

# Interfaith Scotland

Magazine Spring 2023: Issue 39

Making a Difference through Dialogue



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# A time of renewal and hope

This edition of our Interfaith Scotland Magazine is entitled 'Spring 2023'. Spring usually feels like a time of new beginnings, new life, the end of winter, lengthening days – it's a time perhaps when we feel a sense of renewal and hope. For many who have struggled through the winter with rising fuel and food costs it may be more difficult to feel hopeful and the rising mental health crisis in Scotland indicates that we all have to continue to dig deep, reach out a hand of friendship and help those who are struggling.

The war in Ukraine continues to cause immense grief and suffering as does the continuing plight of asylum seekers to the UK. Faith communities have done so much to help and no doubt will continue to do so. The Scottish Government has now launched its new Hate Crime Strategy for Scotland and it can be found on the Scottish Government website. History has shown us that when countries are struggling financially it is easy to scapegoat communities and we all must work hard to counter the rhetoric of hate and division – this is central to all our faith-based and interfaith work.

For now, let us remain hopeful that we can continue to build a safe, inclusive, sustainable and welcoming Scotland together.

**Dr Maureen Sier, Director**



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

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Flemington House,  
110 Flemington Street, Glasgow, G21 4BF  
**Tel:** 0141 558 0778  
**E-mail:** [admin@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:admin@interfaithscotland.org)



# Working with Young People



## National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board

**In April 2022, Interfaith Scotland invited applications for a National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board. After a shortlisting process, 12 applicants were selected.**

The current board consists of members from the following faiths – Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, and Buddhist and members had their first meeting online during Scottish Interfaith Week. It is hoped that representatives from other faiths will also apply to serve on the board in the coming months. Since its formation, the Interfaith Youth Advisory Board members have met together to discuss their remit and have attended equality and diversity

and interfaith leadership training sessions made possible through funding from YouthLink Scotland.

The Youth Advisory Board came together in person for the first time at the Interfaith Scotland Dialogue Centre during World Interfaith Harmony Week (February 2023) to discuss the role of youth leadership in faith community and interfaith settings and to plan future interfaith events together.



## Experiential Play

**Interfaith Scotland continues to deliver training to nursery school teachers in their continuing professional development.**

The sessions give an outline of six world faiths through a mixture of interactive activities. Students also looked at ways in which religion, belief and spiritual experience might have an impact on 3 – 5 year olds and their parents. The sessions were well received and there were a lot of interesting discussions with the students.



## Christie Park Primary School

**Interfaith Scotland staff delivered a lively school assembly in October at Christie Park Primary School in Alexandria with 200 pupils aged 4 – 12.**

They shared with the children about the importance of understanding and accepting people from different faiths and cultures and demonstrated the use of different religious objects, instruments and items of clothing. This was the first in-person school engagement since before the pandemic and it was a joy to interact with the children. An art competition was launched for pupils at the school to 'design the perfect prayer room'. A lot of creative ideas were shared and pupils designed and outlined how a space could be created that would be suitable and welcoming for people from all religions. A prize went to the best design in each class.



# International Women's Day: A Silent Voice Speaks



**On Monday 6 March, Interfaith Scotland and Women of Faith in Community, a local interfaith group for women based in Glasgow, hosted an event for International Women's Day at Glasgow Unitarian Church. Trishna Singh OBE shared extracts from her memoir, 'A Silent Voice Speaks: The Wee Indian Woman on the Bus', reflecting on her life as a Sikh woman in Scotland. Over 50 women were in attendance and after the speech everyone moved down the road to enjoy langar (a vegetarian meal) at Glasgow's Central Gurdwara.**

International Women's Day is an important date in the interfaith calendar. It is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality. The theme of 2023 is 'Embrace Equity' which recognises that equality in terms of everyone being offered the same opportunities is not enough, as some groups will require additional support that is tailored to their specific needs in order to participate fully in society. This has inspired Trishna's work for over 35 years supporting women from the Bhat Sikh Community in Edinburgh.

When studying the Sikh scriptures, Trishna discovered that the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, had been a vocal advocate for gender equality in 15th Century India. After learning this, Trishna realised that many of the gendered practices she disagreed with in the Bhat community were cultural and not religious. This included Sikh women veiling their faces in the company of men older than their husbands.

Trishna began sharing her knowledge with other women in the community.

In 1989 she took her efforts further by founding the Sikh Sanjog. The Scottish charity began supporting isolated Sikh women to make friends, gain qualifications, and secure employment. Many of the Sikh women Trishna grew up with left school with very little reading and writing skills. While exploring ways to develop a social business with Sikh women at the forefront, the workers at Sikh Sanjog realised the key skills they shared. Every day a group of four or five Sikh women would make a three-course meal for over 500 people in under five hours. This incredible feat is carried out daily as part of a common Sikh practice known as Langar, a free community kitchen in the Gurdwara open to anyone. Recognising the skills the women had, Sikh Sanjog opened a social enterprise called Punjabi Junction in 2008. The business served traditional home cooked Punjabi food and has empowered minority ethnic women to learn literacy, numeracy, communication, social and customer care skills.

In recognition of her services to the community, Trishna became the first Sikh woman in Scotland to receive an OBE in 2014. Trishna

is proud of the change she has witnessed in the community since the charity began. Now she sees her friend's granddaughters and great-granddaughters living their own lives and having careers. Trishna's hope for the future is for gender inequality within faith communities to be addressed and challenged.

'A Silent Voice Speaks: The Wee Indian Woman on the Bus', was published in 2022 and is available to purchase from Fledgeling Press, Waterstones and Amazon. Trishna is also available to speak in schools for a fee, 50% of which goes towards the work of Sikh Sanjog. Please contact [trishna@sikhsanjog.com](mailto:trishna@sikhsanjog.com) for further details.





# Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

**For some years now Interfaith Scotland has been performing the secretariat role for the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief.**

The group is chaired by John Mason MSP and meetings typically focus on the discrimination or persecution of a specific faith or belief community. In November the keynote speaker was Philip Mounstephen, the Bishop of Truro, who provided an engaging presentation on his review into support by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) for persecuted Christians worldwide. The

Bishop described how 'Christians are, by most calculations, the most persecuted faith worldwide'. We heard about the use of forced conversion, kidnapping, forced marriage and sexual violence, as well as how little Western governments seem to be doing to challenge the pattern. The Bishop emphasized that there are many drivers behind the persecution, and that it is being perpetrated by

those of many faith traditions and of none. Those committing acts of persecution included drug cartels, authoritarian governments and militia groups. Finally, we discussed what action the group could take, including engaging directly with the FCDO. If you are interested in attending future meetings of the group, email [jamie@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:jamie@interfaithscotland.org)



## Annual Interfaith Lecture: Tackling Hate Through Education

**Interfaith Scotland was honoured to have the Annual Interfaith Lecture 2022 delivered by Michael Haines OBE the brother of David Haines who was murdered by ISIS.**

Michael has founded a charity Global Acts of Unity and spoke movingly of both his experience as a brother of someone taken so brutally and also as Director of such an effective educational charity. His work to challenge hatred has been recognised globally. Interfaith Scotland held this annual lecture during Hate Crime Awareness Week and representatives of the Scottish Government attended the lecture in support of the week.

There was an opportunity for Q & A with Michael immediately after the Annual Interfaith Lecture and this was followed by an opportunity for dialogue on the following questions:

1. What do you think are the root causes of hatred and prejudice?
2. How does your faith community tackle hatred and prejudice?
3. What sort of awareness-raising and educational activity do you think would be beneficial in tackling hate crime in Scotland?



# Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees

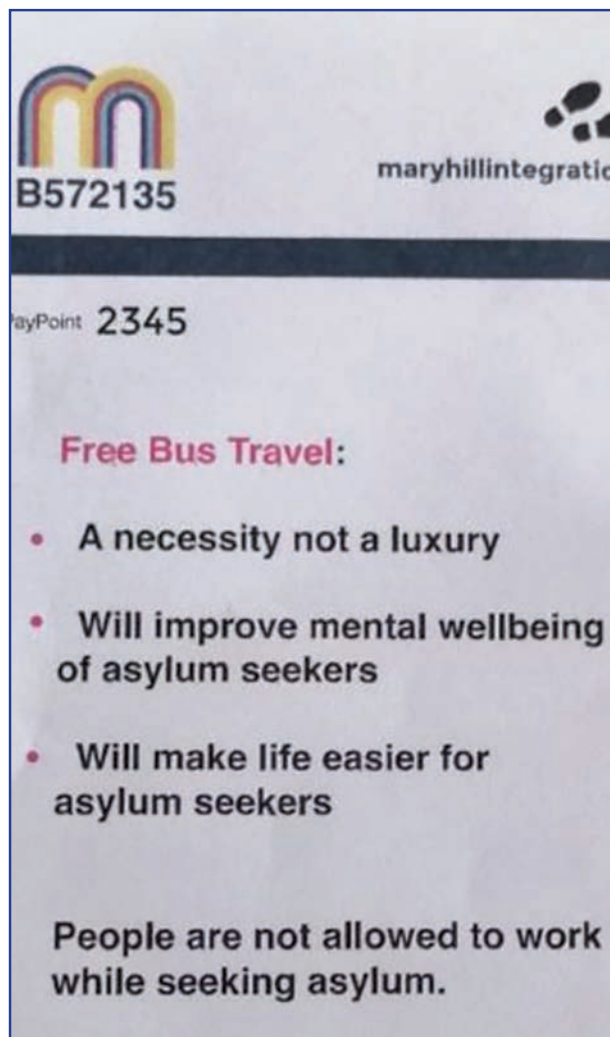
**Interfaith Scotland is honoured to sit on the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees spearheaded by Sabine Chalmers from the Church of Scotland.**

Over the years there have been many campaigns and conferences, and on-going awareness raising and lobbying. One of the current campaigns could make such a difference to Asylum Seekers and is simply to allow them concessionary travel, below is a summary of the campaign.

## Campaign Summary

People seeking asylum are left to survive on a pitiful and inadequate amount of £5.83 per day if in dispersal housing and £1.24 per day if they are in contingency hotel accommodation.

People are typically in limbo waiting for an initial asylum decision for many months, often years and therefore excluded from fully participating in community life. Some 120,000 people are in that predicament across the UK and around 5,000 people in Scotland. People seeking asylum are also denied the right to work and are then pushed into severe poverty, for months and years. They are often isolated, mental health deterioration sets in, and the reality is that integration from day one is a distant hope for most as they cannot afford to travel to a community event, English classes or to meet a local friend. Campaign partners are asking the Scottish Government for a national change and for the longer-term goal of concessionary bus travel for people seeking asylum in Scotland. It is also hoped that the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum Members will get behind this important campaign.



# Faces of Kabul Exhibition



**Interfaith Scotland was delighted to partner with Nick Sidle, Creative Scotland and Glasgow Libraries to bring the Faces of Kabul Exhibition to Pollok Library, Glasgow from 14 November 2022 – 20 January 2023.**

In 2002, just after the fall of the Taliban regime of that time, Nick Sidle became one of the early photographers to be embedded with western forces. This gave him access to the work of the soldiers from multiple nations but also meant that he came into contact with the Afghan people at a time of great change and hope for the future. For the most part, he was welcomed and what arose was a unique portrait of shared human experience that everyone can relate to. The exhibition 'Faces of Kabul' was credited with changing perceptions and breaking down barriers in the midst of events that had created a climate of fear and mistrust. The archive of images, all shot on film, was revisited, known images restored and new photographs printed for the first time. The human story was powerfully shown and continues to help create understanding and empathy.



# St Andrew's Day at the Scottish Parliament

As a member of the Cross-Party Group on St Andrew's Day, Interfaith Scotland, was delighted to be part of a wonderful team who helped craft a truly multi-faith, multi-cultural celebration of St Andrews Day, held for the first time in the Scottish Parliament. The CPG is sponsored by Paul McLennan MSP and is chaired by Dennis Canavan.



The Parliamentary celebration was ably led by Joe Goldblatt and the programme included a prayer for peace from the Ukrainian Catholic Priest, Scottish and Hindu music, diverse stalls, a gift of a poem from the Makar and was attended by around 100 guests. It is planned to hold an annual event in the Parliament and to grow the festival year on year.



## Enjoying a Roundtable Dialogue with our Ecumenical Friends

Interfaith Scotland was delighted to welcome representatives from a number of Christian denominations for a round-table discussion about the work of Interfaith Scotland and how we can further collaborate with our ecumenical partners even more effectively. The engagement was a

warm and productive one and the staff team at Interfaith Scotland look forward to continuing to deepen our relationship with the diverse churches in Scotland. Back row from left to right: Joe Sikora, Interfaith Officer for the Catholic Bishops Committee for Inter-religious Dialogue; Rev Gareth Jones,

Interfaith Officer for the Methodist Church; The Rt Rev Iain Greenshields, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Rev Dr Kleber Machado, Church of Scotland minister and Vice Chair of Interfaith Glasgow. Front row left: Mr Paul Cathcart DCS (deacon in the Church of Scotland).

# Scottish Interfaith Week 2022



**This year's Scottish Interfaith Week was one to remember! From Sunday 13 November to Sunday 20 November 2022, over 70 events were hosted across Scotland to celebrate the nation's religious and cultural diversity. Local interfaith groups, faith communities, organisations, politicians, schools, youth groups, and chaplaincies all notably engaged with the festival and its theme of 'Storytelling'.**

The theme of 'Storytelling' was chosen for this year's festival to tie in with Scotland's Year of Stories. Stories enable us to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and start important conversations. As Scotland's only interfaith festival, we had the unique opportunity to explore how stories of faith and belief can offer resilience, connection and joy.



Our festival launch event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre featured musicians, poetry readings and an exhibition of photography and stories – all exploring faith and belief. The poetry readings came from Interfaith Scotland's new poetry book developed in partnership with the Scottish Poetry Library. Our poets on the night were Lynnda Wardle, Ghanima Answar, Mamie Philp, Linda Haggerstone and Rumaisa Zubairi. 'The Courageous Non-Uniformity of Stones' features forty poems and initially received over 70 submissions. Copies of the book can be purchased by emailing [admin@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:admin@interfaithscotland.org)





The exhibition at the launch event was also developed by Interfaith Scotland. 'Faces of Faith' was a showcase of Scotland's diverse religious and cultural communities. Through the stories of 16 people, we explored the joys, challenges, and complexities of living as a person of faith in Scotland.

The exhibition was displayed in the Scottish Storytelling Centre on the Royal Mile for eight days before being moved to the University of Glasgow Memorial Chapel for two weeks. The exhibition can also be viewed on our website at <https://scottishinterfaithweek.org/faces-of-faith-exhibition>.

A special event was held at the University of Glasgow Memorial Chapel where five of the 16 people featured in the exhibition shared their personal stories: Henry Wuga (Jewish), Sharandeep Singh (Sikh), Neil Pitchford (Pagan), William English (Protestant Christian), and Malar Menon (Catholic Christian).



Our team at Interfaith Scotland hosted seven exciting events for Scottish Interfaith Week and co-hosted events with Borders Interfaith, Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group, Glasgow Libraries, and the University of Glasgow. We also developed a series of videos on YouTube about inspirational interfaith experiences that you can find at <https://tinyurl.com/IFInspirations>

We loved hearing about all the wonderful gatherings, exhibitions, conversations, and performances which took place during the festival. Thank you to everyone who took part in Scottish Interfaith Week 2022 and made it a year to remember! On the following pages is a sample of some of these events.





# Decolonising Lands and Minds

**Interfaith Scotland ran a Scottish Interfaith Week Ambassador programme where volunteer ambassadors attended events across the country. We invited ambassadors to share their stories. In this story, David McKee reflects on the event 'Decolonising Lands and Minds' which he attended on Monday 7 November 2022.**



It was a dreich – you might say typical Glasgow night – as I wandered off the subway and meandered towards the University of Glasgow Memorial Chapel, to listen to Alistair McIntosh – speaker, researcher and activist – share his thoughts on Decolonising Land and Minds. Despite the weather, McIntosh's talk was anything but dreich and instead, really got me thinking.

This was part of Scottish Interfaith Week and also tied in with the moving Carrolup Touring Art Exhibition in Glasgow University – Tracing the Art of a Stolen Generation. In this display, paintings and words from Australian Aboriginal children, taken away from home to the Carrolup Settlement in the 1940s, are showcased.

This is intended to allow reflection and also – because many of the

paintings have not been found – spark interest if anyone in Scotland has one, unbeknown to them. The art from Carrolup mirrored that of places such as Terezin, a Nazi ghetto near Prague, where, during the horrors of the Holocaust, Czech musicians, composers and theatrical artists, wrote and performed. Like the children of Carrolup, despite terrible prospects, creativity was a form of resistance.

McIntosh used the basis of the Carrolup story to form his engaging and passionate presentation, covering a wide range of topics, including: how colonisation was once seen as progress but not any longer; how in the past people often saw things in pure binary terms; Alistair's work with the Isle of Eigg moving into community ownership; liberation theology; how society can begin to decolonise our

viewpoints; and how we have a duty of candor in facing, accepting and challenging our past. He also spoke of the three 'Is' of colonialism: Imperial, based on land and territories; Internal, within a country and Inner on the level of the soul and spiritual process.

Much of this made me ponder the 'Black Lives Matter' movement and protests in Bristol and elsewhere over slavery in recent years. For interfaith matters too, is there a need for faith groups to in effect, 'decolonise their attitudes'? The past cannot be overwritten, but surely there is a requirement to be welcoming, open and honest to all people, not to be scared, but instead welcome contributions, skills and more importantly, the stories of people who have suffered, however difficult these may be to hear for our faith tradition.

## Storytelling with Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group

**On Saturday 19 November, over 30 women enjoyed a talk and presentation on the theme of Storytelling at The Methodist Church in Edinburgh as part of Scottish Interfaith Week.**



Rev Ali Newell spoke about her contribution to the Edinburgh University Chaplaincy and her work in the wider community. Frances Hume shared her story of her interfaith journey and working at Interfaith Scotland. It was absolutely wonderful to hear the stories of both of our guests. After the talks, women enjoyed the delicious refreshments with tea and coffee.





# Interfaith Borders Multicultural Celebration

**Around 50 people attended a wonderful multicultural celebration, young and old from countries across the globe, at Borders General Hospital Chaplaincy Centre on Sunday 20 November.**

The event was organised by members of Interfaith Borders, a local community group with members from several faiths from across the Borders, to mark Scottish Interfaith Week. The event began with sharing a 'potluck' supper. Participants were then invited to share a song, story, poem or piece of music. One young girl enchanted the audience with delightful songs and played the cello for those gathered. A Gaelic singer shared some traditional Scottish songs. A Welsh lady shared an old Welsh folk tale and a lady from

Northern Ireland shared a traditional song from Belfast. Frances Hume, National Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland, then taught some Scottish dances to those gathered. Young and old danced together with great gusto! Some great connections were made at the event which helped create a sense of diversity within the local area. It is hoped that these will continue and that Interfaith Borders will grow from strength to strength bringing communities together to get to know one another and establish



long lasting friendships across different faiths and cultures so that the Scottish Borders continues to be a warm and welcoming place for all.

Anyone interested in coming along to future Interfaith Borders events can check out the Interfaith Borders Facebook page or email [frances@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:frances@interfaithscotland.org) for more details.

# Interfaith Journey of the Kalasa

**During Scottish Interfaith Week, all were welcome to a special religious ceremony to consecrate the Kalasa, at the Hindu temple of Scotland in Rutherglen.**

The Kalasa is a prominent motif of Hinduism and the consecration ceremony takes place every 12 years. Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula, a volunteer Hindu Priest, Honorary Chaplain of the University of Glasgow, and board member of Interfaith Scotland gave a very interesting talk on the origins of Kalasa. The information presented in the talk was drawn from his original study reviewed by the Centre of Hindu Studies in Oxford.

Hindus believe Kalasa to be a symbol of abundance. It is also called Kalash, Kumbha, Purnakumbha and Purnaghata. It is very common to see Kalasa being used during prayers

offered at home and in the temple taking the form of a coconut on top of a pot. Kalasa is installed on top of most Hindu temples and it forms an integral part of temple art and architecture. Kalasa represents a pot overflowing with abundance in life.

The talk provided evidence of the origins of Kalasa in Hinduism and the use of Kalasa in prayers even before idols were used for worship in Hinduism. The Buddhists



were the first to place the Kalasa on top of their Stupas. Hindus later adopted the practice of placing Kalasa on the top of their places of worship when they started building temples inspired by Buddhist architecture. The Kalasa was also used in worship in Jainism and interestingly, there is evidence that Kalasa found its place on top of mosques but only for artistic purposes. This is the Interfaith Journey of the Kalasa.

**Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula FRCSEd**

# Dumfries and Galloway: Our Festival Stories

**On Sunday 13 November the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group held an event for Scottish Interfaith Week at the Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Centre on the theme of 'Our Festival Stories'.**

We had a wonderful turnout with no less than 132 people coming through the door, including Ukrainian families from all over the region. The interfaith group can take little credit for this crowd, most of whom were invited by the Dumfries & Galloway Multicultural Association, whose premises we used. Our interfaith group itself is very small, so we work closely with the DGMA, who are at the forefront of local work with refugees and others of different faith traditions.

Given that almost every faith/belief tradition celebrates festivals, our take on Storytelling, the theme of the Week, was to invite speakers to tell the stories behind their own faith's Festivals. We listened first to a Baha'i speaker, who spoke of Naw Ruz (New Year) and Ridvan, both of which involve a period



of fasting followed by gatherings of friends and families enjoying delicious food. Our speaker from the Jewish tradition shared with us the Passovers of his youth which instilled in him the principles by which he lives his adult life: the awareness of, responsibility for, and connection to all others, of whatever background, throughout the world. A Muslim speaker then described the festival of Eid al Fitr, which marks the end of fasting in Ramadan, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar.

A Church of Scotland Elder outlined the background to the traditional British Christmas. Then, to our delight, an interpreter amongst the Ukrainian guests described the Orthodox Christmas of her homeland celebrated in early January. A Roman Catholic Sister then told us about the Easter festival in the RC Church. Traditionally, the period of Lent, leading up to Easter, was a time of fasting, whose pattern finds echoes in both the Baha'i and Muslim traditions.

This account of what our speakers had to say is, of course, essential to this article, but it doesn't actually begin to describe the atmosphere in which this event took place, the fun and enjoyment that was had, the uplifting of the spirit which so many felt. It was



splendidly chaotic - the unexpected numbers of people, folk continuing to arrive long after the intended start time, speakers delayed or unexpected, some minor sound system and temperature issues ... But I think the majority of people were just so happy to be among such a large and varied crowd, meeting old friends and making new contacts, together savouring lovely and unusual food, much of it provided at very short notice by a local Syrian café owner, plus some delicious Ukrainian sweet contributions. Learning together too, from the stories told, how similar, in many ways, are the festivals of the different faiths represented.

In a way, the gathering was a festival in itself. Neil McGregor, in his book 'Living with the Gods', describes festivals as "combining reverence for the divine with throwing a great party, not just living with the Gods, but celebrating with them", and I think we certainly did that!

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





# Official Opening of Glasgow Peace Embassy in Glasgow

Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, officially opened the Peace Embassy Glasgow at 82 Mitchell Street on Friday 18th November. The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and Women's Federation for World Peace, founded by the late Rev Sun Myung Moon and his widow Dr Hak Ja Han Moon, now have a new base to support and cooperate with other faith groups, charitable organisations, and NGOs. Dr Sier wished FFWPU success in their future endeavours. She pointed out that Interfaith Scotland was founded in 1999 and its values resonate with those

engraved on the Scottish Parliament's ceremonial mace, Wisdom, Compassion, Justice and Integrity. Key values also perhaps, for individuals, organisations and communities.

Guests came from FFWPU communities in Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Ireland, London, Birmingham and around the UK. Local faith communities were represented by Bahai, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu members from Glasgow and further afield.

Refreshments and snacks were served and guests were able to meet each

other and share their views and experiences. Dr Michael Balcomb, FFWPU Director for the UK, Europe and the Middle East, offered a dedication prayer for the future success of the new Peace Embassy. Viola Dirnhofer beautifully sang Hillsong United's 'Oceans' to conclude the evening.

It was a new beginning for the Peace Embassy. The world is in dire need of peace, unity, understanding and compassion. We trust the Peace Embassy can be a resource for all these things within Glasgow and the wider community.

## SoupFest

As the event date coincided with Scottish Interfaith Week, we encouraged everyone to submit entries but particularly our local faith groups and international communities to bring a diverse flavour to the event.

We had a great response and were inundated with vibrant soup recipes from various groups and individuals. Five recipes were shortlisted by our judging panel, Giraffe Café, and a team from the café kindly prepared large amounts of these soups for tasting on the day of the event. This

**Perth & Kinross Council held a soup competition called 'SoupFest' as part of the Winter Events Programme in Perth on Sunday 20 November.**

was held at Perth's Horsecross Plaza on Sunday 20 November as part of the City of Perth Feast. All shortlisted entries were contacted and invited to attend on the day.

The soup winner was picked by our guest judge, the Provost Xander McDade, and the winner was presented with a trophy and certificate. As a gesture of goodwill, the soups



were made freely available to all whilst supplies lasted. In particular, individuals and families going through hardship were encouraged to come along and

enjoy some hot soup. This event was very well received by our communities.

**Kate Kelly, Equalities Engagement Officer, Perth and Kinross Council**

# The Jewish Community Celebrates Scottish Interfaith Week



## The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre

The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre was delighted to contribute to Scottish Interfaith Week's 2022 programme with an Open Day event on Armistice Sunday, where we remembered the Jewish men and women who fought and died in wartime, showing material from the Archives Centre collections from the Boer War onwards.

Visitors had the opportunity to view this impressive 1,000 page-plus volume, which contains some 50,000 records of Jews who served in the armed forces during the conflict between 1914-1918,

as well as a number of photographs. The book is now also available online at: <https://www.jewsfww.uk/roll-of-honour.php>. All the visitors had the opportunity to browse the Archives

Centre's displays and admire the magnificent Prayer Hall of the A-listed Garnethill Synagogue.

**Fiona L Brodie**





# West of Scotland Council of Christians and Jews

**Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields and his wife Linda attended an event organised by the West of Scotland Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) at L'Chaim's restaurant.**

Dr Susan Siegel, Chairman of CCJ, welcomed the group and outlined the work of CCJ. Sister Isabel Smyth described CCJ's Jane Haining project which celebrates the life of a Righteous Gentile, originally from Scotland, who sacrificed her life to ensure Jewish children were safe during the Holocaust. Rt Rev Dr Greenshields shared insights on the importance of visiting communities, sharing faith experiences and his belief that there are a great many challenges facing our society today including climate change, poverty, mental health, social isolation, addiction and that all of our faiths are active in supporting those in genuine need.



## Mitzvah Day

**An amazing day was held on 20 November to celebrate Mitzvah Day. Mitzvah Day is the UK's largest faith-led day of social action. Jewish-led, it brings together people of all faiths and backgrounds, to volunteer side-by-side.**

50 children and parents joining The Matana Club, a partnership of Jewish organisations across Scotland, to pick litter, sort donations, and make cards for those in need, with even more community members helping out by dropping off donations. Thanks to Rabbi Pete for teaching the children about mitzvot and leading some great songs, The Black Door Shop for hosting us, everyone who helped plan, and everyone who came out to volunteer and make Mitzvah Day a success!

## Tour of Giffnock Synagogue - Meeting of Rev Greenshields of Church of Scotland and Rabbi Rubin

**During Scottish Interfaith Week, Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, visited with Rabbi Rubin and Susan Siegel at Giffnock Synagogue.**

After a tour of the Prayer Hall and a view of the sacred scrolls, they discussed the challenges they face today. They mentioned encouraging young people to stay involved in religious activities, working with the community to combat racism and ensuring their religious organisations share information about festivals and beliefs.



# Holocaust Memorial Day 2023

## Edinburgh

The Edinburgh Interfaith Association produced this year's online Holocaust Memorial Day Programme. EIFA also coordinated the civic Holocaust commemoration for the City of Edinburgh in the Council Chambers, hosted by the Right Honourable Lord Provost Robert Aldridge. Attending this event were 100 primary school pupils from Longstone and Preston Street Primary Schools. Each pupil had contributed original artwork depicting the theme of "Ordinary People". The artwork was displayed in the City Chambers and the Lord Provost interviewed the artists about what they had learned as a result of this experience.



The main speakers were Umutesi Stewart, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, who alongside her sisters, who had just flown in from Rwanda, told their remarkable story of survival and warned of the dangers of racism. They movingly spoke of how 'ordinary people', once friends and neighbours, could

commit evil acts of atrocity and killings. Children were also moved by footage of the online programme of a secondary school student originally from Syria recounting her experiences of racism and reminding us that we still have much to do as a society to end racism. This was reinforced by Sarah Cohen, a Jewish student leader from the University of Edinburgh, in her closing remarks when she spoke directly to the younger pupils and reminded them that now they must continue telling these stories in order to prevent future atrocities from happening.



## Inverness

The Regional Holocaust Memorial Day Event in Inverness took place on 24 January in the Town House in Inverness in partnership with Interfaith Scotland, Inverness Interfaith and Inverness Provost Office. Interfaith Scotland worked over a few months with Inverness Interfaith Group to plan the event. The event was a great success attended by over 60 people. There was a viewing of an HMD digital exhibition created in collaboration with Heartstone and photographic journalist, Nick Sidle. It features

photos and commentary on the 60th anniversary of the Liberation of the death camps taken by Nick Sidle. After a Welcome from the Depute Provost of Inverness, the event featured keynote addresses from Holocaust Survivor Kathy Hagler, and Rwandan genocide survivors Umutesi Stewart and her sisters Delphine and Natasha. Following these were the presentations



from two Holocaust Educational Trust Ambassadors (Inverness Royal Academy Pupils). The event concluded with a candle-lighting ceremony.



## Shetland

On 27 January 2023, convener Andrea Manson joined members of Shetland Interfaith, guests, and staff and pupils from Bells Brae Primary School P6 at Lerwick Town Hall, to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

Reflecting on this year's theme, 'Ordinary People', those gathered remembered that it is ordinary people who can turn a blind eye, believe the propaganda, and join murderous regimes - prompting them to consider how ordinary people can perhaps play a bigger part than one might imagine in challenging prejudice today. Wreaths were laid at the County War Memorial after the ceremony, with two pupils from Bells Brae Primary laying a wreath on behalf of Shetland's young people. Shetland Town Hall was also lit up for HMD 2023.



## East Renfrewshire

The East Renfrewshire Council and the Jewish Community held a Holocaust Memorial Day event at the Calderwood Lodge Primary School on Monday 23 January 2023. There were 250 participants at the event. The Primary 7 pupils of Calderwood Lodge created a project on Jane Haining, an ordinary Scottish lady who

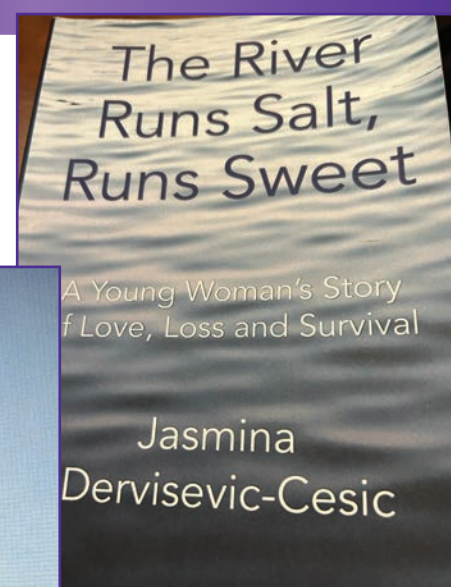
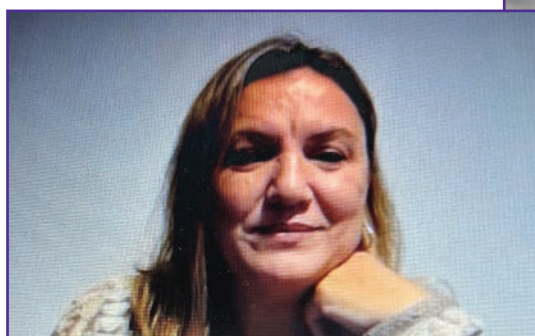
was extraordinary in her courage to help others and was sent to Auschwitz, which was displayed at the event. A second-generation Holocaust survivor spoke as the guest speaker on this year's topic 'Ordinary People'. Other speakers included Scottish ambassadors from the Anne Frank Trust and senior pupils from local

schools who are ambassadors for the Holocaust Education Trust. The East Renfrewshire Secondary Schools Strings Orchestra provided music for the event. The event concluded with other East Renfrewshire pupils lighting the memorial candles whilst the HMD commitments were read.

## Aberdeen

On 23 January, a Regional Holocaust Memorial Day Event was hosted in partnership with the Aberdeen Interfaith Group, Interfaith Scotland, Grampian Regional Equality Council and Robert Gordon University. This Holocaust Memorial Day event focussed on the Bosnian Genocide and featured a large group of diverse people (from many faiths and none) who had studied the book, 'The River Runs Salt, Runs Sweet' about the genocide in Bosnia, written by Jasmina Dervisevic-Cesic a survivor. The group, plus invited guests, gathered at Robert Gordon University to hear

a keynote address by Jasmina (live-streamed from Boston) and to engage in dialogue around the themes in the book and how to address hatred in the current climate/context.



## Island of Iona

A multifaith vigil for HMD was held on 25 January on the remote Hebridean island of Iona, at the centuries-old pilgrimage site of Iona Abbey. Readings, poetry, music, stories, prayer and symbolic action were included. As well as the participants at the Abbey, over 100 people joined by Zoom. There was a family story of the Holocaust from a Jewish contributor, an Islamic prayer from a Muslim contributor, and the rending of a large black cloth in the Abbey in response to being reminded of the horrors of genocide. This was echoed by those

on Zoom, who had been asked to bring a small piece of material: the screens were full of people tearing cloth, or paper, in silence. Six candles were lit, to remember and lament the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. A banner was shown, "We refuse to be enemies" which are words from a farm and educational centre near Bethlehem. Abbey and island musicians provided opportunities for reflection. The stages of genocide were recited and



later transformed and reversed, in a declaration of commitment to prevent future genocides. The vigil ended, as it was Burns Night, with singing A Man's a Man for A' That, which upholds universal dignity for everyone, no matter who they are. The congregation in the Abbey and online joined in the refrain.

## Falkirk

On 27 January over 70 people gathered at the Dawson Centre in Falkirk to remember the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. The guest speakers included the Provost of Falkirk Robert Bissett; Nick Sier and Andrew Sarle, both children of Holocaust survivors; two Holocaust Educational Ambassadors, Hope Rafferty and T J Ballingray; and Rwandan genocide survivors Umutesi



Stewart and sisters Natasha and Delphine. There was also a moving candle ceremony to conclude the event and refreshments were served

to everyone. The event was recorded by BBC Scotland and Nick Sier and Umutesi Stewart appeared on BBC Reporting Scotland that evening.

## Glasgow and Collaboration with Turin in Italy

On 25 January, the Holocaust Memorial Concert was organised and hosted in partnership with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland based in Glasgow, Glasgow City Council and Interfaith Scotland. The concert was attended by 110 guests along with a VIP reception hosted by the Royal Conservatoire. A welcome address by the Director of Music Dr Munro was followed by an introduction to the theme of HMD 2023 and the

importance of remembering by Dr Maureen Sier. The concert involved young people from Glasgow and Turin Italy. A candle-lighting ceremony brought the celebration to a conclusion.

Royal Conservatoire Scotland and Glasgow City Council collaborated with the Conservatoire in Turin, Italy to engage young people from Turin in education on the Holocaust and

subsequent genocides. As part of this process, three young musicians from Turin came to Glasgow to work on the music for the Holocaust Memorial Day Concert. This ongoing project has strengthened the relationship between the two cities and between the two Conservatoires, giving young people from Glasgow and Turin an opportunity to learn about the Holocaust together and to perform in this exceptional concert.



## Dumfries and Galloway

Members of Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group invited friends to a gathering to mark Holocaust Memorial Day at the Kindertransport Tree in Carlingwalk Park in Castle Douglas. This native oak was planted in 2021 by the Association of Jewish Refugees in honour of their 80th Anniversary and HM Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The inscription reads "With sincere thanks to the local people of Castle

Douglas for housing Jewish refugee children during WWII, also in loving memory of Lily and Heinrich Schmerling, who found refuge in the UK from Nazi persecution in Austria." Those gathered around the



tree had a short time of quiet reflection on this year's theme of 'Ordinary People'.

## An Ordinary Person: The Jane Haining Project



On Holocaust Memorial Day, an increasing number of Scots remember the life of Jane Haining, sometimes referred to as 'the Scot who died in Auschwitz'. Jane was a farmer's daughter, born on a small farm in the village of Dunscore in Dumfriesshire. She won a bursary to Dumfries Academy where she stayed in the Hostel for girls from around the area. After school Jane went to Glasgow, where she gained a qualification in Business Studies and worked for J&P Coats. In her spare time she was a Sunday School teacher, devoting herself to the well-being of children.

In her late twenties Jane took a course in Domestic Management and then secured a job with the Church of Scotland as Matron of the Girls' Home for boarders in the Scottish Mission School in Budapest. It was a great adventure, and she was happy there from the first, until the rise of Hitler and the increasing savagery of Nazi persecution, antisemitism and other forms of racism overwhelmed most of Europe by the end of the 1930s. In 1940, after the outbreak of War, Jane was ordered to return home to Scotland for safety, but she refused to leave her pupils in the Girls' Home, the majority of whom were by then Jewish girls entrusted to the School in the desperate hope that it would offer them some protection. Jane told a friend, 'The Jews are now entering their most dangerous period - nothing would induce me to desert them.' She and several of her colleagues continued to speak out boldly against what was happening, and by the time

the Nazis invaded Hungary in March 1944, Jane had become a target. She was arrested on trumped-up charges less than a month after the invasion. The last glimpse we have is of her striving to keep up the spirits of her fellow cell-mates in Budapest's fo Utca jail, where she organised a fashion show displaying their prison rags. The next day she was transported to Auschwitz, where she died on 17th July 1944.

For many Scots, the life of Jane Haining opens a window into the Holocaust - a life so ordinary, so familiar in many of its details, so innocent, so warm and bright. An ordinary person, who became extraordinary through her courage and her devotion to the community and the children whom she loved. Inspired by her story, the Jane Haining Project was established by the West of Scotland branch of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). The project's mission is

to highlight the living legacy of Jane Haining and its relevance for today's growing levels of antisemitism and all forms of racism. By refusing to be a bystander, Jane demonstrated her loving kindness, her sense of fairness, justice and solidarity, and her contempt of discrimination in her refusal to treat her Jewish pupils as 'the other'. In this light, the Jane Haining Project aims to increase understanding, acceptance, and kindness between individuals from different cultures and religious backgrounds, equip people to speak up against prejudice, and to take action to challenge antisemitism, discrimination, and to appreciate diversity. The project has created a Schools Competition which will be accompanied by a suite of appropriate educational resources for pupils to learn about the Holocaust centred on Miss Haining's life.

**Isabel Smyth**

# Local Interfaith Groups News

## Aberdeen Interfaith Group

### Visit to Aberdeen Synagogue

We had a visit in February to the Aberdeen Synagogue where we discussed things pertaining to the Jewish faith. They do not have a Rabbi in Aberdeen. Each week members of the congregation take turns reading from the Torah in Hebrew, then they discuss what they have read. Our friend from the synagogue, Orit, gave of her time to make us feel very welcome. We had around 20 in attendance from different faiths around the city.

### Winter Words

We held our annual 'reflections round the fire' event at the Brahma Kumaris Centre in Aberdeen. Despite the cold and dark of winter our readings spoke of hope, peace and light which we all look forward to when spring comes and the dark, hard times pass. Nine people took part from different faiths and denominations. Each person chose a reading to share.

Weiers from Seventh Day Adventists read a poem from Divine Beauty by John O'Donoghue. This was followed by a rendering of O Come, O Come Immanuel by the Piano Guys, chosen by Jackie from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Another poem called the Long Night by



David Adam was read by Clive from the Quaker tradition. Our youngest member, Ananth, who has recently set up the first School Interfaith Group in Aberdeen, spoke about the Hindu months which look for glimmers of light in the darkness and shared the story of Andal. Ruth, a Christian, recounted spending Christmas in Prague with an atheist. Patricia, also a Christian, explained about Blue Christmas, which is a special service for those who find Christmas difficult for personal reasons. Astrid, from Brahma Kumaris, played the Spaceman sung by Crista Berg which speaks of a time of transformation and light and hope of better things to come. Sister Mary Joseph from the Holy Family Sisters

of the Needy read Psalm 113 which reminds us that God gives us the variety of seasons – the spice of life.

Lastly Kloud, a Muslim, shared her own beautiful words about Winter:

*Dew beads shining on the window...  
The smell of tea and memories...  
Pictures that come to mind from that  
winter and that... A belly that can  
only be warmed by lentil soup... Wool  
there and there... Hearts are washed  
in winter as roads are washed... It  
is getting ready for new flowers... A  
wonderful day when I wake up to  
the sound of rain... Winter, despite its  
cold, is warm.*

## Edinburgh Interfaith Association

"What did you learn today?". One enthusiastic pupil replied at a recent EIFA School programme, "I learned that this is how the world works!" The child had just attended a two-hour Religion and Belief Road Show with Hindu, Jewish, Baha'i, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, and Sikh speakers, and representatives from Police Scotland.

We might smile at this remark but at the heart of EIFA's work is education, whether that be learning the dark lessons of humanity's past in order to ensure that history does not repeat itself, or learning to understand and



celebrate what we have in common as people of different faiths so that we can learn to come together for the good of our communities.



To that end since October 2022 EIFA has been averaging one Primary School programme a week, thereby helping to build respect for our country's cultural and religious diversity.

In Leith we have been coming together through our Leith Network to learn from and celebrate one another's religious festivals, as shown in photos from our Interfaith Diwali event at the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir.



In November we were delighted to welcome Rabbi Alex Goldberg and his team to deliver the United Nations 'Faith For Rights' programme for the first time in Scotland. Faith representatives learned how to apply a framework to faith and human rights working together in the arena of societal action by promoting equality rights and community cohesion.

The Religious Leaders and Faith Representatives Conference in November focused on practical ways that faith communities could help people suffering from the Cost of Living Crisis with input from Kate Polson, CEO of the Rock Trust Youth Homeless Charity, and Iain Johnston, Director of Faith and Community Scotland.

EIFA was thrilled to have worked with the Edinburgh Jewish Cultural Centre to hold the historic premier of 'The Singer



of Shanghai' play in Scotland. The play tells the story of Jewish refugees rescued by Chinese people in 1938.

"For the first time in my life I feel proud of my Jewish heritage." This was the comment from one fifteen year old female student at Edinburgh's Broughton High School after performing in the play. She confided that her grandfather had kept her Jewish heritage a secret for three generations to try and protect her from potential antisemitism and even physical harm. Upon learning that her great grandmother, who converted to Christianity in Germany to save her family, was Jewish the young student smiled and said "I am the first one in four generations to feel proud about being a member of the Jewish people."

Professor Joe Goldblatt, Chair of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association and Vice-Chair of the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum commented that

"For many of the student actors this was the first time they had learned about this historic period when one man, the Chinese diplomat in Vienna, Austria, Feng Shan Ho, single-handedly rescued Jewish people by issuing them with visas to enter China. When he was told to stop issuing visas he continued to do this from his home. Nearly 20,000 Jewish lives were saved."

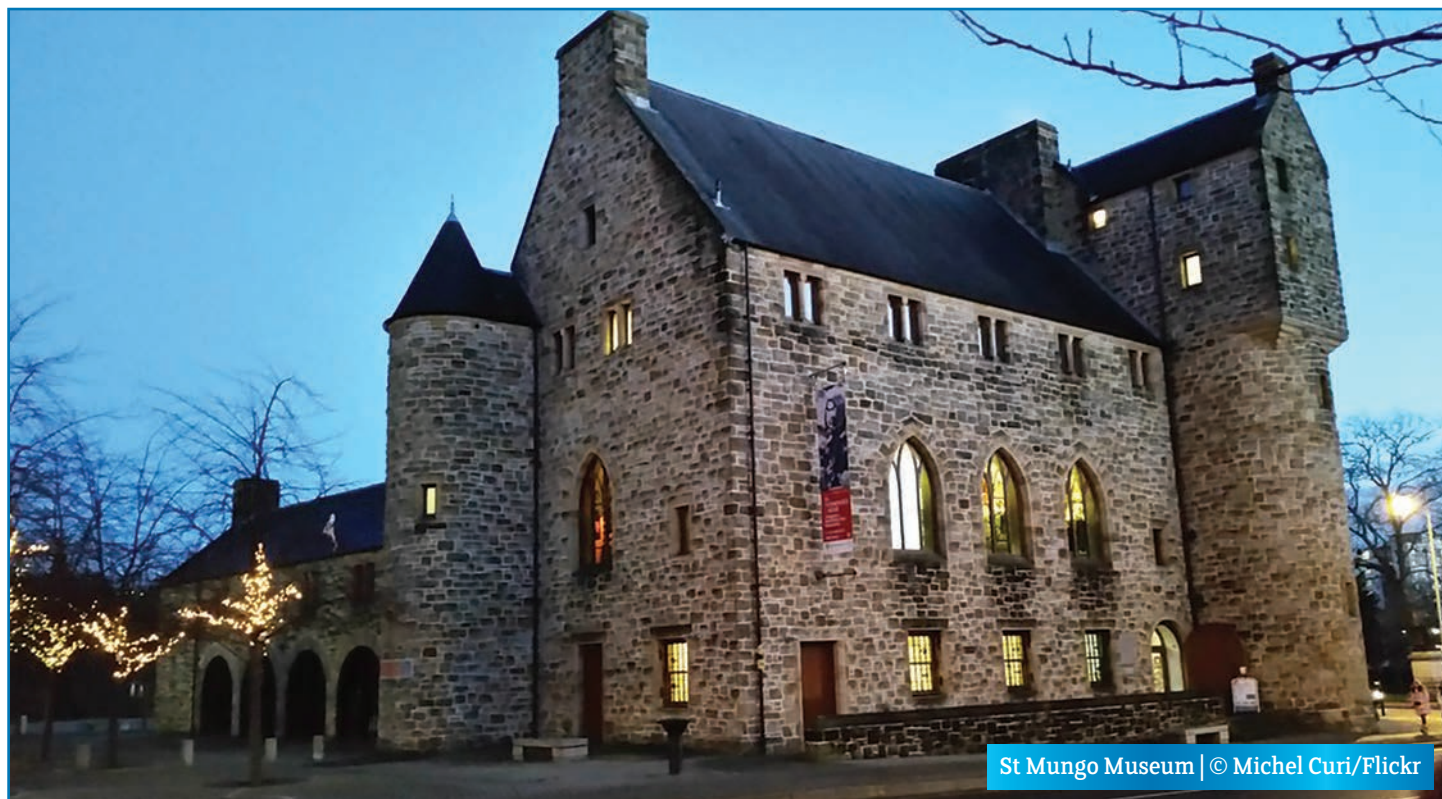
EIFA shares heart-warming stories of faith in action across its programming which can be found on our Facebook and YouTube channel or at [www.edinburghinterfaith.com](http://www.edinburghinterfaith.com)



A scene from the, 'Singer of Shanghai'



# The re-opening of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art



**There was a real sense of celebration on Sunday 2 October when the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art held its first interfaith event since the closure of the museum during the Covid pandemic.**

Glasgow City Council had suggested that it might not open the museum again but rather it would seek ways of finding another promoter such as Historic/Environment Scotland to take it over. There was an outcry from all those who appreciated the importance of the Museum, particularly the faith communities who for decades had found it a safe space for dialogue. The campaign, spearheaded by Interfaith Glasgow, led eventually to its opening which in itself was a cause for celebration. This first event, focusing on the life of Stella Reekie and the work of the International Flat, brought together 69 people, many who had worked with Stella in Glasgow, some who had worked with her in Pakistan and some who knew very little or nothing of her life and work. There was a lot of buzz, chatter, laughter as people renewed

friendships and shared memories. The event captured the spirit of The Flat, even to the extent that we had to buy more cake for tea.

The reason for the focus on Stella Reekie was that this year, 2022, was the 100th anniversary of her birth and the 40th anniversary of her death and it seemed an appropriate moment to remember and celebrate her. A report of her life can be found in Issue 38 of the Interfaith Scotland Newsletter, Autumn 2022. Most of the people present at St Mungo Museum on 2 October had known Stella through the International Flat and her work in establishing the first interfaith group in Scotland – The Sharing of Faiths. Three people, Canon David Lawson (Christian), Mrs Brij Gandhi (Hindu) and Mr George Ballantyne (Baha’i), all members of that first Sharing of Faiths

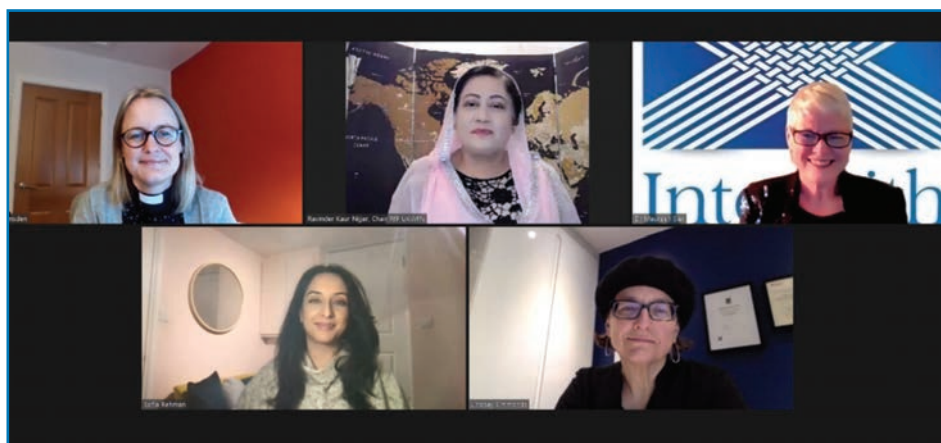
committee, shared their memories of Stella and her interfaith work.

When Stella died in 1982 the Glasgow Sharing of Faiths was the only interfaith group in Scotland. Now there are 20 local groups, including Interfaith Glasgow, and a national body, Interfaith Scotland, which carry on the work begun by her over fifty years ago. The seeds that Stella sowed then have borne fruit in a way that she probably would not have dreamed of. For those of us who are reaping the benefits of those fruits and sowing our own seeds of understanding and cooperation, Stella still remains a source of inspiration and encouragement. Her life and influence are a good reminder that many of the seeds which we now sow can bear fruit in a way that we cannot imagine.



## Women in Leadership

One of the strategic priorities of RfP UK Women of Faith Network is to promote inspirational women from the past and present who can in turn be role models for all. Therefore, RfP UKWFN organised and hosted the first 'Women in Religious Scriptures' event, with a panel of distinguished speakers from the Muslim, Jewish and Baha'i religious traditions: Dr Sofia Rehman, Dr Lindsay Simmonds and Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland respectively. The speakers were



asked three key questions: is there a particular woman in your religious scriptures who inspires you and how/why; which verses in your religious scriptures empower women; and how

can we, as women of faith, challenge those who misuse religious scriptures to cause harm. This fascinating and inspirational event can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/@RfPUKWFN>

## 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence

**Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network took part in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. This is an annual international campaign that begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women until 10 December, Human Rights Day.**

For 16 days we took action by bringing the issue of Gender-Based violence to the forefront by posting on social media every day. This year we invited male ambassadors who supported us in advancing our cause and are honoured to present a video series called "Visible Advocacy – Interfaith Male Allies in our Midst". Male ambassadors from Scotland included the Moderator of the Church of Scotland Dr Rev Iain Greenshields, Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula from the Hindu community, Imam Dr Sayed Razawi, Chief Imam and Director General of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society. The videos can be viewed using the link <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPAMHnBPXclunDuFBbNQ1Q>

A Radio Show was commissioned especially for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Chair of RfP UK Women of Faith Network Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, and RfP UKWFN Women's Project Coordinator, Jenny Ramsden, were guests alongside Abda Khan - lawyer turned author, domestic abuse support worker and British Muslim Woman of the Year 2019, and Simon Phillips - Ambassador for the White Ribbon Campaign, which aims to mobilise men and boys to stand up against violence against women and girls. The show can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d58wIFcKBxk>

On the culmination of the 16 Days of Activism Religions for Peace UK was

honoured to welcome humanitarian Sally Becker as the keynote speaker for our Human Rights Day Helen Mayer Memorial Lecture. We had the privilege of hearing Sally share her remarkable story, which has covered decades through hardships and dangers upholding the rights of children in conflict zones and bringing them to safety. Sally shared how, with the support of Religions for Peace UK, she organised the evacuation of over 200 orphaned children from conflict zones in Ukraine when war broke out earlier this year.

For details of posts, and event reports please use the link [www.facebook.com/UKWFN](https://www.facebook.com/UKWFN)

# In Memoriam...

## Archbishop Mario Conti

**The interfaith community in Scotland has lost a friend and champion in the death of Archbishop Mario Conti on 8 November 2022. Archbishop Mario had an open outlook to churches of different denominations from his early years and for decades was involved in the ecumenical movement which, in 1990, gave rise to Action of Churches Together in Scotland.**

He came later to the work of interfaith relations when in 2006 the Catholic Bishops' Conference set up a committee for interreligious dialogue and he became both President and chair. At first, he was cautious, asking for advice and help in how to address people of other faiths, what was appropriate dress, what was expected when visiting places of worship etc. but he embraced the whole interfaith adventure as he had done the ecumenical one and soon felt at ease in his relationship with people of other faiths. This was because of his innate charm, friendliness, and out-going manner which drew people to him and made them feel at ease in his presence. He was loved within the interfaith world and many of our sisters and brothers in faith have phoned, texted or emailed to express their deep sorrow at his death and to pass on their condolences to the Catholic community.

Hospitality was a hallmark of Archbishop Mario and for many years he hosted an annual interfaith reception for faith communities which was not only well attended but was considered an important event in the interfaith calendar. Archbishop Mario was quick to accept invitations to visit places of worship, to meet with faith communities, to talk at important faith events, meet visiting dignitaries and to engage in dialogue. Together we studied the document on Human Fraternity for Peace in Our World co-authored by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed El Tayeb. Archbishop Mario was supportive of all the work of the committee and contributed to our annual colloquium which was intended to educate the Catholic community in the faith of others as well as interfaith issues. As well as this he participated in national interfaith events such as Holocaust Memorial Day, the twice



annual meetings of the Scottish Religious Leaders Forum and the First Minister's Annual Interfaith Symposium.

Archbishop Mario has now entered the realm of the ancestors and has joined a small body of people who have gone before us in Scotland and continue to give those of us involved in interfaith relations the confidence to continue in their footsteps. May his memory be a blessing to us all and an inspiration for the future of interfaith work within the Scottish Catholic Church and this nation.

**Sister Isabel Smyth**

## Ken Riley

**On 25 March members of Faith and Belief Dundee attended a Quaker Memorial Service for Ken Riley who died on 26 December 2022 at the age of 89. Ken was involved in interfaith activities for many years.**

He was a member of Faith and Belief Dundee, formerly the Dundee Inter Faith Association, and before that the Sharing of Faiths Group, covering a period of over three decades. Ken will be remembered for his great





enthusiasm, his keen sense of justice and his love of truth and beauty in the souls of others. He participated wholeheartedly in whatever the local interfaith group did, and often represented us at Interfaith Scotland meetings in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

Ken remained open to new ideas and youthful in his outlook. In the earlier

years I recall him describing himself as a Catholic, then a Quaker, and he sometimes attended Episcopal services. Dialogue with people of diverse beliefs led to him developing genuine friendships with those he met in those spaces. He saw no distinctions and truly was a believer in the oneness of humanity. During the pandemic he gained great comfort from

participating in a weekly devotional meeting on Zoom that was organised by a Baha'i in Dumfries, Venus Carew, whom he praised highly. Venus has also left us recently, and I can imagine them continuing their dialogue in the next world!

**Carrie Varjavandi, Chair, Faith and Belief (Dundee and Tayside)**

# Venus Alae-Carew

1958 - 2023

**Many Interfaith friends across Scotland, and beyond, will join in our sadness about the recent passing of Venus Alae-Carew of Dumfries, a much loved and respected member of the Baha'i community and the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group.**

Venus was very much the driving force behind the establishment of our small interfaith group over 20 years ago; and her expertise, experience and wise counsel has meant the group has had a positive profile and made a strong contribution to equality and diversity during all that time. A wide range of events were organised each year for Scottish Interfaith Week, and more recently Holocaust Memorial Day and Scottish Refugee Week, including film shows, ceilidhs, discussion panels and quizzes.

Her Baha'i faith featured prominently in her everyday life - indeed in sharing the news of her death the family message said: 'She was the embodiment of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching to "let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path". She dedicated her life to spreading the message of love and unity. No-one was a stranger to her and she made genuine lifelong friendships wherever she went.'

Her interfaith work was formally recognised by Her Majesty The Queen and her volunteer work with our Syrian Refugees by the Dumfries and Galloway Resettlement Project. And there are so many organisations and individuals who now have a



Venus - front left

Venus shaped hole in their life. The family have set up a JustGiving page in memory of Venus, with the proceeds going to charities which meant a lot to her - Dumfries and Galloway Befriending; Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association; Macmillan Cancer Support; and Marie Curie. Any interfaith friends are invited to contribute Crowdfunding to honour the memory of Venus Alae-Carew on JustGiving

We are determined that the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group will continue, so please pray for us as we move forward without the light and inspiration of Venus.

**Elisabeth Manson and  
Jan Lethbridge  
Dumfries and Galloway  
Inter Faith Group**

# Faith Community News

## Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society

### Coat of Arms

**On Saturday 22 October the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society was honoured to have been presented with its official Coat of Arms by The Rt Hon the Lord Lyon King of Arms at Cathcart Old Parish Church, Glasgow.**

The granting of a Coat of Arms is an ancient mark of honour and identification and the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society is the first Muslim group to hold its own armorial ensigns in the 350 year old history of the Public



Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland. This represents a historic moment for the Scottish Shia Muslim community in its recognition of their contribution to Scottish society. It is a symbol of the understanding and inclusivity that Scotland embodies that has welcomed us; seeds that will flourish as we continue on a journey to strengthen relations and further the

cause of humanity. A fantastic drawing competition was also held for children at the event, where they were given an opportunity to design their very own coat of arms.



### St Andrew's Day Interfaith Service

On Sunday 27 November The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society's Director-General Imam Dr Sayed Razawi gave an address at Cathcart Old Parish Church, Glasgow as part of the St Andrew's Day Interfaith Service.

Imam Dr Sayed Razawi was graciously welcomed by the Reverend Neil Galbraith of the Church of Scotland. The message of a diverse and inclusive Scotland was given at the event which was aimed at strengthening multi-faith relations in Scotland. The service included a baptism and marked a police COVID memorial anniversary. We are together on a quest to overcome the world's challenges and to establish true peace and benevolence. The gathering was one of celebrating the heritage of our Nation and the life of Scotland's patron saint.

## Scottish Parliament



**On 15 December The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society Youth Team were pleased to have combined with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, and his wife, Linda, to continue the long standing SABS tradition of circulating warm and prayerful wishes throughout The Scottish Parliament ahead of the holiday season.**

As a gesture of goodwill, the team passed a rose into the hands of each and every MSP, figuratively placing roses into the hands of the Scottish peoples they represent. Grateful thanks to Bill Kidd MSP and his stellar team for their indomitable support and for accompanying us as we travelled the corridors.





# Sikhs Welcome Faith Communities to the Gurdwara on the Birth of Guru Nanak

**Sikhs from Glasgow welcomed representatives from the Christian community to Central Gurdwara on the birth of the founder of the Sikh religion Guru Nanak Dev Ji.**

Father Gerard Mitchell together with Sister Isabel Smyth and parishioners from St Aloysius Church visited Central Gurdwara in Berkeley Street, Glasgow bringing greetings from the Vatican for Guru Nanak Prakash Diwas 2022 and an accompanying letter from Bishop McGee bringing the good wishes of the Catholic Bishops of Scotland and the whole Catholic community.

The letters were personally handed over by Fr Gerard Mitchell to the President of Central Gurdwara, Mr Surjit Singh Chowdhry, Dr Inderjit Singh who represents the Sikhs on the Interfaith Scotland Board and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar representing Sikhs on the Scottish Religious Leaders Forum. Fr Mitchell read out the greetings to the congregation and Surjit Singh thanked him and said the Sikh community were honoured to receive the greetings and Fr Mitchell was given the gift of the Sikh Saroopa (special scarf) by the President. He and his colleagues were then shown around the Gurdwara and invited to partake in the langar, a vegetarian meal available to anyone who visits the Gurdwara.



On 8 November the Moderator of the Church of Scotland Dr Rev Iain Greenshields with his family brought greetings from the Church of Scotland on Guru Nanak's birth. During the traditional service, the Moderator spoke of the importance of interfaith relations and the connecting of communities. He was given this scarf as a symbol of the dignity of the office of the Moderator and the importance of his visit. Touring the Gurdwara the Moderator spoke with many members of the Sikh community, and saw the areas where langar is made



for hundreds of people who visit the Gurdwara. He was encouraged by the ladies in the kitchen to make a roti (chappati) with the result being nearly round. He also had a go at serving the hot meal to those waiting in the langar hall.

Visits from the Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland have led to stronger bonds with the Sikh community. May these bonds continue to flourish as we work together for the common good.

# The Climate Crisis: Continuing the Engagement

**Interfaith Scotland continues to build awareness within communities of the Climate Crisis and seeks ways that faith communities and others can keep informed and do whatever they can to help address the crisis. Interfaith Scotland continues to serve on the Interfaith Liaison Committee to the UNFCCC and to Chair the Scottish Interfaith Working Group.**

We are pleased to see that our World Interfaith Harmony Grove of Trees in the Highlands continues to grow and we encourage anyone who can to plant a tree there via the Trees for Life Website <https://treesforlife.org.uk/groves/g8922/>

Our Climate expert and volunteer Adrian Shaw produced a brief report on COP27 which was held in Egypt last year and we are delighted to share a slightly shortened version of this report with you.

## COP27: What was it all about?

Cop 27, held in Egypt in November 2022, was the latest in the long series of UN conferences (the Twenty Seventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change) that seek to address the global challenge of climate change. The scale of the event was daunting with reports of over 30,000 participants. While smaller than Glasgow this is still a huge number with delegates from countries great and small, advisers, media, lobbyists, and campaigners. The agenda and associated reports were complex and the stakes could not have been higher. Unlike Cop 26 in Glasgow where many faith groups from Scotland were able to participate in fringe events, community participation in Egypt was more limited.

## Headline Outcomes

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland summarized the outcome in three key points.

1. Loss and Damage was on the agenda for the first time, and positively, agreement was reached to establish a dedicated new fund for this

2. Lack of firm commitment to immediately phase out all fossil fuels sets us on course for extremely dangerous levels of heating and will result in escalating Loss and Damage debt owed.
3. The Scottish Government has continued to show welcome leadership on Loss and Damage on the international stage, but must commit to urgent new action to slash Scotland's emissions and meet domestic climate targets by making polluters pay for the damage they are creating. Committing to a just phase out of oil and gas is essential to this.

## Loss and Damage

Each Cop revisits the same themes: mitigation (what can be done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for example by phasing out fossil fuels); adaptation (how to adapt to a changing climate); and loss and damage (how do rich countries support and finance poorer countries who contribute least to the problem but are hit hardest by climate change). Countries worst affected by climate change have lobbied for many years but richer countries have been reluctant to accept responsibility for loss and damage as it could commit them to enormous payments over

years to come. The UN for example has since 2009 set a target for rich countries to pay \$100 billion a year to help poorer countries deal with adaptation – a target that has not yet been met.

The new commitment to provide support to deal with loss and damage is in addition to payments for adaptation. It was a significant achievement to persuade the Cop to agree to set up a new Loss and Damage Fund.

## Phasing Out Fossil Fuels

Progress on emissions reductions was disappointing with well reported blocking moves from oil producing countries and it was also reported that there were over 600 fossil fuel lobbyists at the Cop – twice the number of representatives from indigenous communities. Oil and gas companies are benefiting from high energy prices and continue to invest tens of billions of dollars in new oil and gas fields while maintaining that they are concerned about climate change. The target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius remains on 'life support' according to Alok Sharma, the retiring president of Cop 26. Even if current commitments made by national governments are put into effect temperatures are still likely to rise by 1.8 degrees Celsius.



## Scottish Government

Nicola Sturgeon received international coverage by committing Scottish Government to fund loss and damage projects, perhaps embarrassing the UK Government in the process. At home the Scottish Government has a good record in promoting wind power and in supporting the phased run down of North Sea oil and gas production. However most homes in Scotland remain dependent on gas central heating and progress in switching to low carbon alternatives (heat pumps or district heating schemes for example) is very slow. Emissions from transport, now the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland, remain high due to increases in road traffic. Public transport services are less carbon intensive but remain poorly coordinated and sometimes unreliable. Agriculture,

another large source of greenhouse gas emissions, has been relatively slow to change with a continued dependence on livestock farming, the principal source of agricultural emissions in Scotland. For many farmers in upland areas there are few alternatives other than forestry, raising difficult challenges of adjustment.

## Faith groups

Faith groups are represented at the Cop but are not part of the negotiating process and don't always receive as much media coverage as other players. Faith leaders called for action, but it is uncertain to what extent they were able to bring effective pressure to bear on the discussions.

Henrik Grape of the World Council of Churches expressed disappointment at

the outcome pointing to the 'massive gap between what science tells us we must do and the political will to do what we must'. While faith groups are marginal to the Cop negotiations, they are central to the process of change. Faith groups are communities that can promote and facilitate change among their own members according to their own traditions of caring for each other and caring for creation. This work does not take place at Cops, it is ongoing and builds the conditions where faith groups can encourage political leaders to have the confidence to do what must be done. The Cop is the annual display of progress (or the lack of it) but the real work goes on locally and nationally all year. In that work faith groups across Scotland have a challenging but essential role to play.

**Adrian Shaw**

# Interfaith Glasgow: Climate Dialogues

**This Autumn, Interfaith Glasgow (IG) delivered three dialogue events exploring the meaning of climate justice and the ways in which it intersects with other crucial justice issues. Made possible through Lottery funding, these events explored climate justice through the lens of food, gender and finance.**

## Climate Justice is Food Justice

At "Climate Justice is Food Justice", participants gained insights into the nature of our complex global food system which is driven by profit at the expense of the welfare of workers, the land and animals – as well as being a key source of carbon emissions. ISKON Scotland shared their exemplary model of sustainable food growing practices intimately linked with people, community and earth care. As a result, our audience committed to actions such as supporting local food producers, growing vegetables, raising awareness about processed food and eating more plant-based food.



The speakers were *(from top left to top right)* Pete Ritchie – Executive Director, Nourish Scotland; Florian Kroll – Food Systems Researcher and Facilitator, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; *(from bottom left to bottom right)* Zarina Ahmad – Climate Change Communicator and Researcher, University of Manchester; Vrinda Watson – Krishna Eco Farm, International Society for Krishna Consciousness Scotland; Shantanu Mandal – Facilitator for Environment and Faith, United Nations Environment Programme, India.

# Climate Justice is Gender Justice

Women's experiences have historically been marginalised and have tended to be overlooked within climate change discourse. Our event "Climate Justice is Gender Justice" highlighted:

- How women are disproportionately affected in the environmental crisis due to structural gender inequality, which further intersects with inequalities of race and disability
- Injustice and patriarchal structures at the heart of the global economic system, which is driving climate breakdown
- Examples of fantastic work, which seeks to include women in climate solutions such as Wen's feminist New Green Deal, Adenike Oladosu's



The speakers were *(from top left to top right)* Kate Metcalf – Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network, London; Roshini Thamotheram – Campaigns Project Coordinator, Women's Environmental Network, London; *(from bottom left to bottom right)* Oladosu Adenike – Founder of I Lead Climate Action Initiative, Ecofeminist, Ecoreporter & Climate Justice Leader, Nigeria; Aniqah Ali – Podcaster / Interviewer and Climate, Racial and Gender Justice Activist, Glasgow; Rev David Coleman, Environmental Chaplain, Eco Congregation Scotland.

# Climate Justice is Financial Justice



Our final event explored financial justice, and taking place shortly after the COP27 summit, speakers reflected on how the COP27 negotiations were both a step forward (for loss and damage) and a huge disappointment (on everything else). Asad Rehman of War on Want laid bare the deeply embedded colonialist structures within our financial and economic systems, which have been developed at the expense of countries in the Global South.

Abigael Kimba, Climate Activist and Host of Hali Hewa Podcast shared how Africa is responsible for less than 4% of global emissions and only 0.5% of the historical emissions and yet faces multiple climate disasters. Far from receiving the reparations required much of the continent is crippled by debt. Abigael made attendees aware of the impact of climate breakdown on indigenous communities in Kenya and the importance of sharing and telling personal climate stories. Dr Shanon Shah of Faith for the Climate spoke about Loss and Damage finance as a focus for the activist work of the Make COP Count Group targeted at the UK Government in support and solidarity of the Global South.

The speakers were *(from top left to top right)* Asad Rehman – Executive Director, War on Want, UK; Abigael Kimba – Climate Activist, Host and Producer Hali Hewa Podcast, Kenya; *(from bottom left to bottom right)* Shanon Shah – Director, Faith for the Climate, England; Jennifer Newall – Co- Founder of Trees For Birthdays, Scotland.

Speakers from diverse faith and belief backgrounds ended each event with a spiritual reflection on the theme and sharing insights including on the importance of seeing the bigger picture and we are all interconnected and interdependent and how self-transformation brings hope for world transformation.



# Get Involved!

There's lots of ways of getting involved in the work of Interfaith Scotland. Here are just a few!

## Become a Friend

Becoming a Friend of Interfaith Scotland is a great way to support our work. Our Friends are individuals, groups and organisations who are passionate about interfaith work and the impact it makes on communities. For a small subscription fee you can receive our newsletter, annual report and invitations to attend interfaith events organised by Interfaith Scotland.

## Scottish Interfaith Week

We can provide you with ideas and advice for setting up an event in your area to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week. We can advertise your event on our Scottish Interfaith Week website at [www.scottishinterfaithweek.org](http://www.scottishinterfaithweek.org). Small amounts of funding are also available for local interfaith groups to assist with events.

## Local Interfaith Groups

We can help you get in touch with the nearest interfaith group in your area. If there is no interfaith group in your area we can help you to set one up and provide advice and support for the group.

## Schools and Youth Groups

We have volunteers from different faiths who are available to speak in schools and youth groups about their faith and/or the importance of interfaith dialogue. We have also created interfaith resources for schools and youth groups available at the office and on the website.

## Women's Interfaith Dialogue

We host women's interfaith dialogue events in different towns and cities in Scotland throughout the year. Get in touch if you would be interested in us hosting a women's dialogue in your area.

## Training

Our Religion and Belief Training Programme trains organisations from the statutory, voluntary and public sector to develop their understanding of the diversity of faiths in Scotland; conform to the Religion and Belief Equality legislation; and to be sensitive to the needs of the religion and belief communities they serve.

## Resources

We have produced a number of useful publications and resources which are available at the office or can be downloaded from our website.

## Donate to our work

You can donate to our work by contacting us at [admin@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:admin@interfaithscotland.org) for further details. We use Gift Aid so please let us know if you would like to make a Gift Aid donation.





# Interfaith Scotland

**Making a Difference  
through Dialogue**

Flemington House,  
110 Flemington Street, Glasgow, G21 4BF  
**Tel:** 0141 558 0778  
**E-mail:** [admin@interfaithscotland.org](mailto:admin@interfaithscotland.org)

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

**Facebook:** [interfaithscotland](https://www.facebook.com/interfaithscotland)

**Twitter:** [@InterfaithScot](https://twitter.com/InterfaithScot)

**YouTube:** [Interfaith Scotland](https://www.youtube.com/InterfaithScotland)

**Instagram:** [@interfaith\\_scotland](https://www.instagram.com/interfaith_scotland)

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