, and useful tips for promoting your event. Explore resources at <https://scottishinterfaithweek.org/resources>

What are your plans for Scottish Interfaith Week? We would love to hear from local interfaith groups and faith communities across Scotland about the events you're planning. Get in touch at [info@scottishinterfaithweek.org](mailto:info@scottishinterfaithweek.org)

Remember you can follow Scottish Interfaith Week on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram!

#SIFW2022 #YearOfStories [www.scottishinterfaithweek.org](http://www.scottishinterfaithweek.org)





# Interfaith Retreat on Holy Isle

**From 5 - 7 August, Interfaith Scotland hosted an interfaith retreat for women at the Centre of World Peace and Health on Holy Isle off Arran. The retreat was open to women of all faiths and none to share and find out about the lived experience of people of different faiths and beliefs.**

The retreat was first advertised in March 2020, the week before lockdown was announced, so it was a patient 2.5 year wait for it to finally come to fruition. It was so popular that the 25 places sold out in less than a week! There was a wonderful mix of ages and faiths represented. Folk had travelled from near and far, the furthest travelled being from another small island off the West coast of Ireland!



After a smooth ferry crossing to Arran we waited patiently for the tide to be high enough to be able to take the small boat over to Holy Isle. It looked tantalisingly close and we were fortunate that it was bathed in sunshine as we waited at the jetty. When we finally arrived we were welcomed by



the volunteers who run the Centre. We enjoyed a delicious dinner together. All meals offered at the Centre are vegan and vegetarian and many of the vegetables and salads are grown on the island in the community garden.

On Saturday morning we gathered in the Peace Hall for a time of sharing. We discussed what we shared in common across the faiths. One theme that came out strongly was the need for greater equality for women within religious institutions, particularly in positions of leadership. There was then an invitation to the women to share any significant moments on their own journeys of life and faith. This was a poignant and emotional experience with participants sharing from the heart.

After lunch, we enjoyed a reflective walk along the coastal path, stopping for prayers and readings on the theme of faith and nature, provided by our staff and participants. We were joined by Adam, one of the residents, who explained the spiritual history of the island. He showed us the cave of St Molaise who lived as a Christian hermit on Holy Isle in the 7th Century. The island was bought by the Tibetan Buddhist community in 1992 and Adam shared about the Tibetan Buddhist deities that have been beautifully carved into the rocks alongside the path. On our return, a



few intrepid folk embarked on a second walk and made it to the top of the island before dinner!

In the evening there was a session looking at hate crime followed by a time for the ladies to bring creative or cultural offerings. There were poems shared, a South Indian dance demonstration with participation, a chance to have henna hand painting and to try on a sari.

On Sunday morning there was a time of reflection with participants given the opportunity to share prayers or readings from their faith tradition before we headed back for our boat, bus, ferry and train journeys!





# Interfaith and Human Rights



## International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief London 2022

**On 5 and 6 July 2022 the UK Government hosted a conference on Human Rights to urge increased global action on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all.**

The conference brought together governments, parliamentarians, faith and belief representatives, and civil society to urge increased global action on freedom of religion or belief for everyone. Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is one of the UK's long-standing human rights priorities. The UK Government remains deeply concerned about the severity and scale of violations and abuses of FoRB in many parts of the world. Over 800 delegates from across the world joined together in London and

explored such themes as Gender and Freedom of Religion and Belief; Young People and Interfaith Engagement; and the media and Religious Freedom.

The Director of Interfaith Scotland was delighted to be in attendance and is also honoured that Interfaith Scotland continues to act as Secretariat to the Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Scottish Parliament. John Mason MSP was also present in London and sponsors the CPG in Scotland on Religious Freedom.







## Baha'i Community hosts event on Freedom of Religion or Belief: 'Human Rights and Human Flourishing'

**On 30 June the Local Baha'i Spiritual Assembly of Edinburgh held an event in the Edinburgh Baha'i Centre in the lead up to the Freedom of Religion or Belief (ForB) Ministerial in London.**

The Baha'i community were delighted to welcome over 30 guests, including Christina McKelvie MSP, Minister for Equalities and Older People, and representatives of diverse faiths and organisations; and to receive a specially commissioned video from Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The evening included a panel presentation from Kishan Manocha,

Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Warsaw; Isadora Quay, Global Lead on Gender and Humanitarian Action at CARE International; and Hooshmand Badee, International Economist, author and educator. This was followed by a video presentation entitled 'Flourishing Vibrant Communities' and a Q & A with the audience. Pertinent closing remarks were made by John Mason MSP and

Convener of the Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Scottish Parliament.




## Human Rights and Equalities Training Project

**Eleanor Roosevelt is quoted as saying, "Where after all, do human rights begin? In small places close to home".**

Many small charities do not tend to talk about their work in the language of Human Rights, even though what they do is very much about trying to ensure that people's rights to very basic standards are realised – for example the right to education or the right to be free from inhuman or degrading treatment. Interfaith Scotland has recently partnered with Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS), and other third sector interface organisations, to support a project to provide training for small and grassroots charities across Scotland. The training provided will focus on how to bring an 'Equalities and Human Rights Approach' to their work. Our trainer Jamie Spurway

has been working with colleagues at GCVS and Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council to develop a full day training course which will be

provided free to small charities across Scotland. The project will also produce a range of other learning resources.



### What are Human Rights?

Human rights are rights that are inherent to everyone.

They provide a minimum standard for how all people should be treated and are rooted in the recognition that we all share a common fundamental humanity.

They are built upon the principles of FRED.A.

- Fairness
- Respect
- Equality
- Dignity
- Autonomy

→ How do these principles relate to your work?

# Cross-Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Meeting to discuss Religious Persecution in Afghanistan

**For five years now Interfaith Scotland has acted as secretariat for the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group (CPG) which focuses on challenges to freedom of religion or belief around the world.**

The group is chaired by John Mason MSP and meets about three times a year. Since early 2020 the group has met online, but we hope to include face to face meetings in the coming months. Most meetings focus on the experiences of a specific belief group in a particular country. For example we have heard about the persecution faced by the Yazidi people of Iraq and about the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar.

In April this year our meeting considered the state of religious freedom in Afghanistan and we heard a powerful presentation from Mohammad Asif, Director of the Afghan Human Rights Foundation. We heard that although freedom of religion or belief has been enshrined in the constitution of Afghanistan for many years, in recent years the constitution has not been followed. The vast majority of the Afghan population are Sunni Muslim, with small groups of Shia Muslims, as well as Sikhs and Hindus. Much of the presentation focused on the



violent persecution of these minority faith groups.

At times the content of the discussion was distressing as we heard about appalling acts of violence, especially that experienced by women from minority faith groups. We also heard about the use of the death penalty against those found guilty of blasphemy or even for being gay or bisexual. Towards

the end of the meeting the group discussed the possibility of the Scottish Parliament hosting the 'Faces of Kabul' photography exhibition. The photographs serve to present the human story of Afghanistan. There was also discussion about the need to better support refugees from Afghanistan, and the challenges that many Afghan refugees face in accessing the protection of countries like the UK.

## Remembering Srebrenica

**Interfaith Scotland was honoured to partner with Remembering Srebrenica Scotland to host the film 'Quo Vadis, Aida?'.**

The film was hosted in July at the Centre for Contemporary Arts and was fully booked with guests from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. The film itself is a brutal reminder of the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 during the Bosnian war, in which more than 8,000 unarmed Bosnian Muslims sheltering in the so-called UN 'safe area' were slaughtered making it the most recent genocide on European soil. It is a film we strongly recommend watching but not for under 18's. Immediately after the film was a facilitated Q & A with Almasa Salihovic, a survivor from Bosnia.





# The Climate Crisis: continuing the engagement

**It is now close to a year since COP26 took place in Glasgow and the extensive engagement of the faith communities of Scotland with the COP26.**

The climate crisis has, of course, not gone away and indeed Pakistan has just witnessed the worst floods in its history, floods that are directly linked to the change in climate. Other regions of the world are experiencing unprecedented fires. Interfaith Scotland is continuing to engage in the discourse around working together to help tackle this global crisis. The Interfaith Working Group, consisting of diverse faith community representatives, has continued to meet, with Interfaith Glasgow acting as Secretariat and Interfaith Scotland as Chair. The working group wrote a letter to COP26 President Alok Sharma. This was picked up by the BBC Sunday Morning Live show and our Director was offered an opportunity to share, on national TV, the great work done by faith communities in Scotland.

Interfaith Scotland continues to work closely with the Interfaith Liaison Committee to the UNFCCC and is continuing to co-host international webinars exploring the diverse implications of the climate crisis. We have also worked with them to promote an international prayer campaign for the planet and would encourage all of you to join us. The link is on the poster featured in this article.

On the recent visit of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum to Iona (organised by Interfaith Scotland) they collectively committed to continuing to work together to encourage all of their respective communities to be actively engaged in climate action (see pages 12 and 13).



## Ceilidh for the climate

**Interfaith Scotland hosted a Ceilidh for the Climate at Our Lady and St Ninian's Catholic Church in Bannockburn in April.**

Frances Hume worked with Rev Peter Gill from Allan Church of Scotland and the local Catholic Church so it was a truly ecumenical as well as an interfaith event! Frances Hume gave a talk on climate change and ways in which we can protect the environment and also tried her hand at leading the ceilidh dancing! Rebecca Gill taught us a traditional Pakistani dance and others shared poems, stories and songs. Natalie Sinclair gave a presentation on a local environmental initiative in Bannockburn.

Around 50 people attended from the region and useful connections were made between those interested in or involved in environmental projects in the local area. Entrance was via donation and a total of £230 was raised which was used to plant 47 trees in the World Interfaith Harmony Grove.

## Cycle for the climate

**As part of our continued commitment to positive action for the climate, members of our staff participated in a Cycle for the Climate from the west end of Glasgow to Kirkintilloch on 5 September.**

We embarked on the cycle to raise awareness about climate change and to encourage people to make positive lifestyle changes that can reduce their carbon footprint. The sun shone and

it was a memorable experience. Our director commented that she hadn't ridden a bicycle in years and would consider cycling to work in future so it definitely had a positive effect!



# 20th Anniversary Gathering on Iona to mark the founding of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum

**From Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, St Andrews, the Borders and beyond representatives of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum with accompanying University Chaplains and members of local interfaith groups set off for the historic Island of Iona together.**



Accompanying us on the first leg of the journey was a film crew commissioned by the BBC to explore what had taken such a diverse group to a remote Scottish Island.

The journey and three-day engagement had been six months in the planning – but no one could have imagined that we would be travelling together on the day Queen Elizabeth was laid to rest (19 September 2022). The journey felt incredibly poignant as we reflected on the Queen's deep Christian faith and her commitment to promoting good interfaith relations.

The journey involved travelling on a train, two ferries and a bus but at 4 pm we all arrived safely at the Iona Abbey and were warmly greeted by Iona Community members with a warm cuppa and home-cooked ginger biscuits.

On our first evening together a service of Justice & Peace was held in memory of Queen Elizabeth in the Iona Abbey and Srihari Vallabhajousula from the Hindu Temple of Rutherglen shared a reflection from the Hindu tradition. Later the group gathered at the Iona Village Community Centre to watch the Queen's funeral on catch up – another moment to reflect on her life of service. Tuesday morning began with breakfast and a service in the Abbey. During the service Imam Hassan Rabbani shared moving words from the Qur'an. The words were revealed to Mohamad at a time he was struggling and were

words of spiritual encouragement applicable to anyone.

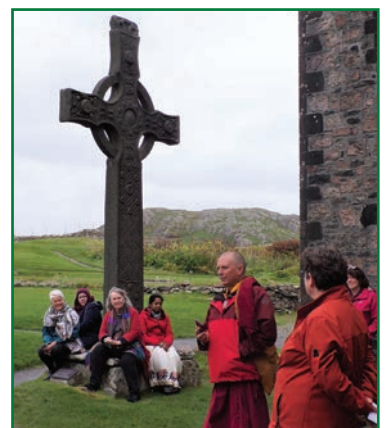
The service was followed by an Interfaith Pilgrimage to sites of historic interest on the Island of Iona. The first stop was to the Nunnery – now a ruin – where the history of the Nunnery was shared. It is a powerful history of how the nuns nurtured the land, the islanders, visitors and the vulnerable for over 350 years before being forced to leave. Then Imam Rabbani shared a beautiful story of Mary directly from the Qur'an and Ravinder explained how women have been viewed as equal from the beginning of the Sikh faith, over 500 years ago.

The second stop was the Iona Primary School and after Karen from the Iona Community had explained the history of education on the Island, Zainab and Aparna, a young Muslim and Hindu shared educational stories from their faith traditions. Currently there are 17 primary school children in the school but at its height (during the war years when children were evacuated

to Iona) there were around 80 children at the school.

Moving on to the Land Monument, we learnt how the Community of Iona almost lost the Island to a millionaire but because of a financial intervention by Lord Fraser (of House of Fraser) they were able to save their island from being sold. Many themes of wealth and poverty and social injustice arose and Carrie from the Baha'i community shared a reading on the theme of Justice. We then moved to the Community Housing Development where Rev. Bonnie Evans Hill from the Episcopal tradition and Joe Goldblatt from the Jewish tradition then shared some deep reflections on Faith and Action.

Our final stop was to an ancient well linked to the Abbey, and at this point it felt appropriate to reflect on the climate crisis and thoughts were shared from the Hindu, Pagan and Buddhist tradition. Adrian Shaw, our climate expert and volunteer was able to give us a raw picture of what could







happen to the Island of Iona if we don't succeed in changing our ways and tackling the climate crisis.

On Tuesday afternoon some of the group went to Staffa, some to the Primary School to engage with the young children of the Island and some went were able to join Joe Goldblatt on a 'tour' of St Oran's Chapel and graveyard (from the comfort of the common room). A rich discussion on life and death rituals then followed.

On Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning the Religious Leaders Group and the Chaplains and local interfaith group representatives moved into separate spaces to write a Declaration of Commitment and to create a vibrant, inclusive interfaith service for the final evening together. The Declaration can be seen opposite.

The Iona Community members baked a wonderful 20th Anniversary Cake which was presented to everyone immediately after the final, moving, historic and incredibly beautiful Interfaith Service of Commitment held in the Iona Abbey. The service is available to view online on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel.

On Thursday morning at 7 am many of the pilgrims gathered in St Oran's Chapel for dawn prayers. Back and forth we chanted and sung moving sacred verses from diverse faith traditions. The dawn chorus joined us as the Iona winds blew and we then began our long journey home – buzzing from the spiritual energy of our days together on Iona.



## SCOTTISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS FORUM

### 20th Anniversary Declaration of Commitment Island of Iona, September 2022

WE, representatives of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum, meeting on the holy and historic Island of Iona, mark this, the twentieth anniversary of the Forum by restating our commitment to work together.

We share this land of Scotland with people of diverse cultures, religions and beliefs. We know that our lives are connected closely to the lives of others around the world and to the earth, our common home. Yet we know that in this beautiful land many live in poverty, as do millions more around the world and we recognise that our way of life and over consumption is causing environmental damage and harm to all.

We also acknowledge with sadness the suffering caused by prejudice, discrimination and war and recognise that religious discord has, at times, contributed to this suffering.

#### With all our hearts and humility;

1. We commit to continuing to build good interfaith relations and trust across Scotland and beyond
2. We also commit to working with others to actively respond to the climate crisis;
  - by emphasising the importance of caring for the earth highlighted in our scriptures
  - by doing our utmost to live sustainably and encouraging our communities to do the same
  - by joining with others to convince those in positions of authority and influence to act urgently to implement the agreements made at Cop26 in Glasgow in 2021
3. And finally, we commit to walk alongside and listen to local communities across Scotland and beyond that are facing many and diverse challenges, such as poverty, displacement, uncertainty and disorientation in a time of bewildering change.

We share these words on the Isle of Iona, an island that is beautiful and sacred, but with a violent history, and which today is exposed to rising sea levels due to climate change.

This Island stands as a metaphor for humanity, and other life on earth: vulnerable, sacred and to be cherished and loved but not abused and exploited. Inspired by this place we make this declaration.

# Local Interfaith Groups News

## Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA)

In the past two years it has been a real joy to connect with people not only across Scotland and the UK but across the globe. We are learning how faith has continued to inspire people to make a positive difference in our world, from helping vulnerable people during the pandemic, to helping tackle climate change. Our programmes, such as 'Interfaith Insights', 'Future of Faith', and 'Faith Full Fridays', continue to attract large audiences who feel a sense of connection through the power of technology. However, for many of us a virtual hug does not replace an actual physical hug. It has been great to begin to go back to having events in person alongside our online programmes.

I would like to mention just four of our in-person programmes: the Annual Interfaith Peace Walk, Together for Our Planet Event, Interfaith Road Shows and Leith Interfaith Network Events.



The Annual Interfaith Peace Walk is always a firm favourite of ours and it was great to be able to spend more time in different buildings associated with different faith traditions. It is as much about the conversations en-route as visiting our beautiful places of worship. This was summed up in the following feedback, "A fabulous afternoon having so many meaningful conversations with friends old and new".

The event 'Together for our Planet: What are we called upon to do?' was held in partnership with the Edinburgh Jewish Cultural Centre (EJCC), and brought together in dialogue a diverse interfaith group from faith founded environmental projects. This was EIFA's first ever hybrid event.

The keynote speaker was environmental activist and author

Alastair McIntosh, who focused on the concept of "Tikkun Olam", the Jewish concept of taking responsibility to mend or heal the world. He emphasised that we all need to dig deep into our spiritual traditions in order to draw out our calling and live that calling in the world to address the climate challenge. This inspired us all to think about the responsibility within all our faiths to respond to the climate emergency, both individually and collectively, and to encourage others to do so.

Two new developments are our Interfaith Roadshows and the Leith Interfaith Network. Interfaith Roadshows are fun and interactive events aimed at engaging young children in learning about different faiths. The children rotate

in small groups to a different speaker from six world religions. As one student from Preston Street Primary told us, "Before I came today, I didn't know much about Sikhism, Christianity or any other religion. I really enjoyed it and I learned a lot about Sikhism and they show a lot of respect and you don't have to be scared of them when you see a Sikh and they're really nice". The Rev David Paton Williams added, "It was great for children to come





and learn about six different faiths and learn that we are happy to be in each other's presence and happy to cooperate and work with each other. It's important for young people to see that faith is a normal part of life and that people all over the world and throughout this country have one faith or another."

Another programme creating more spaces for deeper conversations and making new friends is our new pilot project in the Leith area called 'The Leith Interfaith Network.' This is part of EIFA's strategic planning to build interfaith understanding, relationships and community across different neighbourhoods of Edinburgh.

On Sunday 14 August EIFA held its first 'Festival of Faiths' programme for our Leith Interfaith Network with our hosts the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society and Wali Al Asir Trust. Imam Bargah shared the very powerful story and meaning of Muharram, which commemorates the sacrifice of Imam Hussain, grandson of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and the tragic events of Karbala. We enjoyed some very deep conversations as we reflected on the message of Imam Hussain and examples in our own traditions of those who made supreme sacrifices for just causes.

We also enjoyed coming together for our Leith Network 'Festival of Faiths in the Park' on 11 September in Leith Links, and our Keynote lecture and AGM on the 29 September with the Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills.



## Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group worked with Interfaith Scotland to host a special event for Refugee Festival Scotland, 'Sharing our Stories through Creativity', on 15 June. An exercise in the importance of flexibility is probably the best way to describe the event which took place at the Multicultural Centre in Dumfries. Of the 20 names on our list of positive responses, four turned up! However, as luck would have it, a coffee morning had been taking place at the same venue, so that many of those present were only too happy to come along to join our event and make a day of it. The fact that most of these guests were refugees from Ukraine, who had only been in the country for a couple of days, could not have been more appropriate. They were mostly women who brought along their children as they weren't yet in school. No interpreter was present, but one of the

ladies had good enough English to take on that role.

Much of the planned programme, facilitated by Frances Hume and Aparna Ramesh from Interfaith Scotland, had to be quickly adapted to suit the new audience, but the first part, drawing something or someone which was inspiring, was a task that everyone could do. It also proved possible to share the stories behind the drawings and much understanding was shown between the group members, respecting and sometimes echoing each others' experiences. The meditation which should have followed was centred on clay. While it wasn't possible to do the full meditation with the language barrier, we used the clay to make models and some jewellery. All then enjoyed a delicious lunch that we were able to provide with funding from the Dumfries and Galloway



Community Planning Partnership.

So what had at first appeared to be a disaster, in fact became a most valuable, rich and enjoyable experience. The women remarked on how grateful they were to have spent time like this, relaxing in a safe place with new friends, whilst their children had some fun. What more could one ask of any event, and I felt privileged to have been part of it.

**Jan Lethbridge, Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group**



## Aberdeen Interfaith Group

The Varapunya Meditation Centre (VMC) organised several events jointly with Aberdeen Interfaith Group (AIFG) in the last few months. The first event was a Fire labyrinth to celebrate the spring equinox in mid-March, in collaboration with AIFG, VMC and our Pagan friends. One of our volunteers, Bruce, is a Pagan practitioner and he prepared the ceremony for us, introducing us to the background of Paganism and lighting the fire. Bruce has been instrumental in creating the woodland for us at our Meditation Centre.

Our second event was our annual Interfaith Mindfulness Day on Saturday 14 May. Our theme was 'Lonely or Alone' to fit in with Mental Health Awareness Week. Ajahn Sujana led a mindful walk around the field of growing trees, together but alone, appreciating nature's sounds, sights and smells. Walking slowly and silently we were at one with each other and creation. We made some new friends and met up with old ones over beautifully prepared food by volunteers from the Centre before sitting around the garden in the sunshine to reflect on our themes.



Patricia Findlay shared from the writings of Rev Dr James Simpson, "Solitude, making time alone, is a very different thing from painful loneliness which too many people experience today and have experienced over the last two years. Whereas solitude expresses the glory of being alone,



loneliness expresses its pain." We were reminded by Astrid Bendoric, from the Brahma Kumaris, that Jesus and Buddha took time to be alone before reaching out to others. How important the balance of self and others is in today's busy world. Suki Bain, a Sikh, told us of the importance of Oneness in his faith – with God, with nature, with others, with ourselves. Nigel Dower, a Quaker, reiterated a similar point about there being a spark of the divine in each person. In that sense we are never really alone but connected to all.

The third event we held was to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in June. The first part of the celebrations was the ordination of a young man as a temporary Buddhist monk and a second as a temporary novice monk at the Centre. We were joined by senior Buddhist monks from England, and the event was well attended by members of the community. Temporary ordination is regarded as a training in spiritual morals and ethics, walking on a spiritual journey as well as learning mindful living in the frantic world.

After the ordination ceremony, members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group joined us for a mindful walk in the woodland and we planted a tree to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee.

After the tree planting, a seminar-style event was held with speakers from different faiths. David welcomed everyone and shared how service and gratitude is at the heart of all the great faiths and spiritual practices. Children from the Buddhist studies group wrote essays on 'Buddhism and the Queen' which they shared with those gathered. Frances Hume from Interfaith Scotland joined us and shared about the life of the Queen and how the values of the Queen's Christian faith motivated her to a life of service to her nation and the commonwealth. She shared Scriptures from all the major faith traditions which outline the values of service and gratitude and shared ways in which members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group had helped their communities during the pandemic. The event concluded with an award ceremony where members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group were







presented with certificates for their dedicated service to interfaith over the years.

The Varapunya Meditation Centre, independently and in partnership with NHS Grampian and other international organisations, has been able to offer various online sessions, providing support and guidance in the region,

nationally and internationally, helping those with worry, anxiety and stress to cope and develop a more mindful way of living. The last two years have brought lots of sadness but also, of course, joy for some and, with all of this, new perspectives on life and nature. The last two years have been challenging for everyone in different ways and we have all learnt different



skills to adapt and adjust to this new environment. Aberdeen Interfaith and the Varapunya Centre have continued to offer support and encouragement wherever they can to their members and visitors and will continue to do so. For more information please visit our website: [www.varapunyacentre.com](http://www.varapunyacentre.com) and the Aberdeen Interfaith Facebook page.



## Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group

On Saturday 27 August Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group organised a trip to Falkirk. 41 women and children from diverse faiths came and enjoyed a memorable day together. The group visited St. Andrew's West Church on New Market Street in the morning. We received a very warm welcome from Kenny Muir, Rev. Alastair Horne and members of the church on our arrival. Learning about the history of the church made the experience more meaningful and enjoyable. After the talk the group enjoyed lovely singing from the church choir. The ladies of the church provided a lovely tea with cake, home baking and biscuits. What a feast we all had!

In the afternoon the group visited the



Falkirk Wheel and enjoyed a picnic in the garden, a walk beside the canal and the amazing technology of the wheel itself. Our journey home was enlivened by some folk singing. We all felt that we had much enjoyed our summer outing with its opportunity to meet with women of other faiths in a

relaxed and informal way. All in all it was wonderful and spiritual uplifting day! We are very grateful to the John Wigham Trust for part-funding our summer trip.

**Nila Joshi, Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group**



## Interfaith Glasgow



One Big Picnic returned to Glasgow in early September. Thousands of people came to George Square to enjoy food, music, and activities from many cultures. One Big Picnic is a free family-friendly day out celebrating the diversity of the people of Glasgow. Through the Interfaith Food Justice Network, faith and community groups came together to prepare thousands of portions of delicious food between them – and served it for free to the people of Glasgow. Stalls served a vast selection of sweet and savoury food, with many options prepared by diverse communities, allowing people the opportunity to perhaps taste something they never had before. Many of the organisations

involved deliver food projects - such as emergency food provisions, community cafes, and soup kitchens - all year round, and they continued their service for the vulnerable throughout the pandemic, serving tasty food with dignity to those who need it.

Food stalls were joined by a rich variety of activity stalls. There was something for everyone – whether that was craft activities, trying on Muslim hijabs or Sikh turbans, tasting fragrant Yemeni coffee, trying your hand at writing in Hebrew, or visiting the Music Broth tent and playing one of their many instruments! You could also get your hand decorated with



beautiful henna patterns or your face painted as a butterfly, tiger, or spider-man!

If that wasn't enough, there was a rich selection of musical performances. We had pop music as well as traditional Scottish, Kurdish, and Ukrainian songs. Add to that a choir performance and a string quartet and there really was a huge variety to listen and to dance to! And did people dance! As a baglama was strummed, a group of people from all backgrounds began to dance together, sharing and embracing culture and truly highlighting what the day is about!





## Women of Faith & Community



Women of Faith & Community meet in Glasgow on the first Monday of the month in the Unitarian Church, Berkeley Street. Occasionally we venture forth and visit a place of interest. Concerned about the climate, we started to focus on trees and the possibility of contributing to the campaign to reduce carbon by planting. One of our members who lives in Old Kilpatrick told us of the plan to create an arboretum near the site of the west end of the Antonine Wall. Unfortunately, this bold idea was impacted by the pandemic and put on hold. However, she suggested that we should retain the idea of visiting Old Kilpatrick. A very kind friend Catherine Quinn had offered

to host our visit, to provide lunch and an opportunity to meditate in "Bella", a mysterious building in her garden. What an enticing prospect. The day was beautiful. The small group of cars followed our leader up the Kilpatrick Braes past summer fields of sheep and cattle, the road getting narrower as we progressed. Eventually we arrived at a fascinating house with a summer house verdant with plants and fascinating objects with an amazing view of the Clyde and the Erskine Bridge. Catherine provided tea and coffee while we introduced ourselves. Then it was time for our visit to "Bella", an octagonal wooden building erected by Catherine in memory of her father, which she uses as a retreat. There were Buddhist prayer flags, little bells, colourful cushions and candles. We took off our shoes and prepared to relax and take in the beauty and peace of the place.

We took part in a quiet meditation reflecting on gratitude in our lives. We then turned to our neighbour and each talked for three minutes without interruption about a happy memory of our childhood. The second question was 'what gives me life and makes me happy'. This was followed by a general sharing when we were delighted to hear how similar our experiences were. Isabel Smyth then introduced us to the work of Joanna

Macey, a systems thinker and deep ecologist. Joanna began the world wide movement, 'The Work that Reconnects', which helps people discover and experience their innate connections with each other and the self-healing powers of the web of life. This transforms despair and overwhelm into inspired, collaborative action. Joanna's book 'Active Hope, How to Face the Mess We are in with Unexpected Resilience and Creative Power', co-authored with Chris Johnstone, was recommended. A lovely lunch was then provided for those gathered. Our warmest thanks to Issy who organised the event and to Catherine who was such a generous host. Truly a day to remember.



# Stella Reekie: A Remarkable Woman

**9 July 2022 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Stella Jane Reekie. The 40th anniversary of her death is on 28 September. These are significant dates for those of us involved in interfaith relations in Scotland for Stella was truly its pioneer.**

Stella Jane Reekie was born on 29 July 1922, the youngest of eight children and brought up outside Gravesend. She trained as a nursery nurse and, early in 1945, was present at the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp at Belsen where she saw for herself the horrors that hatred of the other could bring about. She stayed on in the rehabilitation camp, working as the Child Welfare Officer, responsible for the care and education of the children. Her work was greatly appreciated and a paper describing the school, which catered for some 470 Polish children from 7-16 years old, describes Stella as "the Guardian Angel who watches over the school life and to whom the children turn eagerly quite unhampered by the fact that there is little they can say in English or she in Polish. She copes with endless problems such as sudden shortages of fuel, collapse of the bus, lack of material for work, illnesses, complaints about the bread, the endless small details which in such an undertaking are always going a little wrong and needing care."

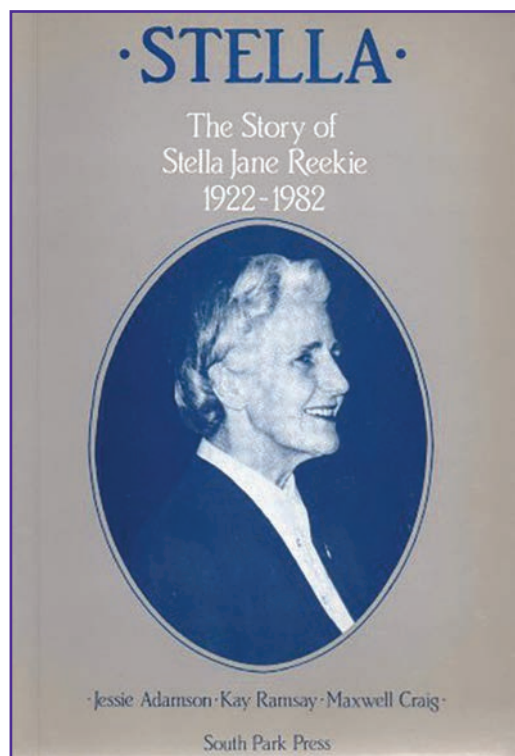
After the war she trained as a missionary at the Church of Scotland's St Colm's College in Edinburgh before going to Pakistan in 1951 to work with women in the Church of Scotland mission in Sialkot. It was in Pakistan that she learned to speak Urdu which came in useful in her work in Glasgow. She didn't speak Urdu very well, having no facility for learning languages, as she herself admitted. But this was no barrier to communication and the booklet on her life, written after her death, speaks of her power to communicate despite language and cultural barriers.

All this prepared Stella for her work

with the new Asian community in Glasgow, particularly with the women who were not allowed to leave their homes to meet other women unless their husbands could be sure men would not be present. Because of her experience and understanding of the faith and culture of the new immigrants she was appointed by the Home Board of the Church of Scotland to work with women and help integrate them into their new life, supporting them through childcare, social services, friendship and advice. She knew that the host community needed to appreciate these new Scots and while she made significant contributions within the context of community and race relations, it is within the area of interfaith relations that we remember her today.

Stella believed that understanding and respect was the bedrock of integration and that this included faith and religion, hence the setting up of the first interfaith group in Scotland, 'The Glasgow Sharing of Faiths'. From her home in the International Flat in Glasgow Street, Stella welcomed people of all faiths and none with great generosity and joie de vivre and people of all faiths found a safe space where they could relax, meet one another, share their beliefs and way of life and establish friendships which have endured to this day. In this context there was to be no sense of one group being superior to another or dehumanising people because they were different.

When Stella died in 1982, the Lord Provost of Glasgow at that time, Dr Michael Kelly, wrote a foreword to the commemorative booklet written



to celebrate her life. He spoke of the city's 'incalculable debt to Stella Reekie' and said: 'as long as her spirit of selflessness inspires those who knew her and is passed on to others who never knew that privilege, the debt will be discharged through their continuation of her mission to break down barriers and build understanding between people'. Surely this mission and spirit continue now in an interfaith movement which has 20 local interfaith groups spread across the nation - from the Scottish Borders all the way to Shetland; women's interfaith dialogue groups in Glasgow, Edinburgh, East Lothian and Coatbridge; an interfaith LGBT+ group and a national interfaith body, Interfaith Scotland, with links throughout the four nations of the United Kingdom and worldwide. The seeds that Stella sowed have borne fruit in a way that she would not have dreamed of. For those who are reaping the benefits of those fruits and sowing their own seeds of understanding and cooperation today, Stella still remains a source of inspiration and encouragement.

**Isabel Smyth SND**





# The Art of Living: Mantras Decoded

In mid-June I organised a two-day workshop “Mantras Decoded” with the Art of Living Team, designed and led by Swami Purnachaitanya who commenced his UK wide tour in Glasgow. Mantra is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘sound to transcend the mind’.

These sounds are repeated to aid concentration in meditation, in a chant or prayer. Swami Purnachaitanya is a senior faculty in the Art of Living, teaching yoga, meditation, breathwork and the benefits of mantra chanting internationally. Born and brought up in the Netherlands, Swami is known for his ability to skilfully bridge the philosophies of the East and the

West and simplify concepts from ancient wisdom.

The course was open to people of all faiths and beliefs. Participants learnt to sing Sanskrit hymns and were gifted a Rudraksha mala – a rosary of 108 beads composed of Rudraksha tree seeds – a precious gift that all participants can use in their mantra practices. Many of the participants

gave feedback on feeling blissful and empowered with the toolkit given to improve so many aspects of life. The event concluded with Swami signing copies of his international bestseller ‘Looking Inward: How to find calm in a chaotic world’.

**Dr Sujata Sriram, Volunteer Facilitator for the Art of Living Team, Scotland**

## Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society News

**The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society (SABS) was pleased to have held its 7th Unity Dinner on 19 June, a celebratory event situated between the Two Eids.**

The dinner continues the annual pre-Covid tradition of SABS to break bread with Scottish Shia Muslim brethren in what is our annual Gathering of the Clans. The dinner was held at Greyfriars Charteris Centre in Edinburgh, and brought together Muslims in fellowship, from the clerics of our great Scottish cities to the local community members. As part of our ethos and desire to strengthen unity within and across Schools of Thought, which is an indispensable part of

our faith, we were honoured by the attendance of our Sunni partners and brethren, Dar ul Ehsan, at the event in our shared commitment to nurture true harmony and peace. Our thanks extend to our esteemed clerics, community leaders, and our fellows and peers who came down and shared in a meal with us together. We were delighted to see representation across the Muslim diaspora from Hazara, African, Pakistani, Indian, Moroccan, Iraqi, Turkish and Iranian communities in Scotland, from Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Fife, Inverness and elsewhere.

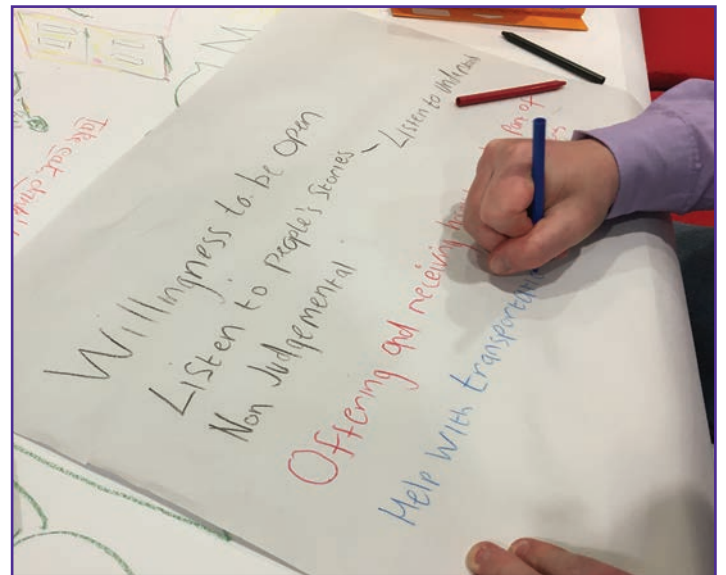
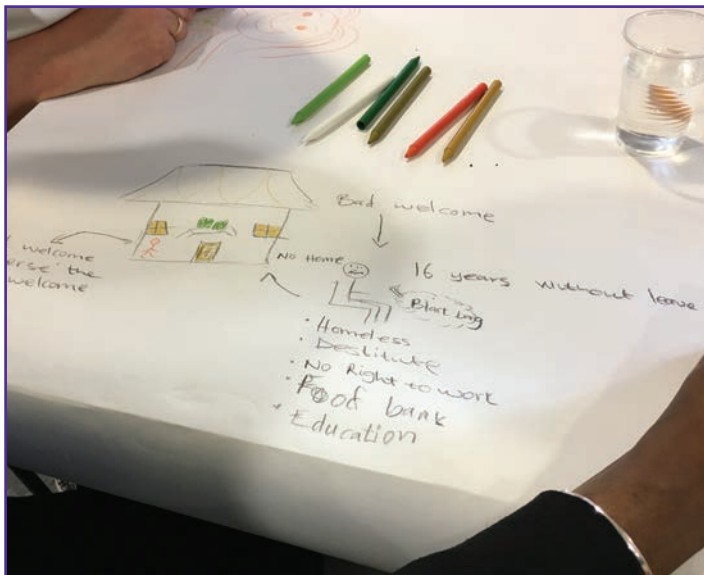


Illustrating the pluralism and acceptance that prevails in Scotland – and in an act that highlights the friendly relations between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish



Muslim Communities – an official letter was written by the Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshield, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, to Imam Dr Sayed Ali Abass Razawi to mark the sombre month of Muharram and the occasion of Ashura. This comes from a fellowship across faith families that is truly exemplary and a model to follow in the Western World.

**Azhar Hussnain, General Secretary, Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society**



# A Faithful Welcome

The event sought to explore and develop the welcome offered to asylum seekers and refugees by faith communities. The title 'Love without Limits' was given by a woman seeking asylum who described the support she had received from her faith community as 'love without limits'. Central to the Gathering were the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers who shared powerfully about the impact their personal faith and their faith communities had made in their lives. It was clear that faith communities in Scotland are places of hope, compassion and skill and play a central role in the lives of many refugees and asylum seekers (New Scots).

Over lunch members of faith communities and New Scots exchanged ideas about what a good and bad experience of welcome looks like, and explored how the welcome by faith communities could be enhanced. The afternoon was sprinkled with both creative and informative workshops, including one led by Interfaith Scotland and the Baha'i Community about 'what my faith says about welcoming refugees and asylum seekers'. The day was rounded off with a ceilidh which celebrated the contributions in song,

In June, faith communities gathered with refugees and asylum seekers in Glasgow for the Love Without Limits Gathering and Ceilidh. The Gathering was organised by Faith in Community Scotland and Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees as part of their joint Faithful Welcome programme.

music, poem and dance from across the world. The report 'Somebody Reaches Out' records the feedback we received from refugees and asylum seekers about their experiences with faith communities.

The staff team at the Faithful Welcome project are happy to support any faith community who would like to

expand or start working with refugees, including easy accessible funding. David Moodie will be working with local faith communities across Scotland as they respond to displaced Ukrainians moving to their local area. David is keen to connect with and hear from local faith groups and he can be contacted at [david.moodie@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:david.moodie@churchofscotland.org.uk)







# Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees

## Planting a Tree of Peace at Glasgow University

**On 6 September 2022 Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network in partnership with the University of Glasgow Chaplaincy held a ceremony celebrating the planting of a 'Tree of Peace'.**

The tree was planted in March 2022 but due to Covid the dedication ceremony could not be held at the time. This is a continuation of the project led by Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith of Network 'Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees'. The project is a simple concrete method whereby individuals, families, schools, universities, places of worship,

businesses etc, plant a symbolic 'Tree of Peace' helping to negate carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere but also leading to discussions and concrete actions as to what can be done individually and collectively.

Vice Principal of Glasgow University, Professor Ian McInnes, the Religion and Belief Champion, Chaplains, students and members of different faith communities gathered around the tree which had been planted in the university grounds. Dr Rev Carolyn Kelly, the University Chaplain, welcomed those gathered. She spoke of the Tree of Life in the book of Revelation in the Bible. The Tree of Life bears twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month, and it says that the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of RfP UKWFN outlined the project and spoke of the importance of planting trees and their significance in different religions. She outlined the

Miyawaki methodology of planting trees in a small area resulting in fully grown forests within two years restoring biodiversity in the area. She encouraged the University to carry out a pilot project using this method. The Vice Principal of Glasgow University Professor McInnes spoke of the commitment of the University to tackle the climate crisis. Glasgow many years ago was one of the first Universities to lead with a green city concept and working together we can make a difference. The ceremony concluded with refreshments and conversations in the principal's lodgings.





# Interfaith Scotland

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